August 4, 2024

Dear Members of the Sweetwater Lake Management Plan:

Whether it's for short day hikes, all-day hikes to Rim Lake, picnics on the dock, or just a beautiful afternoon drive away from I-70 traffic, Sweetwater has been one of my favorite destinations since moving to Eagle almost 30 years ago. From its inception, I followed the EVLT's campaign to save the area from development, and was a small contributor. I happened to catch the live news report of Gov. Polis announcing the approval for a state park, and like many, felt duped. Keeping an open mind, I have followed subsequent articles on the reasons, proposed plans, and pros/cons from both sides. I was unable to attend the recent public comment meeting, but appreciate this forum to voice my thoughts.

Although the US Forest Service’s plan, in writing, appears to be low-impact on the environment, wildlife, and quiet enjoyment of Sweetwater residents, unfortunately written plans & artist renditions of proposed developments do not always depict the reality of the final, long-term result.

From personally witnessing the changes to Sylvan Lake and the Brush Creek Valley since Sylvan Lake became a state park, gives me reason to caution all not to be naïve about the negative effects to come by the proposed changes to Sweetwater. I no longer recreate around Sylvan Lake during the summer months due to the Disneyland atmosphere and the contribution to traffic and heartbreaking impact on wildlife along the Brush Creek Valley.

Below are some of my questions & concerns for the Sweetwater plan:

* 20 camp sites, new day use site, 12 cabins, new equestrian facility, administrative building, maintenance facilities, equipment storage, and employee housing may appear low-impact in writing or drawings, but consider the REALITY of:
  + Number of autos, trucks, RV’s, trailers, 4-wheelers, e-bikes and other toys for each camp site or facility. More than likely each user will come with more than just the vehicle that transports them to the park.
    - Is there ample parking?
    - Can the Sweetwater road handle this traffic during all weather conditions?
    - Noise & air quality impact from vehicles & toys?
  + Number of people be? How was the estimate of 250 calculated? Related trash & waste?
  + Reservation system? For whom? Hikers, locals?
  + Impact on the night sky with campfires, lighting for RV’s, cabins, structures?
  + Noise impact of generators & audio devices from campers?
  + How many dogs per person that will visit the park? Resulting barking noise, dog waste, & safety to others? An out-of-town guest that I took to Sylvan Lake for a picnic, was bitten at our table by a camper’s dog that was not on leash.
* Pollution of the lake?
* Who will be on-site to monitor the park? How many employees will service the park? Will there be a guard gate?
* Will bicycles, e-bikes, or other motorized toys be allowed on the surrounding hiking trails?
* Safety & impact on Sweetwater & Colorado River roads: Neither are safe for large vehicles, and drivers not familiar with the area and conditions. After volunteering at the Round Up River Ranch on an evening in July 2012, I was nearly caught in a mudslide from a sudden storm. This could have been disastrous for an RV making its way in or out of Sweetwater.
* The steep dirt road at the end of lake area, up to the official trailheads is narrow & dangerous. Will it be closed to vehicles, or somehow be made safe?
* Negative Wildlife effect: I use the word NEGATIVE, because not one thing about this plan will be positive to wildlife….it’s a fact! From the traffic, noise, lights, off-road toys, trash, pollution, disrespect of humans, dogs off leash….I can’t say enough!
* Impact on the quiet enjoyment of life for those who chose to homestead, live, & invest in the Sweetwater area, never imagining that a State Park would forever change their dream.
* Effect on those of us who pay the high price to live in Eagle & Garfield counties in order to have close access to hike and enjoy the solitude and beauty of nature in special places that have not been turned into Disneyland/HOA campground attractions.
* Costs: Where are the costs for this published, and who is paying for it? Structures, site costs, personnel costs, construction, on-going maintenance and reserves?

I know there are different opinions and many have put in time and efforts on this plan. And I understand there must be a plan. So please don’t view my comments as a negative checklist; rather, please view them as constructive considerations from someone who has witnessed and lived with many changes over the last 70 years. Take time, use caution, and consider all options. One thing is certain, they are not making any more land or places as special as Sweetwater…..and once it’s gone…..it’s gone forever.

Keep Sweetwater Sweet😊

Jane Tully

Eagle