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June 25, 2024

Heather Noel, Acting Forest Supervisor, White River National Forest
c/o Jamie Werner
900 Grand Avenue
Glenwood Springs, CO 81601

Re: Sweetwater Lake

Dear Ms Noel:

We are writing to you concerning Sweetwater Lake. We have lived in Eagle County for over 50 years. We lived on Sweetwater Road for over 20 years from 1997 to 2017 but when our ranch got to be too much for us, we sold it and moved into Eagle, Colorado. We enjoyed our years at Sweetwater very much and became members of the close community up there and are still invited to many of their functions.

When we donated to the Eagle Valley Land Trust to save Sweetwater Lake, we thought it was going to be put into a conservation easement and left the way it was with the Forest Service managing it. We did not think it was going to be a State Park.

We have seen the plans for the Lake and have a few comments and would like to tell you of some of our experiences up there.

Safety

Regarding Safety on the road, it takes a long time for emergency vehicles to get up there and because the road encompasses two different counties, it is difficult for the emergency workers to know where they are going. Several times while we were living there, we had to go out on the road to give directions as the fire trucks and ambulances went up and down looking for an address. The addresses start all over at the Garfield County Line so it is very confusing. This would be very confusing if a tourist said they needed help in front of a certain house number. There can be two of the same number on the road, one in Eagle County and one in Garfield County.

During our 20 years there, there were several what we called gulley washers where mud and rocks came down the gulleys and, in some cases, blocked the road. We personally had extensive damage to our property twice. There were rocks the size of Volkswagens on the road and in our field. It seems if things like this happened again, it would be dangerous for an additional 100 cars on the road. During the first flood, we had gone camping and people who were stuck on the road, broke into our house and did a lot of damage and stole things. Things like that would be worse with the State

Park up there. During another flood, a man whose car was stuck up the road, came and asked if he could stay with us until it was over. With 100 extra cars up at the lake, where would all those people go if the road was closed for a couple of days if they were just up there for the day and didn't plan on camping.

When we lived there, I walked on the road with my dog on a leash for exercise. I can't tell you how many times we had to jump in a ditch to avoid being hit by a car coming around a curve too fast. A couple of times, the community talked about asking Eagle County to pave their portion of the road. We personally didn't want it because we felt cars travelled slower on the gravel road than on the paved road in the Garfield County part of the road. The trouble with the gravel road is that potholes develop and are dangerous if cars travel too fast. With 100 or more additional cars on the road, it would be a lot more dangerous and there would be a lot more potholes. Several times when we lived there, we had cars come around a curve and take down our fence. We even had a car come around a curve too quickly and go through our fence and down into our yard and partly into our pond. We had two ponds and it happened in both of them. Another lady flipped her car on the curve. Our house was very close to the road and it would scare me that with 100 additional cars on the road there could be one come through the house.

With no cell service up there, we feel that would be hazardous to visitors also. So many people rely on their cell phones to call for help.

It didn't happen when we lived there but there has been an evacuation for a possible wildfire since we moved. The road would be very crowded if there were 100 or more additional cars up at the lake. People would be trying to get their livestock etc. out and all those cars would definitely be a hinderance to the people who live there.

Overall, we feel there would be a lot of safety concerns with that many any additional people up at the lake and using the road. It was even noticeably worse just during hunting season up there and there weren't that many additional cars.

Wildlife Impacts

There is a lot of wildlife on Sweetwater Road, elk, deer, bear, raccoons, moose, mountain lions, wild turkeys, river otters on the creek etc. Having that many additional people in the small valley would certainly impact their calving places, nesting places, habitat etc. There are numerous birds in the valley also such as eagles, peregrines, pinyon jays, hummingbirds etc. Having that many cars and that many additional people going up and down the road would certainly create more stress for all of them. One lady posted the other day that she saw a car hit a young fawn and just drive on. The lady who saw it stopped to see if she could help it and at least move it off the road and it died before she got to it. What would happen with 100 more cars on the road.

