

# State Park Access for Colorado Ute Tribes

Sponsors: Rep. K. Stewart & Taggart, Sen. Simpson & Roberts



## Background & Overview

There are two federally recognized Tribal Nations with jurisdiction and reserved treaty rights in Colorado: The Southern Ute Indian Tribe (SUIT) and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe (UMUT). The SUIT and UMUT are the oldest continuous residents of what is now known as the State of Colorado (State) and the Ute people do not have a migration story. Through a series of treaties with the United States, the original Ute homelands were severely restricted to the reservation lands that are now present today. The Ute people have profound cultural and spiritual connections to their ancestral lands and have been natural resources stewards for time immemorial. This proposed legislation for the 2025 General Assembly session would waive the entrance fee to all Colorado state parks (currently 43) for enrolled Tribal members of the SUIT and UMUT. The legislation intent is to support ancestral lands reconnection and formally recognize the profound cultural and spiritual connections to the land that have been preserved through Ute traditional knowledge, oral histories, and language for generations.

## Scope of Bill

Due to the unique legal status of Tribal Nations and the sovereign-to-sovereign relationship between the State and Tribal Nations, this proposal supports access requests made by the SUIT and UMUT to the State, and therefore is different from other types of reduced fee passes or waivers that CPW offers. Other states have also introduced similar initiatives based on this sovereign-to-sovereign relationship and an effort to reconnect federally and/or state recognized Tribal Nations within their state jurisdictional borders to ancestral lands. Reducing barriers to accessing outdoor spaces, acknowledging and seeking change in systems that have historically excluded and contributed to the erasure of Indigenous peoples, and reconnecting American Indian communities to ancestral lands in Colorado state parks is a shared vision that the CPW and DNR hold.

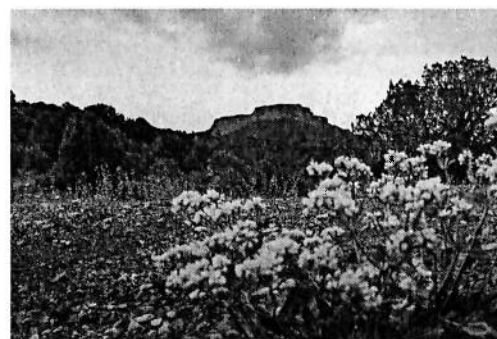


Photo courtesy of Wayne Lewis

## Formal Consultation with the Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute Tribes

Tribal sovereignty is the basis of the government-to-government relationship between Tribal Nations and federal and state governments. Formal Tribal-State consultation is a process that supports this and is advanced by State agencies through the Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs. This CPW and DNR priority legislation was derived through historic requests from Tribal leadership to the State and consultation efforts with both Tribes. Consultation meetings were first held in November 2024 and will continue with both Tribes throughout the legislative process and any potential future implementation efforts.

## Greater Stakeholder and Community Engagement

CPW and DNR respect the unique government-to-government relationship the State has with SUIT and UMUT, and the inherent sovereignty of all Tribal Nations. CPW and DNR also acknowledge the displacement impacts of historical Federal policies on all Tribal Nations and greater American Indian communities located throughout Colorado, and are dedicated to continuing broader conversations related to Colorado state parks. This legislation is a first step in a long-overdue effort to better support the needs of American Indian residents and visitors to Colorado state parks. Throughout the 2025 legislative session, CPW will have an open input form on [Engage CPW](#) to elicit feedback on the legislation and to help inform the direction of future discussions on how CPW can better engage with Tribal Nations and the diverse American Indian and Indigenous populations located throughout Colorado on topics related to state parks. Feedback received from the Engage CPW input form will help to inform the continuation of these important discussions following the 2025 legislative session.