

## Sweetwater Residents and Friends Vision July 2024

# Sweetwater Complex

This packet was posted to NEPA site electronically, but not all appeared in reading room. I just wanted to make sure I didn't mess up a submission.

-Janet



"Our community loves this land and believes there's tremendous value in preserving not only the land, but also the *essence* of the property...The human pull towards Sweetwater Lake, and the value that citizens assign to it, is a combination that's one-part stunning natural beauty, and one-part prideful affection towards that storied cultural heritage of Colorado's rugged Western roots." Steve Carver, Mayor, Town of Gypsum

The Sweetwater Community maintains the sustainable level of visitation to Sweetwater Lake is an average of 60 or less people per day, which is the average review of the last 39 years. This is the number that allows a special and unique experience for a variety of visitors; that promotes the healthy ecosystem which provides a good diversity of flora and fauna, and that supports the culture and safety of the surrounding community.

## Our Site Plan

### Lodging

#### Rental Cabins

Unique historic cabins can be remodeled OR six rustic-looking wet cabins can be constructed in the same area after the current houses are removed. This nice area where these old cabins are located can continue the previous desired lodging amenity. If dry cabins are wanted, they should be added to the camping area, not here, as they are basically camping within wooden walls, a different use category.

#### Primitive Camping

The area by the current USFS Cabin is a convenient location, close to the central area, with good views, and room for an interesting layout. This is a previously disturbed site that had cattle and horse grazing here for some years. We prefer a simple design and minimal impact and development. We envision a maximum of 12 sites. While no cement pads, shower houses, electric hookups or generators, we would permit small RV's along with tents and car camping. Vault toilets and water pumps should be available while noise and light should be limited. If desired, a few of the 12 sites can contain dry cabins.

#### Equestrian Camping and Parking

Equestrian camping and parking can be located below the current barn. There should be room for 5 horse camping rigs, vault toilets and water, and some pens for horses along with public parking. It is close to county road easements outside of the main arena yet close to multiple trails. We would include hunter parking, and other public forest use parking such as backpackers and day hikers.

### Day Use

#### Day use - Divided into two areas.

Area One: This is the main day use area near the current restaurant, and should include parking, including some parking for people bringing their own small fishing boat trailers. This is the most heavily historically used part of the property with the least amount of "natural" vegetation. We propose a vault toilet and water pump.

This will include the rental boathouse and a dock for launching small lakecraft (electric trolling motors 5 hp or less allowed). We propose a second fishing dock be added nearer the cabin area

Day uses include fishing, hiking (we hope access to Indian Caves reopens soon), sightseeing, picnicking, lounging, wildlife viewing, etc.

Area Two: This is where the old campground was located. We would like to see picnic tables and fire grates, and perhaps a small dock for fishing access. A vault toilet and water pump.

#### Outfitter Area

The barn and the closest cabin should be continued as the outfitter complex. Altogether, this should include a barn, office, corrals, staff housing, and guest parking. It is slightly separate from the main area and autonomous. However it is also close to the road, close to the pastures, and close to multiple trails. It is easy access for day horseback and pony rides, and yet still offers half-day, full-day rides, and overnight pack trips into the forest.

#### Restaurant

We would either like to see the old restaurant restored or a new small restaurant built across the road from the current one where a previous lodge/restaurant burnt down in 1954. This previously disturbed area is close to the water source, has a good view of the lake, yet is far enough from the lake for a good septic system.

The restaurant could include a small store and a few employee housing rooms downstairs.

### **Additional Necessities**

#### Water treatment

A new water treatment facility should be built where the previous one was located. It is good proximity to the water source

#### Administrative Area

If the US Forest Service (or Colorado Parks and Wildlife) wants to have a presence near the lake, they should develop a small administrative area in a flat, previously heavily disturbed area (referred to as Dead Horse Flats) across from the barn. It is ideal for small development. It has a good overview of the site and there is plenty of space, yet it is separate from the main day use. We envision maybe one house for employee housing, perhaps with seasonal apartments downstairs, and one maintenance/storage facility, and a maintenance yard area.

#### Cattle Catchment Area

Cattle operations are welcomed in our valley. The cattle catch pen should be located where cattle tend to wander from the Flattops, near the old campground. They can be rounded up and hauled away from the property.

#### Additional notes:

This plan keeps the county truck turnaround, welcomes hunters, promotes winter ice fishing, and snowshoeing. All pastures remain as pastures and are not built upon. The previously used USFS trails remain accessible.

Not allowed are mountain bikes on hiking/horse trails. No ATV's. Snowmobiles only allowed for ice fishing access. And dogs must be leashed.

We hope that USFS will make sure that the area is well maintained and cleaned, that trash is removed in a timely manner, and that rangers are on duty for safety and policing. We request good, clear signs leading up to the area, but not posted on private lands.

*"It's not only the natural landscape that citizens aimed to protect, but also the human elements that provide a bridge to connect us to the past. Sweetwater Lake is a magical mixture of natural landscapes and rustic western culture that drives meaningful emotional connections to the place for citizens." Steve Carver, Mayor, Town of Gypsum*

Janet and Benny Rivera

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Jacob and Katie Rivera

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Matt Statman and Taylor Woodard

