

**Key:**

Vertical Gain/Steepness:	<b>E=Easy</b> , 0' to 400' gain per mile <b>M=Moderate</b> , 400' to 800' gain per mile <b>D=Difficult</b> , 800' to 1200' gain per mile <b>X=Extreme</b> , 1200' + gain per mile
Surface/Terrain:	<b>E=Easy</b> , mostly sand, dirt or pine needle covered on established trail <b>M=Moderate</b> , small rocks and roots present on established trail <b>D=Difficult</b> , loose and rocky on established trail <b>X=Extreme</b> , very loose, with large rocks and possibly scrambling required. Trail may not be established or easily recognizable

**Trail Name:**

Lower and Upper Sand Creek Lakes Trails, which is a continuation of Music Pass Trail (Trail # 1337, TH Elev. 10,660'). This Trail Summary begins at the turn around point of the Music Pass Trail Summary, document ID# TFA021219.1.V1, so distances provided in this document are in addition to the 2.6 miles (roundtrip) from the Music Pass trailhead parking area to Music Pass.

**Trail Location:**

From Westcliffe go south 4.5 miles on CO 69 and turn right (south) on Colfax Lane (CR 119). Continue for 5.5 miles on CR 119 (initially paved then gravel) to the T at South Colony Road (CR 120) and go left staying on CR 119 (there's a sign to Music Pass at this intersection). Continue on CR 119 past the well-known Music Meadows Ranch for 5 miles to the Grape Creek Trailhead on the Rainbow Trail. There's a pit toilet here and ample parking for vehicles; primitive campsites are also available.

From this point it is 2.5 miles to the Music Pass Trailhead along FDR 119 (4WD required). In the last sharp curve (#2 on map) before the lower parking area (#3) snow drifts will block the road after the first significant snow in the fall and last well into the spring. The last 100 yards or so from the lower parking area to the trailhead are very steep and rough.

As mentioned above, before embarking on the hike to the Sand Creek Lakes, you will first have to make the hike from the parking area to Music pass, which is about 1.3 miles and 790' vertical. See Trails for All trail summary TFA021219.1.V1 for more information.

Maps: USGS Topo Quads Beck Mountain and Crestone Peak; USFS San Isabel National Forest; National Geographic Trails Illustrated Map Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

**Trail Summary:**

*Accessibility:* This trail begins in the San Isabel National Forest and ends in the Great Sand Dunes National Preserve, and is accessible only via foot and horse travel.

*Trail Length and Type:* 5.2 miles total, in and out, Music Pass to Upper Sand Creek Lake  
4.0 miles total, in and out, Music Pass to Lower Sand Creek Lake

**Vertical Gain and Steepness:**

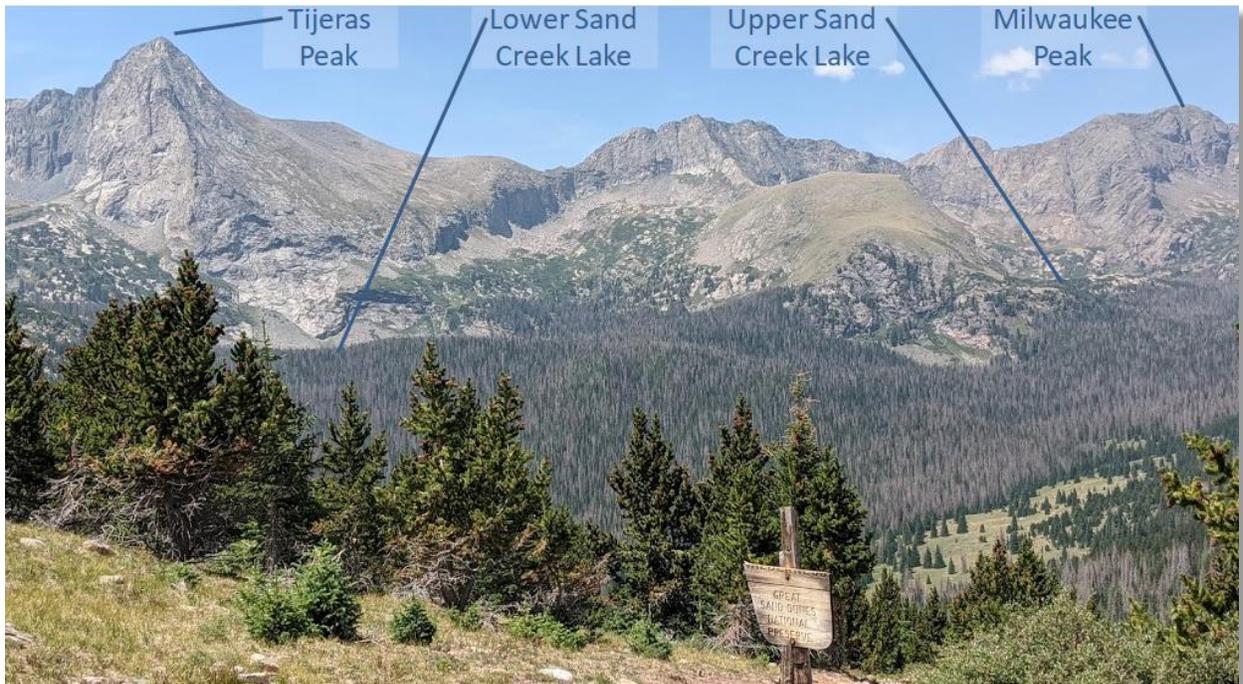
Music Pass to Upper Lake - 1187' gain (incl. 420' up to Music Pass on the return), 60% E, 30% M, 10% D