Traffic/Road

As we already mentioned under safety, cars travel too fast. Even though there is a speed limit, the police are too far away to enforce it. Increased traffic will damage the road. It even gets more damaged and rougher during the increased traffic during hunting season and that is no where near 100 additional cars. There are some places where the road isn't wide enough for two cars to pass. This would be a problem for people not used to traveling on rural roads and not knowing the road especially those with motorhomes or pulling trailers.

Sweetwater Road is used by bikers, walkers, runners, etc. and I doubt with that much increased traffic if they would be able to do that anymore.

Cattle seem to get out of pens and out of fields and be on the road and we can think of several times where people's cattle were hit by cars coming around curves too quickly or just driving too fast. A few times during the year there are cattle drives on the road also. Additional traffic would be dangerous to the cattle and the riders on the horses. Sweetwater is Open Range so the cattle have the right of way.

Colorado River Road has a lot of additional traffic on the road in the last few years with so many people enjoying rafting, paddleboarding etc. It is no where near 100 cars and it is a hazard at times. With 100 extra cars coming up Colorado River Road to access the State Park, we are sure there would be more accidents near the launch areas.

Environmental Impacts

With all the construction of camping pads, demolishing of cabins etc., it seems a lot of green area, wildflowers and plant life will be affected. With that many additional people at the Lake, it seems plant life and trails will be overrun and the lake polluted.

It seems there could also be a noise problem with that many additional people.

With that many additional campers with campfires, it seems like the fire danger would be so much greater with people not properly putting out campfires. The whole of the Sweetwater Community could be wiped out with one campfire left burning. I can't imagine there will be enough personnel up there to monitor the campgrounds that much. Look how many acres burned over by Twin Lakes recently when someone didn't put a campfire out completely.

Before we even moved to Sweetwater, we visited the Indian Caves with some of our friends and I took pictures of the wonderful pictographs on the walls. Years later when we visited again, there had been damage done to the walls and the whole area compared to when we were there last. We can't imagine what it will be if it is turned into a State Park. The entrance can be roped off etc., but who enforces that? We understand there is a barrier now but we also understand people are going around it.

Livestock

We already mentioned about the cattle and cattle drives that would be impacted. We didn't see anything in the plan to address current cattle leases etc. We hope the ranchers will still be allowed to have their cattle on Public Lands up there. One Sweetwater Road and their tributaries, there are a lot of ranches that have cattle, many that have horses, one that is a bison ranch and a lot of children have 4H animals. All these get out from time to time and would be in a real danger from the increased number of cars and people.

Site Size and Design

Having hiked and boated on the lake over the years, we just can't imagine 100 or more cars and that many people up there on trails etc.

The Restaurant at Sweetwater had been a hub of activity for many years. Not just the residents of Sweetwater utilized it. People came from Vail, Glenwood, Denver and all over. We had friends from Michigan who came hunting and stayed with us and they always made a point of going up there for breakfast or lunch at least one time while they were here. After we moved and they came back and camped up there, they ate a lot more meals there. One time we had a bunch of friends come for dinner and they asked if we could just go up there for dinner because it was so beautiful and they enjoyed that restaurant so much. Everyone knew about the restaurant at Sweetwater Lake and talked about the Chicken Fried Steak and the pies!

So many of the buildings up there must be in ruin since they have been sitting empty for several years, but they have Historic Value also. When we lived there, I put together two Community Cookbooks, and I included a lot of Sweetwater History. So much was History I didn't know, and a lot of people didn't know. People who bought the cookbooks in town or at the different Farmer's Markets etc., came up to see the Historical Sites and said they hoped nothing would change. They knew the property at the Lake was for sale and they certainly hoped whoever bought it would keep it just as it was. People were crushed when they could no longer go there. We have had neighbors here in Eagle stop us and say, "Didn't you live up Sweetwater? We think it is just terrible it is going to be a State Park. We loved going fishing and then eating at the restaurant."

Many people are hoping that this area can be preserved as it was. Increasing the number of people many times over at the site, is just unimaginable for the roads, the residents, the animals, the birds and other wildlife, the trails, the Lake, everything up there! We originally bought there because it was so peaceful and it was the one place in the county where you could buy some land, grow some hay and have some animals. It didn't bother us that our house was so close to the road because not that many cars went past. That won't be the case with a State Park.