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Jerry & Georgianna Irvine

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Todd Schmidt

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Mark and Diane Herman

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Jeanne NedreLOW

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Ketih and Leigh Birdsong



Steve & Melinda Hammer



Scott and Rita Skelton

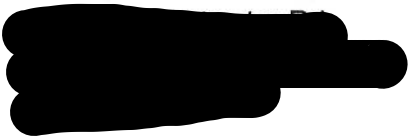


Katie Poffenbarger



Sweetwater property owner

Larry & Letitia Mabry



SALLY SWARTZ



Catherine Beyer



Leigh Seeger



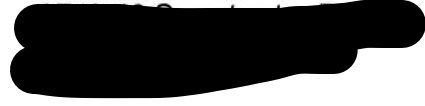
Pam and Larry Dupper



Nicholas Fuenzalida



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Lynn Tanno



Cynthia Ebert



Bill Bohannan

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Yvonne Mooney Babbitt



Dan and Shay Rivera



Rogers Family



Jennifer Raper



Jerry Law



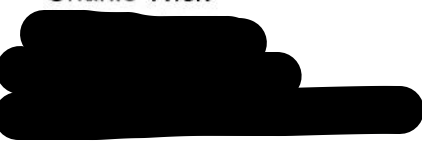
Brian Widhalm



Liz and Ern Mooney



Charlie Wick



Carol G Wick



Joseph T Srholez



Autumn Rivera



Alana Blusol and Arthur Danu

JAMES AND PHYLLIS BOLEN

Chris and Corina Lindley

Jules and Tali Landsman



Pam and Larry Dupper



Brian Widhalm



July 2, 2024

Dear White River National Forest Supervisor Heather Noel,

My husband and I have lived on Sweetwater Road for 40 years, and we are not in favor of White River National Forest's proposed plan for Sweetwater Lake. Nor are my neighbors who have signed below. This is not the use we had hoped for as we raised money for the preservation of the lake. Neither is this the use that we believe is compatible with our area. And we can imagine how this will have a negative impact on the culture of our community.

Several years ago, the 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. And we were successful. 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 closing it forever from development.

Shortly after the complicated sale went through and the land was transferred to the US Forest Service (USFS), they announced that the property would be **developed** and managed by the Colorado State Park service. We were horrified! No one who had donated money had thought they were giving money for *development*! We felt we had been deceived, and in turn, had lied to our donors unknowingly.

We don't want the lake to be developed. While we are happy that the entire property around the lake is now open to the public, we do not want to see amenities developed there to draw more and more numbers up to the lake! In fact, private ownership of the lake property would have been preferable to the proposed public level of build out! That at least would have had less impact on our community!

We enjoyed the previous and historic use of Sweetwater Lake - a combination of a primitive USFS campground, day use, and fishing area, along with a small privately run resort over a hundred years old. The historic 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 limited amenities felt right for the culture of our valley - slow pace and quiet atmosphere. I have attached a "Sweetwater Experience" letter that we sent to the Forest Service in 2022, explaining what we had been trying to save.

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 100 families live along this dirt road and a side road nearby. Most have chosen to live in this area for its remoteness, its beauty, its

western culture, 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 drive; a rancher steering 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. The park plan proposes 100 cars a day, some towing RV's, driving up through this neighborhood and then, later in the day, those 100 cars coming back down!

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, that community held a huge celebration! But 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! He wondered, why is it even being considered?

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 primitive 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 like maintenance shops, park or forest employee housing, rental dry cabins, administration buildings, etc. We are also opposed to RV campgrounds with electric hookups, cement pads, and dump stations. We are especially repulsed by the proposal to put construction in the pastures! All of this would drastically change the culture of our area.


We strongly oppose the 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.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet and Benny Rivera

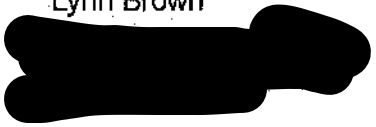


Larry and Tish Mabry





Lynn Brown



Ken Wright



Bill and Louisa Sepmeier



Jules and Tali Landsman



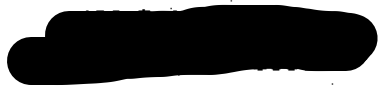
Scott and Rita Skelton



Brian Widhalm



Louise Ingalls



(owns property on Sweetwater)



## A Question of Access

A comment upon the following:

The scoping letter dated May 3, 2024, states "To maintain the natural resources and cultural characteristics of the newly acquired property, the White River National Forest intends to improve recreation access...."

The US Forest Service's (USFS) plan to turn the Sweetwater Lake property over to the Colorado State Parks to develop and maintain will not result in improved recreation nor improved access.

Addressing access, I will emphasize the amount of land to be accessed; how the proposed plan will change who is accessing the area; how access for disabled individuals will be impacted; and how all of this will change the culture and experience of the lake recreation. Having the land given to the USFS improved access slightly. Having the land run by the Colorado State Park Service will bring larger numbers and different people to a diminished experience while denying access to some who formerly enjoyed recreation on the property. Overall, having CPW develop and manage the property will be a net loss to the public.

### **Amount of Land**

To say that "increased access" is a goal begs the question, "Who didn't have access previously?" First, let's examine the **amount of property** available to the public for recreation: Half the lake shore has always been public. That means the public had access to the entire lake surface itself. In addition, there was a public parking area for equestrian use in the middle of the "private" side. Anyone could park and hike up to the top of the big rock on the private side without paying any fees. Now, the entrance to that rock overlook has been closed by USFS, reducing access.

Additionally, the previously "private" dock was open to the public to launch boats for free. The "private" restaurant was always open to the public to eat. So, only about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the lakeshore was ever actually unavailable.

But of that  $\frac{1}{3}$ , the public was always welcome to use the inlet side for free for fishing or even launching a small craft such as a kayak or canoe, especially if no one was in the camping site there. Today, the Forest Service has closed the inlet approach due to wetland concerns. So, the USFS has reduced access to about  $\frac{1}{6}$  or more of the lake shore,

That leaves about  $\frac{1}{6}$  of the shoreline that used to be private that can now be accessed by the public. It is interesting that this equals the amount of reduced access by the USFS. Certainly not a significant change. The advertising surrounding a new state-managed park might inform new people about the lake, but there is barely more land open to those people than is open to them now and earlier.

## **Visitor Population**

Secondly, let's survey who has access - both in the past and in the proposed future. The past use of the property was by locals, townspeople, tourists from Vail and Aspen, long time users from the front range and beyond. The USFS operated a small, primitive campground, and the resort had a few more campsites. So, the campers who came to Sweetwater Lake preferred small, peaceful, and primitive camping, or this was all they could afford. The suggested site operation by CPW includes RV campgrounds with hookups. This brings in a different clientele who can afford buying, hauling, and operating RV campers; who don't mind the noise they bring; and whose footprint on the land is much heavier. The previous campers will not return to the lake utilized this way. So, access is *changed*, (and in favor of those with more money), but not improved.