Music Pass to Lower Lake - 927' gain (incl. 420' up to Music Pass on the return), 70% E, 20% M, 10% D

**Surface/Terrain:** All trails 100% E

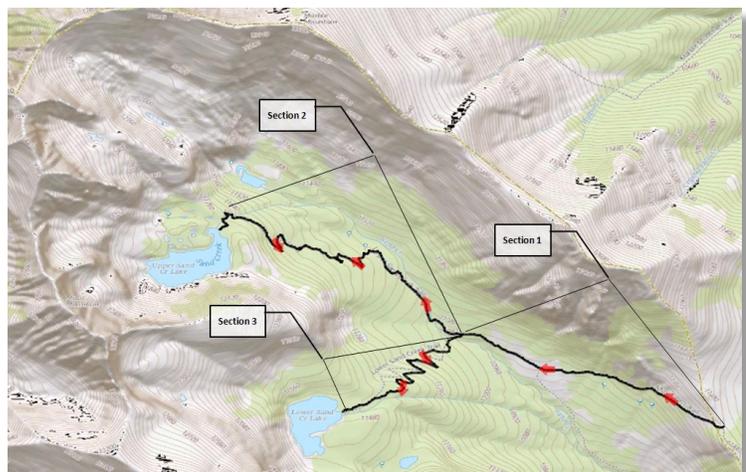
**Trail Experience:**

Once you get to Music Pass and take in the vista of Sand Creek Valley to the west, you can't help but want to go there. Unlike most mountain hikes, your destination is right in front of your eyes, albeit a few miles away!



Most people going into the Sand Creek Lakes area typically will head to either the lower or upper lake and call it a day. Either lake is very doable as a day hike, but packing in for a couple of days and visiting both lakes is a special treat. The trails to the lakes can best be described in three sections.

**Section 1** – Music Pass to the junction – Regardless of which lake you are going to, this is the way in and out of the Sand Creek Valley. This section descends from Music pass 420' to the valley floor, then ascends almost 90' to the junction. The views from this section are fantastic, since most of this section of the trail is



not tree covered. Take time to enjoy these views as you head into the valley, because when you hike out you will discover how steep this section is and likely be focusing more on breathing, especially if you packed in for a few days.

**Section 2** – The junction to Upper Sand Creek Lake – The junction of all three trail sections lies at the east edge of the forested slopes rising up towards the lakes. The longest of all three sections, the trail up to Upper Sand Creek Lake, is 1.6 miles long and rises about 680’ above the location of the junction. Most of this section is