Other Comments and Thoughts

When putting together the Cookbooks with the History in them, I learned how many times the Lake Property had changed hands, how it had been approved for a huge golfing development that never materialized etc. It even changed owners a few times in the years we lived there but luckily everything was always kept relatively the same. After we moved and were contacted by the Eagle Valley Land Trust to donate to put the land into a conservation easement, we donated and hoped a conservation easement and preservation would occur there, not a State Park with many more people camping there. We thought perhaps the Forest Service would be in charge of it and the small campground they currently have there as they are the Public Lands but we thought that would be manageable for them with the one campground up there as it was. The managers of the restaurant and horse operation had always watched the campground and answered questions for all visitors. We thought the restaurant and horse operations would continue as they were and people would still be allowed to fish and hunt. Land would still be leased to ranchers for cattle. Wildlife would still roam everywhere. We just can't see any of this under the current plan or any plan that increases the number of people and cars.

When we lived there, I was Treasurer of the Sweetwater Community Club for 17 of the 20 years we lived there. One of the biggest things I had to deal with was the dumpsters. Since no trash company would do door to door pickups, we had dumpsters at the old Schoolhouse which is our Community Center. Our biggest problem was visitors using the Lake, would dump their trash in our dumpsters. We put signs on them etc. but nothing seemed to help. It has gotten worse since we left and they have changed companies again and moved the dumpsters where they are more hidden and it is working. The residents who use them pay for them each month. I can't imagine what will happen with more cars full of people. I would hope there will be adequate places for trash at the campgrounds etc. I also worry about the two old schoolhouses being vandalized with that many more people on the road.

There are some houses on Sweetwater and Garfield County Road 151 where the homes are second homes and people aren't there all the time. We worry with that many additional people driving and hiking around if some of these homes could be broken into etc.

The Community Club also has a road clean up at least twice a year and it is unbelievable what we find along the road. We can't imagine what it will be like with that many more visitors coming up the road. I have personally picked up beer cans, cigarette butts, bottles, food containers, etc. We can't imagine what it will be like with that many more cars. One time, I covered two miles from our house up the road and collected four huge black bags of trash. We would even get it down in our yard.

When we bought our property on Sweetwater, we loved the remoteness, the peacefulness, everyone knowing everyone, the closeness of the community. We fear

all of that will go away for the people remaining there and they will have to move to find all the things they love about Sweetwater elsewhere. We hated leaving. We had 197 acres of land with a mile of Sweetwater Creek frontage, two ponds, and all the wildlife you can imagine but we can see all of that going away. Colorado River Road and Sweetwater Road just can't take that many more cars and people. Our hearts go out to all our friends and the new people who live there now. We worry with that many more people, there will be automobile accidents and people will be hurt or killed.

Where we live in Eagle now, we can see the cars, motorhomes, trailers etc. going up to Sylvan Lake State Park. We never take a drive on that road on the weekends for fear of cars traveling too fast etc. One time we tried to go up for a picnic, and couldn't find an empty picnic table anywhere it was so crowded. Sweetwater is a smaller area so we can't imagine how it will be.

We also feel there is a real danger with there only being one way out of the area and the roads so narrow. There are places where the road couldn't be widened much but we didn't see any plans to upgrade the road. People coming from all over just don't know how to drive on rural narrow roads with curves and potholes. Will Eagle County and Garfield County still maintain these roads? It will cost them a lot more with so many more cars going up and down.

This whole project as planned must be going to cost the State and taxpayers a lot of money when it could just be kept as it was with a fraction of that cost. It would be so much simpler.

In conclusion, even though we no longer live up there, we feel a State Park at Sweetwater Lake is a real hazard to all those living along the Colorado River Road and Sweetwater Road and to those visitors who would be traveling there. We voted for Governor Polis and have agreed with a lot of things he has done as governor but feel this was one Big Mistake!

Sincerely,



Bob and Cathie Jarrot