The lake was often visited by multi generations, as parents and grandparents brought their children to enjoy the same unchanged area that they had enjoyed as children. For lodging, these intergenerational groups rented what used to be 1920's to 1960's vacation homes, long before VRBO! These houses had several bedrooms and bathrooms with linens, full kitchens, furnished living rooms, no WiFi, and quiet surroundings. Definitely not fancy, it always felt like stepping back into yesteryear. These homes were run by a small resort business that kept them furnished, cleaned, and functioning. Now, the prospective plan includes tearing down these historic houses instead of renovating (leaving a few to view for "historic interpretation") and building new "dry cabins". Few of the grandparents who entertained their grandbabies before the wood burning fireplace in the historic houses will be hiking from the new "shed with a bed" to use the communal restrooms in the middle of the night! Nor will they be able to share their homemade bread in the kitchen nor play group board games on the dining room table at night. Grandma won't be found showering in the communal shower house nor sleeping in a sleeping bag in a shared room! So, once again, the modifications to the site will bring changes to the patronage. Not everyone likes to camp, and the new dry cabins are just camping in a log tent. These will attract a new group, while excluding folks who have used the property in the past, especially cutting out seniors.

In the past, many residents of Eagle and Garfield counties used Sweetwater Lake. These same people had experience with Sylvan Lake. Before Sylvan Lake became a State Park, locals went up there for a spontaneous weekend of free camping close to home. It was truly a beautiful, peaceful lake that lived up to its name. Now, with the fee system associated with the state park, the increased traffic, the online reservation program, and the heavy use, the locals avoid that lake. In their minds, becoming a state park has "ruined" the experience for them. Once again, switching the culture of the groups using the lake has only changed the access, not improved it.

## **Special Needs Visitors**

While the site could use some disabled ingress such as handicapped restrooms, ramps, and fishing docks, this is within the ability of the USFS to facilitate without CPW assistance.

Under the proposed plan, the current concessionaire, AJ Brink Outfitters, will not be able to continue their horse operation within the new park. Now they operate with four pastures. In order to keep their horses in top condition, the animals need room to exercise a lot. These horses are expected to carry pack loads into the Wilderness for week long trips. The USFS has already narrowed the months that the outfitter is allowed to have horses in the pastures. The park plan would bring the pastures used by the outfitter from four down to one and maybe half of another. The herd would be expected to spend their days and nights standing in a corral with weed-free hay tossed over the fence to them. This more expensive diet and less exercise guarantees diminished conditions of the horses to the point that the outfitters would no longer be able to sustain their business and would definitely close down.

How would closing the current outfitter's horse operation affect access? Less people would be able to access the Flat Tops Wilderness without the daily horse rides and overnight pack trips. However, besides the daily rides, opportunities would be curtailed for many special needs groups. The current outfitter has delivered horseback services at the lake to:

*Small Champions*, a program out of Vail for disabled children in Eagle County.

*Mountain Developmental* out of both Glenwood Springs and Vail, for developmentally delayed adults.

*Round Up River Ranch*, a summer camp for children with significant illnesses (liver and kidney transplants, acquired immune diseases, heart disease, blood disorders, brain tumors, etc.). They began their horse program at Sweetwater Lake with Brink Outfitters who now have the specialized equipment and training needed by this group.

*Valley View Hospital Rehabilitation* program, from Glenwood Springs, for teenagers in drug rehab.

*Operation Equine*, a national group out of Boulder, has brought separate programs for male and female Disabled Veterans to the lake.

*Epic Cancer Camp*, a Denver program for adult cancer survivors.

The USFS plan with CPW to develop and manage the Sweetwater Property has already stripped the small business of its lodging and food service capabilities. Now the prospective changes will destroy the horse operation, too. This, in turn, will affect many visitors, especially the more vulnerable.

### **Diminished Recreation Experiences.**

Lastly, let's examine the types of experiences historically enjoyed by visitors to Sweetwater Lake and how these might be impacted.

Previously there was a *restaurant* that mixed locals with tourists in a relaxed, homey, welcoming and historical environment. It had a limited but full service menu. It offered a chance for natural group social interactions, along with watching wildlife, overlooking the lake. It served locally sourced and culturally significant freshly cooked dishes such as bison, trout, and homemade pie. The new park proposes a food service counter that is both less personal and offers less healthy foods. It is in a different location and will not be conducive to friendly, intimate sit-down meals.

Formerly, rowboats and canoes were the main emphasis of *boating*. The proposed park caters to more hand launched watercraft such as Stand-Up-Paddleboards and kayaks. This limits the ages and physical abilities of the users, meaning less young children and seniors will participate.

*Fishing* was a leading use of the lake. Many a visitor had his grandfather teach her how to fish on this quiet lake. Now, fishing will be reduced with increased watercraft numbers.

Visible *western stables and horses* were part of the daily experience at Sweetwater for over 100 years! The proffered park moves the horse operation from the central area and out of view. Part of the scenery and culture of the lake property was watching robust, lively horses prancing and grazing in the pastures. Under the proposed park, less active horses will be crowded in corrals, eating hay, luckily out of sight!

For many years, the small, *primitive campground*, offering 7 adequate sites, was tucked away at the south end of the lake. With the new park, RV camping of 20 or more sites with electric hookups will be centralized. Besides changing the clients, this will affect the view and noise level for all the visitors.

Instead of an interesting variety of historic multi-bedroom wet cabins with fireplaces and kitchens, the *lodging* becomes mostly small, one room, lookalike dry cabins.

Small *events* such as reunions, club meetings, and anniversary parties have graced most summer weekends at Sweetwater Lake. The local high school track team would have their annual team dinner there. County Commissioners would meet in the restaurant. An occasional small wedding or milestone birthday gathering took place in the volleyball field overlooking the lake. Now these types of events will be limited, and, if catering is allowed, it will cost more for a caterer to drive all the way.