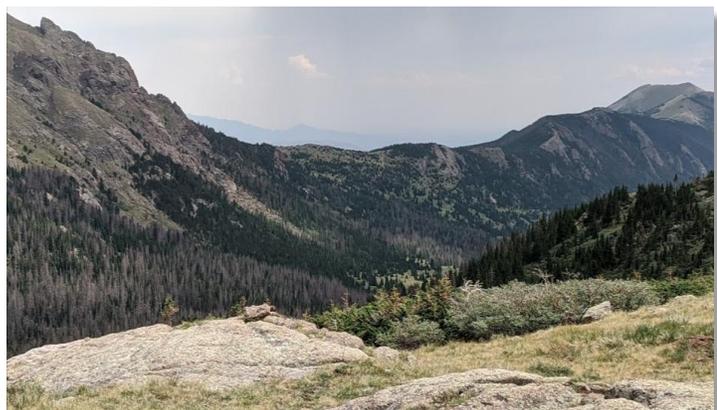
under tree cover as it meanders along Sand Creek on the lower half. As you get further up the trail you will pass open meadows, occasionally getting beautiful views of the south side of Marble Mountain. A couple hundred feet shy of arriving at the lake the trail crosses Sand Creek one more time. At this crossing there is another trail to your right that goes up a steep embankment to an area typically used by campers, but it does not have a view of the lake. Cross the creek to your left and follow the trail right



*View from east ridge look west at Upper Sand Creek Lake*

up to the lake. Once you get to the lake you will notice a trail continuing to your left (approximately south). This generally follows the east shore of the lake, and about halfway along the east shore there is another small trail that again goes off to the left into some trees and up a hill. If you follow this offshoot trail through the trees for a few yards, then up a grassy slope to a ridge, you will be able to enjoy beautiful vistas east and west.

The terrain around the upper lake is rugged. There are some paths that can be followed, but depending on the time of year, there are also many marshy areas on the north side of the lake that are fragile and can be obstacles, depending on where you are trying to get to. Please respect the environment, stay on established paths, and use only existing camp sites.



*View from east ridge look east at Music Pass*

**Section 3** – The junction to Lower Sand Creek Lake – This section is about 1 mile long and rises about 420' from the junction to the lower lake. As you leave the junction, heading southwest, you will immediately cross Sand Creek. The trail runs along Sand Creek briefly, meanders through the forest a bit, then starts switching back and forth up the slope to the lower lake. The entire section of trail is tree covered, and on average is slightly less steep than the trail to the upper lake. Since it is one of the shortest lake trails in the Sangre deCristos (3.3 miles one way, including the Music Pass Trail) , it is very popular throughout the summer and fall. Once you get to the lake you quickly realize the other reason this hike is so popular – the views are simply stunning. Lower Sand Creek Lake sits directly at the bottom of Tijeras Peak, which rises over 2100' from lake level, which is at 11,437'.

The lower lake is visited more frequently than the upper lake, which becomes obvious as you walk around the lake and see how worn the paths are, as well as how many paths there are. There are a couple areas around the lake that are going through a restoration process. Please heed all signs, tread lightly and stay on existing paths and use existing camp sites.

The Sand Creek area also offers other trail opportunities, including;

- Sand Creek Valley Trail (trail #743, about 14 miles long from the junction), which follows Sand Creek to the west side of the Sangre deCristos then veers northwest to Liberty Gate.
- Little Sand Creek Lake, which heads west and up (difficult in terms of steepness) off of Sand Creek Trail (#743) about 3 miles south of the junction.
- Cottonwood Pass (also steep and rocky), which starts about half way up section 2 to Upper Sand Creek Lake and goes up to the ridge just below Milwaukee Peak.

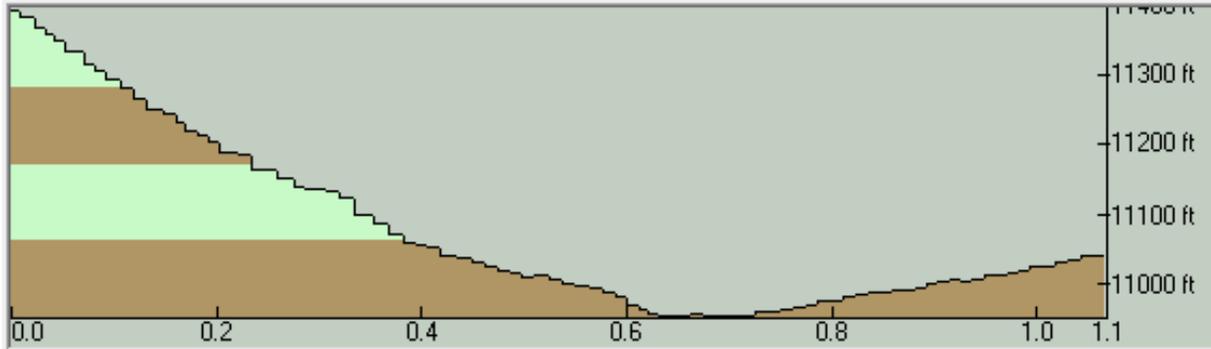
All of these additional trail opportunities require additional planning, time and skill/fitness levels. Study your planned routes carefully and always let someone know where you plan to be during your mountain excursion!



