July 23, 2024,

**Subject: Comments on Sweetwater Lake Recreation Management and Development Project**

I was the Colorado Division of Wildlife District Wildlife Manager for the Sweetwater Lake area from 1971 thru 1999. My comments will pertain mostly to wildlife management of this area.

I am happy to see the raptor protection area designated on the current map. I visited the lake a week ago and watched a peregrine falcon dive on and harass an adult bald eagle coming into the eagle’s nest. Also, there is at least one eaglet in the nest. Falcons, eagles and ospreys were using this raptor protection area during my tenure. This raptor area deserves the utmost protection.

The area between Nellie’s Trail #1839, Johnny Meyers Trail #2067, Ute Trail #2032 and the Keep Ditch is one of the most important big game wintering areas and should also be protected. During winters between 1971 and 1999, deer and elk would winter up to 10,000 feet in elevation on this south facing slope. This included even the very snowiest of winters. In past years, the Division of Wildlife invested in aerial fertilization of this important winter range. Any new hiking or equestrian trails that would tie into the Ute Trail should be kept at a very low elevation. The best possible alternative for wildlife would be no new trails north of the current road to Hilltop Ranch. If you the new park is built as in this development proposal, any new trail should tie into the Ute Trail where it currently starts from the road just across from the restaurant, not further up the mountain.

Campers should be made aware that a large number of wildlife species visit this area, and while wildlife encounters may not occur daily, they will occur. I have observed as many as four different bears in one day in this area. A young lady from Texas was bitten by a bear in the current campground. Mountain lions can and do visit this area in both winter and summer. Now moose are visiting the lake. Any camping areas should include bear proof containers for food along with other appropriate wildlife signage.

While this proposal of a State Park is limited to this newly acquired area, it would be foolish to think that the new park will not impact the surrounding areas. I see no mention of this. About five years ago, my daughter and I backpacked from Sweetwater Lake to Stillwater Reservoir. We counted one person in the Turret Creek drainage, four people with horses at the head of Fraser Creek Trail above Trappers Lake and sixty-eight people from the rim of the Flattops down to Stillwater Reservoir, along with several dogs and a few llamas. There are several trails out of Stillwater Reservoir and this count was only on one of those trails. The Forest Service has been closing campgrounds on the Flattops such as White Owl Lake Campground due to lack of maintenance money to service the human use. The State of Colorado will not be spending money to address increased litter and increase in camping from increased human use on the streams and lakes above Sweetwater Lake. This proposal sounds somewhat like building a ski area with addressing off-site impacts

One of the current proposals is to close the wetlands and pasture at the north of the lake to human entry. If you are going to do that, it should be done quickly. Fishermen are eventually going to try and park along the narrow road to access Sweetwater Creek for fishing. I am not opposed to fishing in the creek. There is no mention of allowing fishing in the creek, but fishermen could create parking problems that need to be addressed.

From 1971 to 1999, I would have been appalled if I could count 50 vehicles from the east campground to Hilltop Ranch. From a quick addition of the figures presented, there could be parking for 125 vehicles. For this area, 125 vehicles will bring increased problems not addressed in this proposal.

As a personal note, a small restaurant was always a nice amenity.

Any new development will most certainly have unintended consequences. More noise, more traffic, more people, more trash, less wildlife and less darkness are those that immediately come to mind.

I hope that the Sweetwater Lake Recreation and Development Project uses the lowest numbers mentioned.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Larry Green

New Castle, CO