The lake has seen regular use by school field trips, 4-H clubs, scout troops, and locals having business or social meetings. If more people are invited, but entrance is limited, will the *school, club, and civic use* be as available?

There has been a definite *historical feel* to the experience at Sweetwater Lake, often described as "stepping back in time". Now it will seem like any other established state campground, albeit with several identical log-sided cabins. The entire culture of the area will be altered.

The welcoming and well-loved *resort company*, AJ Brink Outfitters, has been an integral part of the Sweetwater lake experience for three decades. With the new plan design, this small business will be closed down.

Even now we enjoy *spontaneous and free use*. CPW recommends advanced reservations and possible day use fees.

The *culture* of Sweetwater Lake has been freedom from the developed world to connect with nature and western heritage. Now, we envision it just becoming part of the developed world with electrical hookups and cement pads. Additionally, the natural environment is compromised due to 4 to 10 times the previous human impact!

In **conclusion**, creating a state parklike experience will increase visitor numbers due to the associated development and advertising, but it will not increase the acreage that the public could already use. At the same time, it will shift the clientele using the lake to those with more money and better internet for online reservations, and force the wonderful historic use into actual history! Additionally, the experience that the new visitors will get will be much diminished from what the former visitors enjoyed so much. This submitted plan reduces access for the locals, the nearby townsfolk, and those across the country who have enjoyed the lake under different circumstances - peacefulness, wildlife viewing, free and impromptu use, and a great dinner in the restaurant! What was previously available at Sweetwater Lake is significantly better than what is suggested in the USFS proposed action!

Janet Rivera, author

[REDACTED]

Bill Bohannon

[REDACTED]

Christine Bohannon

[REDACTED]

(related to above landowner)

Lynn Brown

[REDACTED]

Michael Thompson

[REDACTED]

Keith and Leigh Birdsong

[REDACTED]

Jerry & Georgianna Irvine

[REDACTED]

Rod and Jackie Schlegel

[REDACTED]

(they have cattle permits in  
Sweetwater area)



## Alternative Plans

There are good alternatives to the proposal from the US Forest Service (USFS) on future use for the newly acquired Sweetwater Lake property. What follows is a comparison of this proposal with three alternative uses.

- A. **Current USFS Proposal** with Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) management
- B. **Return to Previous Use** with Concessionaire License/Granger Thye Permit
- C. **No Development** and USFS only management
- D. **Creative Alternative** with CPW, Concessionaire, and Community Involvement

### A. Current USFS Proposal with CPW Management

Under the proposed plan, the Sweetwater Property would be managed by CPW similarly to a state park. This involves redesign of the site, utilizing previously disturbed land, some of which is currently in native vegetation and some of which is pastureland. It includes removing some standing buildings. It suggests developing a new campground to provide 20 campsites, some with electrical hookups, a bathhouse, and a dump station in what is now a pasture used by horses and wildlife. Building 12 new cabins - some dry and some wet are recommended. It proposes constructing a new barn and stable in a pasture along with a new road to get to them, overnight equestrian camping sites, and extra day use and overnight parking. It involves erection of a new lodge, maintenance facilities, equipment storage, and staff housing. All of this is intended to increase visitor use from an average of less than 60 people per day previously to a new 250 people per day.

The park experience will be similar to that of the other 42 state parks in Colorado.

- **Cost to taxpayers: High**, for construction and development, road improvements, and ongoing management. Also entrance fees and higher campground fees.
- **Impact to community: High** with a 4 to 10 times increase in visitor numbers affecting traffic, noise, safety, road construction, water impacts, livestock usage, trash, etc.
- **Impact to environment and wildlife: High negative impacts** with increased visitation spread over a wider footprint. Pastures turned into campgrounds, buildings moved from previous use, buildings torn down or boarded up, new buildings constructed for overnight visitor use (dry and wet cabins), staff housing, administration, maintenance, shower houses, lodge, etc.

## **B. Return to Previous Use with Concessionaire License/Granger Thye Permit**

One alternative is to return the property to its previous use prior to the sale of the land and its transfer to the USFS. This use combined a USFS campground on one end of the lake with a private resort across the lake. The resort included a restaurant, rental cabins and boats, and horseback rides. The resort company, AJ Brink Outfitter, has expressed a desire to work with USFS to continue to operate the facilities which would open to the public. Since first the realtor and later the USFS have allowed the buildings to fall into disrepair, they will all need to be remodeled. The resort company and the community have offered to fundraise and write grants for the monies to restore the buildings to prior state health department compliance. One donor has already come forward with an offer to repair the restaurant. The USFS can set reasonable deadlines for the funds to be raised, and a manageable timeline for repair can be established. Remodeling buildings will be more cost efficient than removing structures and building new ones.

Restoring the restaurant is highly favored by all the previous users of the lake area. It retains the local culture. It restores a community gathering spot. It offers an important amenity for day users driving this far from food service or grocery stores.

The visitor numbers should be similar to previous use (the outfitter has been running the resort for 30 years).

The resort experience will be similar to the beloved one of the past and similar to only a few other small, old fashioned resorts around the state.

- **Cost to taxpayers: Low** While the USFS will have some minor oversight costs, the concessionaire would pay a permit fee to offset, plus county sales tax would be collected.
- **Impact to community: Low** - same as historic use
- **Impact to environment and wildlife: Low negative impacts** - same as previous use

## **C. No Development and USFS only management**

This alternative allows the land to "go back" to its natural state. Buildings are torn down; no new campgrounds are developed. The USFS can continue to operate its small campground on the south end of the lake or not. The barn and horse business can continue if the company feels it remains economically feasible. Otherwise, even the pastures will resort back to nature with water rights being forfeited.

A benefit of this plan is that local cattlemen have working permits with the USFS alone.

The fear for this plan was that the area would be overrun with visitors and a general free-for-all would result. However, in the three years since the USFS has acquired the land, the actual visitor numbers have fallen. Without the amenities previously offered and with no new amenities

yet produced, the property has less attraction for many users. The lake has no beach and little boat access. The established camping spaces are primitive and small. There is not even any potable water available. The distance from town is too far for teen drinking parties. And all hiking trails are uphill!