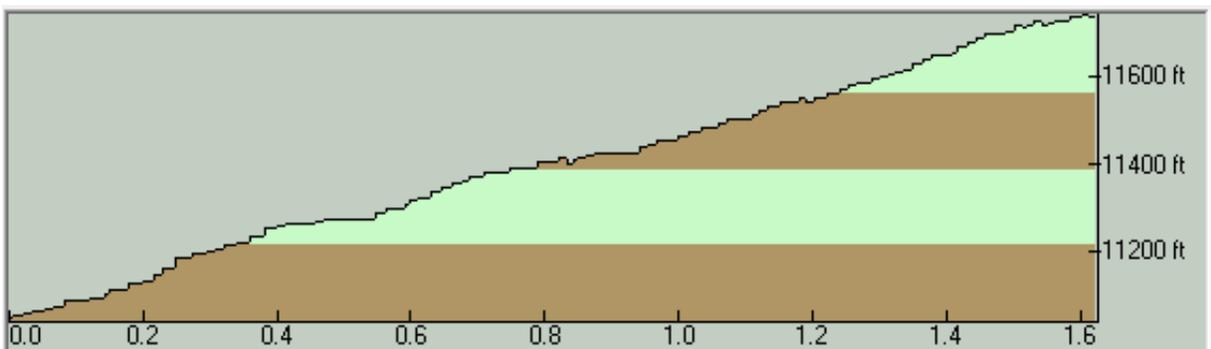
*View of Tijeras Peak Across Lower Sand Creek Lake*

## Maps/Profiles – Sand Creek Lakes Trails (Continuation of Trail # 1334):

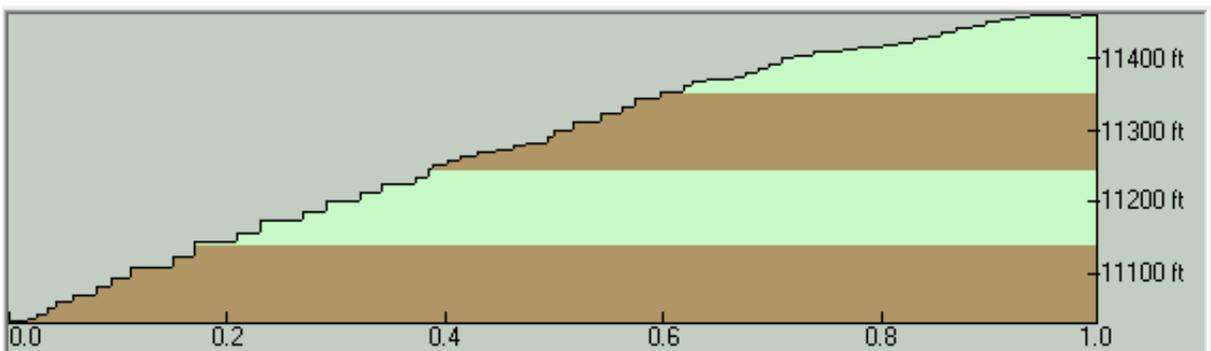
Profiles:



