

The Boondocking App Playbook

Which *kind* of app to open for which job — finding a legal free site, checking whether your rig fits, confirming signal before you commit, and the offline layers that keep working when it does not. Twenty-five tool types across five jobs.

Why this names categories, not apps

Every "top 10 camping apps" list you have read is partly out of date. Apps get bought, paywalled, abandoned, or quietly stop updating their databases — and the list that recommended them does not change.

So this playbook does the durable half: **it tells you which kind of tool does which job, what to demand from it, and how the categories fit together.** Category knowledge survives the app churn. Once you know you need a public-land boundary layer, finding today's best one takes five minutes in an app store or a forum thread — and you will know what you are looking at when you get there.

How to turn this into your actual app list
Take each category below, search it plainly ("BLM boundary map app", "RV-safe GPS routing"), then check three things before installing: **when was it last updated, does it work offline, and are the reviews from this year.** A category with no currently-maintained option is worth knowing about too — it tells you to plan around the gap rather than assume an app has it covered.

The five jobs

You do not use twenty-five apps. You use three or four regularly, and know which category to reach for when the usual ones come up short.

THE JOB	WHAT YOU NEED FROM A TOOL IN THIS CATEGORY
Find a site	Crowd-sourced locations with recent reviews. Recency matters more than volume — a 2019 review of a dispersed site tells you very little.
Confirm it is legal	Land-ownership layers. This is the step people skip, and it is the one that produces the knock on the door at 6am.
Check your rig fits	Road surface, grade, clearance, turnaround. A site rated "easy access" by a van is not easy access for a 34-foot fifth wheel.
Check signal	Carrier coverage and user-reported speeds, before you drive in — not after.
Work offline	Downloaded maps and layers, because the best free sites are exactly where you have no service.

The rule that keeps you out of trouble

An app tells you where people have camped. It does not tell you where camping is currently allowed.

Rules change season to season — fire restrictions, closures, stay limits, new prohibitions. Always confirm with the managing agency before you settle in. Nothing in this playbook is a permission slip.

Finding free and dispersed sites 5 tool types

- **Crowd-sourced campsite directories** — the category you will use most. Strengths: volume of locations, photos, and reviews that mention rig size. Weakness: listings go stale, and a site listed as free may have been fee-ified or closed since.
- **Dispersed-camping specialists** — narrower databases focused on public land rather than campgrounds. Fewer listings, but far less noise from paid RV parks.
- **Overnight-parking finders** — for travel days rather than destinations: retail lots, truck stops, rest areas, casinos. Always confirm the individual location still permits it; corporate policy and local ordinance often disagree.
- **Community forums and regional groups** — the fastest source of current conditions, and often the only place a closure is mentioned before the agency updates its page.
- **Membership host networks** — paid, but they solve the awkward one-night-in-a-populated-area problem that free options handle badly.

Confirming public land and legality 4 tool types

- **Public-land boundary layers** — the single most valuable category here. They show where federal and state land actually begins and ends, which is how you avoid camping on private inholdings that look identical on a road map.
- **Managing-agency apps and sites** — the agency's own information: motor vehicle use maps, stay limits, seasonal closures, fire restrictions. Slower and uglier than the crowd-sourced apps, and authoritative in a way none of them are.
- **Fire-restriction trackers** — restrictions change fast in summer and are the most common reason a plan has to change on arrival.
- **Motor vehicle use maps** — where they exist, they define which roads you may drive and how far off them you may park. This is the detail that separates legal dispersed camping from a citation.

Rig fit, roads and access 5 tool types

- **RV-specific routing** — routes that respect height, weight, length and propane restrictions. Standard car navigation will happily send a 13-foot rig under an 11-foot bridge.

- **Satellite and topographic imagery** — check the last two miles before you commit. You are looking for turnaround space, surface, grade and overhanging trees.
- **Grade and elevation profiles** — useful for both engine and brakes, and for deciding whether a route is a scenic detour or a bad afternoon.
- **Road-condition and closure reporting** — seasonal gates and washouts are common on the access roads that lead to the best sites.
- **Low-clearance and bridge databases** — worth cross-checking against your routing app rather than trusting one source.

Connectivity and power 5 tool types

- **Carrier coverage maps** — the official version. Optimistic, but fine for ruling places out.
- **User-reported speed maps** — what people actually got, which is usually the more useful number.
- **Cell-signal loggers** — tools that record signal as you drive so you can find the pull-out that had bars.
- **Satellite-internet coverage and obstruction checkers** — including tree-cover checks, which matter more than most people expect at wooded sites.
- **Solar and cloud-cover forecasting** — cloud forecasts are effectively battery forecasts when you are off-grid for more than two days.

Offline navigation and safety 6 tool types

- **Offline map downloads** — download the region before you lose service, not when you notice you have. Most people learn this once.
- **Offline topo and trail layers** — for the walking part, and for understanding terrain around a site.
- **Satellite messengers and check-in tools** — for genuinely remote stays. If nobody knows where you are, an app is not a plan.
- **Weather alerting with offline caching** — flash flooding is the specific risk that catches dispersed campers, because the appealing flat spot is often a wash.
- **Dump station and potable water finders** — plan resupply around your stay rather than cutting it short.
- **Trip logging and expense tracking** — mundane, but the only way to find out what a month of boondocking actually costs you.

The stack that works

Four tools, in this order, every time you pick a site:

STEP	CATEGORY	QUESTION IT ANSWERS
1	Crowd-sourced directory	Has anyone camped here recently, and what did they say?
2	Public-land boundary layer	Is this actually public land, and which agency manages it?
3	Satellite imagery	Can my rig get in, turn around, and sit level?
4	Coverage or speed map	Will I have the signal I need, or do I need to plan around not having it?

Boondocking etiquette, in four lines

Camp on existing disturbed ground rather than making new ground. Respect stay limits — they exist because people ignored them. Pack out everything, including grey water where required. Leave the site cleaner than the last person did, because the next closure is usually caused by the previous camper.

Before the next trip

The **RV Maintenance Checklist** covers the pre-departure and seasonal checks that keep a boondocking trip from ending early — also free.

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Provided for general informational purposes. This playbook describes categories of tool and does not endorse, rank or recommend any specific product; availability, features and pricing change frequently, so verify any tool's current status before relying on it. Camping regulations, stay limits, fire restrictions and road closures vary by agency, state and season and change without notice — always confirm current rules with the managing agency before staying anywhere, and never rely on a crowd-sourced listing as evidence that camping is permitted. You are responsible for the safe operation of your vehicle and for assessing road and site suitability. © 2026 Camper Pro Living.