The user's experience would be similar to other mountain lakes in White River National Forest.

- **Cost to taxpayers: Low** - some minor USFS management; similar to many other areas the USFS owns but does not oversee on a day to day basis.
- **Impact to community: Positive impacts** in that less people will use the area, but a trade off as less opportunities for community recreation, too.
- **Impact to environment and wildlife: Positive impacts** as the property reverts to wild.

#### **D. Creative Alternative with CPW, Concessionaire, and Community involvement**

This alternative allows for what Governor Polis suggested, "We want to make sure that we have a sustainable level of visitation and people that visit here have that special experience and it's a different experience than people might expect at other parts of our state park system... preserving the undeveloped nature of the property"

This alternative starts by developing a 3-way **partnership** between CPW, the former resort managers who become park concessionaires; and the local Sweetwater Community. The USFS will have minimal oversight, only so far as to make sure all Forest Service regulations and legalities are followed, with no need for design nor management input.

Working together, the three partners will design an "out of the box", creative future for Sweetwater Lake that retains both the history and culture of the area. One such example is given here, but the actual end result could be even better if the three representative groups are genuinely allowed to direct this project.

*Sweetwater History and Conservation Area* is one sample idea.

In this scenario, the former restaurant building will be remodeled to become an ADA compliant **Nature Center** with plant, animal, and fossil displays, a classroom for environmental education and nature crafts, a home base for children's nature projects, family nature hikes, guided bird walks, exploring animal tracks and signs, and other programs. These programs would be kept small - for example one school classroom or boy scout troop at a time. These programs can be run by CPW Interpretive Staff or contracted with a local expert group such as Walking Mountain Science Center.

A new **History Museum and Diamond Jack Restaurant** will be constructed in the area above and across the street from the previous restaurant. This location is where a former lodge/restaurant had been located historically. This new building can house a CPW information desk and small safety office if desired. It would also house a small office for the concessionaire, and perhaps a small store. The focal points, however, would be the History Museum and Restaurant. The museum would house displays and discussions of the extensive history of Sweetwater Lake. The restaurant would continue the western motif of the former restaurant and emphasize historic (and locally sourced) menu items such as buffalo burgers, elk steaks, rainbow trout, sourdough bread, and homemade pies. The size would be small with dining room seating for about 50, with 20 more on the deck overlooking the lake.

For lodging, the **Historic Houses** formerly used as rental cabins would be restored, each to its period. These houses were built in the 1920's to 1950's. Local businesses from Gypsum and Eagle (or as far as Vail to Aspen) would be solicited to "adopt a house" and help to pay for its remodel, guided by local historical associations. A historic plaque would be placed on each house with credit given to the company who restored it. Guests, especially multigenerational families, could once again rent the rustic yet fully furnished homes from the concessionaire. All of these cabins have kitchens while some have working fireplaces. Even historic board games (and no wifi!), would be available in the homes. The authentic atmosphere would give a true "living history" experience to the visitors.

Rowboats and canoes would be rented, fishing encouraged, hiking to the overlook or Indian Caves (once reopened), picnicking, and horseback rides would be reinstated as recreational activities. Small events would be permitted.

Other than the museum/restaurant, no new buildings would be necessary. The former motel units would be renovated for the employees of the concessionaire, along with the house nearest the barn for an equestrian office, staff housing, and equine equipment storage. No housing would be needed by CPW as the concessionaire could cover round-the-clock routine oversight as they have done for the past 30 years. They also have close relationships with police, fire, and search and rescue departments in the area.

The USFS could turn their campground over to CPW to manage. CPW could choose to move campsites up to the area near the USFS cabin in order to open the previous campground for day use, or just keep the small campground where it is. However, the campground would stay the same size - maximum 12 sites - and primitive with no electrical, water, or sewer hookups, and no generators permitted.

Equestrian camping could continue as previous with locations just below and beside the barn area used for camping before riding into the wilderness, or parking in the large turn around parking area while out day riding.

The lack of additional amenities, other than a museum and nature center for interpretation and programming, would keep the visitor numbers closer to the previous levels. If the marketing is

also kept minimal, we could preserve the undeveloped nature of the property. The 20 year lease to CPW by USFS would also be a 20 year cap on additional development. If, in 20 years, a change was desired, a new NEPA process would be necessary.

The focus of this scenario is history and historic use of the Sweetwater Lake area. It builds on the unique experiences discovered there by locals and tourists alike over the past three decades. The only expansion is in interpretation of that history - both human and natural. The visitor's experience would be unique and different from other state parks.

- **Cost to taxpayers: Medium** - new museum building, minimal CPW management; some offset income generated by concessionaire license with the state park and sales tax to county.
- **Impact to community: Low** - use would be consistent with prior use over the last three decades.
- **Impact to environment and wildlife: Low** - visitor levels similar to previous 30 years, only one new building in a previously disturbed area. Pastures kept for horses in summer and for wildlife year round.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, a state park is not the best use of the USFS's Sweetwater Lake Property. This area is unique in plant and animal species, in its deep history, in its extended community, in its isolated location, and in the use enjoyed there for 100 years or so. I have illustrated three alternative plans that would be preferable and more cost effective than the proposed state park.

The scoping project described in this NEPA process is not a unique experience. Other than supporting equestrian camping, it looks exactly like what one might expect at other parts of our state park system. I have hopes that a new partnership with more local expertise could devise more creative ideas to preserve the undeveloped nature and history of the property.

Looking around Colorado at the other state parks, there are 4000 camping spots and 70 cabins already available. We don't need more of these at Sweetwater. We also don't need entrance fees for day use. Most parks are supported by camping fees. Consequently, viewing the established parks, RV's are one of the main things you see. This is not a bad use, just not a use compatible with Sweetwater Lake. Folks may come to a state park's RV camp for a week, bringing outdoor rugs, lawn chairs, bird feeders, etc. There is enjoyable chit chat back and forth between rigs. And there is noise from the close proximity of units: TV's, air conditioners, radios, generators, gas stoves, etc. The wildlife viewed will be the ground squirrels or camp birds looking for handouts. There may be a playground for kids. The development of this type of campground-park might be fun for some, but it would have a huge negative impact on the surrounding Sweetwater community.