*Section 1 - Music Pass to the Junction*

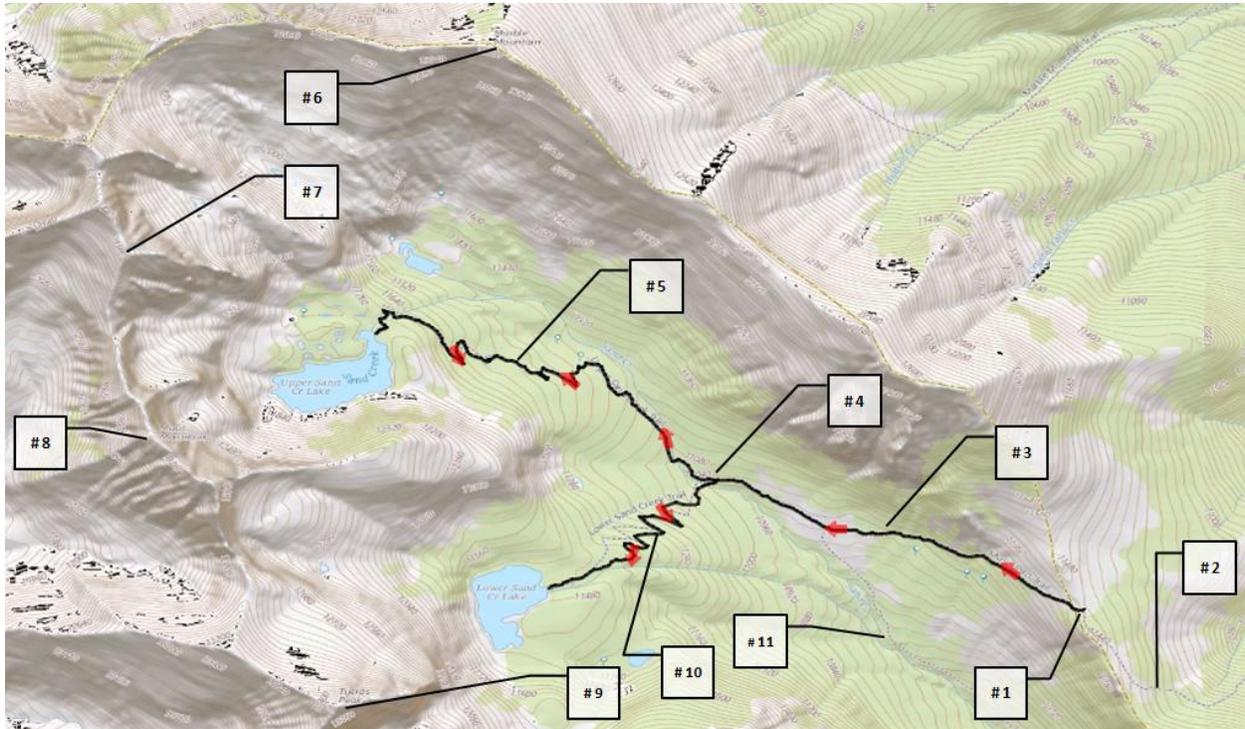


*Section 2 - Junction to Upper Sand Creek Lake*



*Section 3 - Junction to Lower Sand Creek Lake*

Map - Sand Creek Lakes Trails (Continuation of Trail # 1334):



- # 1 – Trail starts on Music Pass
- # 2 – Music Pass Trail from parking area
- # 3 – Section 1 – Music Pass to Junction
- # 4 - Junction
- # 5 – Section 2 – Junction to Upper Sand Creek Lake

- # 6 – Marble Mountain
- # 7 – Milwaukee Peak
- # 8 – Music Mountain
- # 9 - Tijeras Peak
- #10 - Section 3 – Junction to Lower Sand Creek Lake
- #11 - Sand Creek Valley

**The Legal Stuff:** The information contained in these trail summaries is intended to be a supplement to the typical tools and references used by people who are well prepared to venture into the mountains. Always carry a map specific to the area you are exploring. Failure to have the necessary experience, physical conditioning, and supplies or equipment can result in injury or death. Trails For All provides no warranties, either express or implied, that the information provided in our published Trail Summaries is 100% accurate or reliable. By using any information provided, you agree to absolve Trails For All from any responsibility for damage or other liability arising from the use of Trails For All Trail Summaries.

**10 ESSENTIALS**  
For Hiking, Camping, Fishing, Backpacking, Hunting & Other Outdoor Activities



**ALL THE RANGE**

1. **Hydration:** Water Filter, Extra Water
2. **Navigation:** Map, Compass
3. **Sun Protection:** Sunglasses, Sunscreen
4. **First Aid:** First Aid Kit
5. **Shelter:** Emergency Shelter, Bag
6. **Fire:** Waterproof Matches, Fire Starter
7. **Illumination:** Head Lamp, Flash Light
8. **Insulation:** Extra Clothing, Gloves, Head Protection
9. **Nutrition:** Extra Food for Overnight
10. **Knife Kit:** Cutting Tool, Fishing Gear, Paracord, Whistle

210 Main Street, Westcliffe, CO 81252  
918-883-2228 | [www.ga\\_trails.com](http://www.ga_trails.com)  
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