

Sweetwater Items:

Dear White River National Forest

I have been visiting Sweetwater lake for over nearly 40 years and I am not in favor of White River National Forest's proposed plan for Sweetwater Lake. In 2019 I bought a property above the lake on CR 151 and now call Sweetwater home. In 2019, I became part of the effort to "Save the Lake" with other community members and people/organizations throughout Eagle and Garfield Counties.

Eagle Valley Land Trust approached Sweetwater residents with the idea of preserving the lake. They asked for working volunteers for a fundraising committee to this end. I volunteered for this. We spent over a year meeting and soliciting funds to preserve Sweetwater Lake. We made phone calls, wrote letters, spoke in front of government councils, sent letters to the editor of local papers, etc. We raised more money than expected in a short period of time. A lot of locals and visitors were interested in preserving the lake as it was and removing the threat of development.

Shortly after the sale went through and the land was transferred to the US Forest Service, they announced that the property would be **developed** and managed by the Colorado State Park service. I had not envisioned this as something that would happen. I felt that the money I had donated and the money I had helped solicit would support exactly what the campaign was trying to stop. I felt I had been deceived, and in turn, had lied to donors unknowingly.

I don't want the lake to be developed. While I am happy that the entire property around the lake is now open to the public, I do not want to see amenities developed there to draw more and more numbers up to the lake! Private ownership of the lake property would have been preferable to the proposed level of build out by the USFS and Colorado State Parks. That at least would have had less impact on our community!

We enjoyed the previous use of Sweetwater Lake - a combination of Forest Service campground, day use, and fishing area, along with a small privately run resort of over 100 years. The resort was open to and used by the whole community, especially the restaurant. It included rental rowboats, horseback rides, and rental cabins. It welcomed tourists from Vail and Aspen and Denver, but never felt overrun. The remote location and dirt road seemed to keep the visitation on a comfortable level. The number of amenities felt right for the slow pace and quiet atmosphere of our valley.

The proposed park would not only ruin the Sweetwater Lake experience, it would also have major negative impacts on the Sweetwater Community. The last ten miles of the drive to Sweetwater Lake is along Sweetwater Road. About 80 families live along this road. Most have chosen to live in this area for its remoteness, its beauty, and its strong sense of community. On any given day, you might find a 4-H youth exercising their calf or lamb on the road; a neighbor from town taking a slow scenic Sunday drive; a rancher driving his side by side to check on cows; some seniors taking a walk; or even an occasional cattle drive. Dogs wander free, folks can ride their horses on the road, and even chickens occasionally strut down the middle of the street. The area is considered "open range", so stray cattle are not unusual. This idyllic, slow pace would be totally destroyed by the traffic that a developed park would bring to the area. Just imagine 200 cars per day, some towing RV's, driving through this neighborhood!

We spoke with Senator Dylan Roberts and Representative Elizabeth Velasco about our concerns. Mr. Roberts said he just didn't understand the motivation to make this area into a park. When Fisher's Peak was declared a state park, the local community held a huge celebration! On the contrary, he noticed that this current park idea at Sweetwater has zero local support - it is not wanted by the local community, by the nearby towns, nor by either county government that it impacts! Why is it even being considered and why weren't the local communities made aware or included in the discussion?

In conclusion, neither I nor many of the rest of the residents of Sweetwater are in favor of the development that state involvement at Sweetwater Lake would produce. We prefer that the Forest Service continue to manage the area, preferably with a licensed concessionaire doing most of the daily work. We don't mind the Forest Service campground, the rental boats, the horses, the restaurant, or the cabins (should they be repaired and reopened). But we are not in favor of any additional development. We are vehemently opposed to new buildings (maintenance shops, park or forest employee housing, rental dry cabins, administration buildings, etc.), and RV campgrounds, especially anything developed in the current pastures.

We strongly oppose the proposed plan put forward by White River National Forest in this NEPA process. We do not want to see amenities developed at the lake, which we believe will negatively impact both the lake experience and the bordering community.