The previous cultural focal points of the Sweetwater Lake property was the lake and the restaurant that overlooked it. A visitor would come to the lake for recreation, but the restaurant was usually part of it. While food was important, it was more that the atmosphere combined old time western charm and an amazing view of the lake, and with welcoming, friendly staff. While 90% of the restaurant customers were from town or further away, usually there were locals at one or two tables. And conversation was relaxed and open between all the guests.

A typical visit to Sweetwater lake included lunch in the restaurant and then a hike to the overlook and on to explore the Indian Cave.

Or breakfast at the restaurant before going out to big game hunt using the cabins as a home base.

Or a half-day horseback ride, followed by dinner in the restaurant.

Or fishing in a rowboat followed by pie a la mode at the restaurant while watching the hummingbird feeders (about 8 feeders covered with a dozen hummers each!).

Or an evening of bringing your relatives to the lake for dinner and watching the eagle's nest through the spotting scope. (or the bears at the water's edge across the lake, or the moose near the inlet).

Or stopping into the restaurant's office/store for information and some light necessities for your campsite and staying to page through the scrapbooks and talk to the staff about the history of the area.

These experiences are not duplicated at other state parks. There are 42 of these parks around Colorado. There is only one Sweetwater Lake nature and history experience.

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## Regarding Purpose and Need listed in Scoping Letter

The purpose of the proposed action at Sweetwater Lake is stated by the US Forest Service (USFS) in the May 3, 2024, scoping letter as “to provide the public a natural resource-based recreational and educational experience at Sweetwater Lake that is reflective of the culture and history of the area while managing visitation at the appropriate scale...” I believe that the prior use of this property - a small Forest Service Campground, some hiking trails with a lake overlook, and access to the lake, along with a privately run restaurant, a few rental houses, horseback rides, rental boats, and an option for small events met this purpose much better than the new proposed plan would. The only difference would be the previously privately run resort would no longer be private, but would be a concessionaire on the Forest Service property. Listed below are responses (in black) to the actions proposed in the Scoping Letter bullets (in blue) under Purpose and Need.

“The actions proposed in the Sweetwater lake Recreation Management and Development Project are needed to:

- Enhance and provide sustainable management of the public lands around Sweetwater Lake.

Suitable management could be provided by the concessionaire, as they have done historically for the last 30 years, which would save the USFS and the taxpayers considerable money. With their extensive knowledge of the area, putting this property into other management will not enhance, but will diminish the use at these public lands.

- Provide updated and sustainable nature-based recreational services to the public that are appropriate to the environment and are responsive to the recreational needs of the public.

Providing sustainable nature-based recreational services has been happening at the lake for the past 100 years! For the past 30 years, approximately half of the lakeshore was owned by the Forest Service. That gave the public full use of the lake waters themselves for fishing, small watercraft, and other enjoyment. The private dock has always been open to the public to launch boats for free. The “private” restaurant has always been open to the public to eat. Recreation has also included hiking, wildlife viewing, horseback riding, ice fishing, backpacking, birding, camping, hunting, picnicking, and snowshoeing. All of this has been sustainable as can be observed by the excellent state of the property and its amazing flora and fauna. No updating is necessary.

- Improve the site’s existing recreation infrastructure while providing updated facilities in alignment with applicable laws, policies, and known best practices.

Improving the site's existing recreational infrastructure could be completed without building new facilities. If the concessionaire license included on-site management, USFS and CPW housing would not need to be built. Instead, the current rental houses and little motel could be remodeled and brought up to USFS standards at considerably less expense than building new rental cabins and staff housing.

- **Develop and implement management strategies to reduce or mitigate potential impacts on the site's natural and cultural resources from public visitation.**

Developing and implementing management strategies to reduce or mitigate potential impacts is only necessary if the USFS or CPW decide to build new amenities and then market them widely throughout the state. As it stands now, the public visitation since the whole site went into USFS ownership is less than when the concessionaire had a viable operation prior to the sale. Jeff Shroll, Eagle County Manager, mentioned in the first open meeting that traffic volume last year was below pre-Covid numbers. This demonstrates that the minimal amenities, minor advertisement, and remote location will continue to mitigate impacts perfectly well on the site's natural and cultural resources from public visitation. No new strategies are needed if no new amenities are constructed.

- **Provide for year-round on-site management, including oversight and management for all the site's resources and facilities.**

Providing for year-round management can best be completed by the people who have lived there and managed it for the past 30 years. They can be awarded licenses and permits through the Granger/Thye Act.

- **Provide public recreational, interpretative, and educational opportunities.**

Providing public recreational, interpretive, and educational opportunities have been happening at the lake for the last 30 years. The lake property has been well used by school groups, civic groups, scout groups, reunions, church gatherings, community meetings, Eagle and Garfield County public meetings and retreats, Cattlemen's Association, Vail Recreation District, Gypsum Town Board and Fire District, Vail Lodging Concierges, and many, many more. Most of these are more conducive for a privately run small business to organize and coordinate than for the USFS or CPW. In fact, turning this type of management over to a government agent might reduce historic access to these groups. In addition, the current company held many interpretive materials available to the public throughout the restaurant, with knowledgeable staff to discuss the history and wildlife of the area.

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Robert and Catherine Beyer

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Keith and Leigh Birdsong

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Thatcher Family

[REDACTED]



## Rural Sweetwater Community and No State Park

The Sweetwater Community was caught off guard when the governor announced that the Sweetwater Lake property would become the newest Colorado State Park. This is not the usual way for a state park to be formed nor introduced.

The twelve miles of Sweetwater Road, located in both Eagle and Garfield Counties, has historically been an actual community. The previous generations incorporated a non-profit to manage a community center and to "engage in activities designed exclusively to promote the common good, civic betterment, social improvement, and general welfare of the people of the community." This non-profit continues today with both social gatherings of the 80+ families in the area and strong civic engagement including the addition of a Fire House equipped with a Wildland Fire Truck, and awarding a yearly college scholarship. Furthermore, the restaurant at Sweetwater Lake has been the heart of our community. It has been open under various ownerships for over 100 years, and reflects our rustic western culture. It is the spot for locals to meet each other, to introduce newcomers to the area, and to get caught up on community happenings. This state park idea would erase a large piece of our culture and history.

### Why Change the Rules for this Park?

The usual way that a state park is established is through a formal proposal. At that time CPW looks to see if the proposed park meets their Five Established Criteria. From their website (in italics):

*Future State Parks Criteria CPW's vision is that Colorado's state parks connect people to natural wonders. Every state park should offer a unique place to experience Colorado and live life outside. To accomplish this vision, future Colorado state parks will support a system of state parks that:*

*I. Provides outstanding nature-based recreation. Everyone regardless of age, abilities or interest, is connected to Colorado's diverse landscapes. Exceptional nature-based recreation provides for visitor education and enjoyment.*

Sweetwater Lake meets this criteria.

*II. Conserves natural resources. Large natural areas conserve resources and sensitive habitats. They also allow for sustainable outdoor recreation. Connections to conserved public and private lands advance landscape-scale conservation.*

The property at Sweetwater Lake is already conserved as it is part of the US Forest Service.

*III. Meets Colorado's needs. Attention is given to locations that will benefit from new outdoor recreation opportunities and resource conservation. Factors include distance to population centers, visitation demand, and ease of access. Future state parks are innovative, offer a range*

*of amenities and experiences, and provide for evolving outdoor recreation interests. Colorado's state parks system can adapt to changes in society, the environment and technology.*

This is not an area of new outdoor recreation, nor of new resource conservation. Recreation and conservation have been happening here for 100 years or more.

The distance to small town population centers is 24 or more miles. No close urban areas.

Visitation demand has been moderate the last 30 years and this moderate level is best for resource conservation.

Ease of access is debatable. There is a county road to the proposed park, but it cannot carry the load of visitors that a state park would introduce. Putting a state park in, with the load of traffic that would introduce, would make access difficult.

The park proposed in this area is not innovative. It is very similar to 42 other state parks. This park would offer some amenities that were not offered previously such as RV hook-ups, dry cabins, etc, while removing other experiences such as historic rental cabins and an iconic restaurant. It is questionable whether this would be evolving outdoor recreation interests or devolving into a more mundane experience.

*IV. Provides community value. Future state parks engage nearby communities. Local economies and quality of life improve by having a state park. The benefits of Colorado's state park system are available to everyone with attention to being inclusive and accessible.*

This is the most debatable criteria. This future park did not engage the community before the announcement. A "token" engagement happened with a community representative group, but only after the fact. However the representative group stated at their final meeting that they didn't feel they had been listened to.

Local economies will suffer due to this state park. No one benefits economically. In fact, a small business at that location is being put out of business with this plan.

The quality of life will diminish dramatically with this plan. In June of 2023, at the annual Sweetwater Community Club meeting, a vote was taken whether to support the park idea, reject the park idea, or outwardly fight the park idea. Everyone was surprised that the third option - to fight the park - was unanimously voted in! That is how strongly the community feels their quality of life will be negatively affected.

The area has always been inclusive. Some of the access has diminished since USFS acquired the land. No access to the inlet area, no access to the large rock overlooking the east side of the lake, no access to the Indian Caves, no access to the restaurant, and no access to the historic rental cabins. All of the area could benefit from more disabled persons' access.

*V. Supports a financially sustainable system. Looking into the future and park system-wide, new state parks are financially practical, considering acquisition, development, operations and management.*

In order to make this park financially sustainable, developments would need to be constructed to bring in funds. As a park employee mentioned, the money is in electrical and RV's. However, the level of development needed for sustainability would be too much building for the unique flora and fauna of the area. The very entity tasked with conserving the delicate habitat would need to destroy part of it in order to bring in funds through hookups, RV pads, more established campgrounds, etc. There is possible income in park day use fees, but with the new license plates this might be minor.

Moreover, necessary new road construction would be financially impractical. Additionally, marketing would increase in order to get the additional visitor numbers needed for financial sustainability. But then the increased visitor numbers would hurt the park environment, hurt the flora and fauna, cause safety concerns, and destroy many of the positive things about the community.

It makes more sense to have no park, and let the concessionaire fees support the slight oversight that USFS would still need to do.

Furthermore, before a state park is established, several other steps are usually taken. Also taken from the state's website is the following:

*11. Request of notification to the following parties:*

*a. CPW Regional Manager for the region where the property is located. Listed here:*

*[cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/Leadership.aspx](http://cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/Leadership.aspx)*

*b. Local government officials, including the Boards of County Commissioners and City/Town Councils geographically associated with the property.*

*c. State Representative(s) and Senator(s) whose district the property is in.*

*d. Federal or State land managers if associated or adjacent to the property or access to the property is through public land(s), such as the Bureau of Land Management, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Reclamation and State Land Board.*

Parts a and d were followed, but no attention was given to parts b and c prior to the announcement of the state park. This has increased distrust between the local governments, boards, town councils, etc. that will be impacted by the park.

In addition, the following should be added to the application:

*12. Description of any potential opposition to the project.*

Since no one knew of the project before it was announced, the CPW Board was not aware of the dramatically high level of opposition that this project would meet.

Another part of the process asks for:

*Requested Documentation:*

- 1. Easements used to access the site*
- 2. Survey of the site, if available*
- 3. High resolution photographs of the site*
- 4. Two to three letters of support*

We are highly curious as to who contributed two or three letters of support. As far as we can determine, the only entities supporting this project are the USFS and the Eagle Valley Land Trust.

### **Negative Impacts**

The Sweetwater Community is highly concerned with how a state park will affect the human culture here and how it will affect the wildlife found here. The developing and marketing of a park will detract from the enjoyment of our unique environment, damage the habitat, and destroy the historic character of the area. Our concerns are not limited to the potential impacts to our roads, homes, and quality of life, but to the many species of wildlife which have co-existed with the previous modest level of human activity. We fear impact to the calving elk with campgrounds in the pastures, loss of soaring peregrines and vulnerable pinyon jays, and diminished fragile plant life such as Harrington's penstemon and mountain willow. We foresee damage to migration patterns, loss of habitat, and increased stress on wild animals. We are troubled by the shock to the sensitive riparian area with increased use.

Other parks receiving more visitors than they can handle have the following observable impacts: more human/wildlife interactions, clogged roads, overused trails, increases in numbers of searches and rescues, fistfights over parking, excess human waste, use of drones, late night parties and more. Parks that are "over loved" show a lower quality of the outdoor experience. We fear labeling Sweetwater as a State Park, building up the amenities and infrastructure, and then marketing, will bring these problems to Sweetwater Lake.

### **Culture of Sweetwater Community**

People have moved to the Sweetwater valley for the peaceful, country atmosphere, friendly neighbors, and unique scenery. We are anxious that our quality of life will significantly deteriorate due to a nearby state park. The marketing and promotional onslaught will place a recreational consumer target at the top end of our road! The park will bring noise, excessive traffic, and increased trash up and down the road. The area has no cell service, and we worry about safety issues such as accidents and potential trespassers to our quiet community. A park will box in large numbers of visitors on a one-way-out road, dangerous in case of wildfires. It will affect not only Sweetwater Road, but will have negative impacts on the Colorado River



Road too. The cattle grazing along the open range of the River Road in the spring could be deadly with the increased traffic. The kids riding their bikes or walking their 4H animals on Sweetwater Road would be endangered. Those living next door to the lake will have to pay for day use and need reservations significantly in advance where before there was spontaneous use of the lake area. And we are especially worried that our beloved restaurant and cultural heritage center will not reopen and might even be torn down.

We are close enough to Sylvan Lake State Park to have intimate knowledge of what happens when a local gem gets state park designation. Before Sylvan was named and managed as such, many locals such as ourselves and our friends, went there for a last minute weekend of free camping close to home. In addition, area equestrians could ride from there up into the forest. It was truly a beautiful, peaceful lake that lived up to its name. Now with the fee system, the increased traffic, the online reservation program, the loss of equestrian accessibility, and the heavy use, the locals avoid that lake. When asked, they have stated that becoming a state park has "ruined" the experience for them. In their case increasing access for the front range folks has meant losing access for the nearby residents.

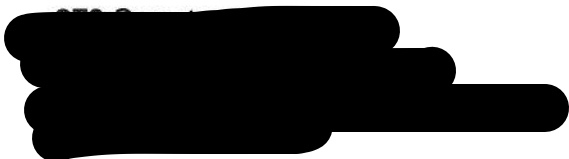
### Conclusions

As the mayor of the nearby town of Gypsum, Steve Carver, recently wrote in a letter "Our community loves this land and believes there's tremendous value in preserving not only the land but also the essence of the property...the value that citizens assign to it is a combination that's one-part stunning natural beauty and one-part prideful affection towards the storied cultural heritage of Colorado's rugged Western roots,, the human elements that provide a bridge to connect us to the past,. Sweetwater Lake is a magical mixture that drives meaningful emotional connections,,"

The people who live in the surrounding neighborhoods and towns are not in favor of having Sweetwater named as a state park. We are disillusioned by the process to reach that choice that did not follow the Colorado Park Service's own guidelines. We are distressed by the adverse effects a park could have on the natural environment and the nearby homes.

We are concerned that if this area is made into a moderate sized state park, what would keep it from expanding in the future? Instead, we want a small, undeveloped historic site that maintains the western cultural experience for our tourists and our locals. We can't emphasize enough how strongly the Sweetwater Community is opposed to both development and a state park at Sweetwater Lake.

Janet Rivera



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Bill Bohannon

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Lynn Brown

Robert and Catherine

Jennifer, Matt, Austin, and Kodi Raper

Tom Thatcher  
Sheep Creek Ranch Manager

Scott and Rita Skelton

Charles and Louisa Sepmeier

Leigh and Keith Birdsong

## Safety Concerns, including Road Concerns

Sweetwater Lake is not a good location for a state park due to safety concerns.

### Fire Danger

During the Grizzly Creek Fire three summers ago, the Sweetwater Community was evacuated. The fire was still ten miles away, so the residents inquired as to why they were required to leave. A policeman checking off names at the foot of the road explained it was because they lived in a box canyon with only one road out. In addition, he said, this area had limited opportunities for emergency communication. There is no cell service, and the reverse 911 didn't work. That brought home the seriousness of fire safety to the over 100 Sweetwater neighbors!

Today, new landowners on Sweetwater Road (County Road 150) and the neighboring County Road 151 are facing complications when applying for new building permits. Garfield County is concerned about too many people living in a box canyon should a wildfire break out. How much more dangerous this situation becomes if 250 people are visiting a state park 10 miles up that road inside that box canyon!

### Flash Flood Danger

The Sweetwater Road tends to wash out each summer during the "monsoon" season of mid-July through August, which is also peak camping season. Sometimes these are mild washes and sometimes they are dangerous and violent. Last year, the rushing, watery mud was over a foot deep across the road near the Garfield/Eagle County border on the way to the lake.

It's hard to imagine RV drivers from the cities navigating through these situations. Yet, that is part of the USFS's plan.

### Search and Rescue

Search and Rescue is located an hour or more away.

When search and rescue teams go into the Flat Tops Wilderness from the east side, they often land helicopters in a lower pasture near Sweetwater Lake. CPW's site plan is to turn this pasture into an RV park with cement pads and electric hookups. There are few, if any, other places that a rescue copter could land safely.

### Communications

There is no cell service along the Colorado River Road, the Sweetwater Road, and County Road 151. The large number of visitors projected for the park will have emergencies without a way to get help. Drivers could be stranded or come to private homes for help.

## **Trespassing**

The USFS's plan is to let parking be the limiting factor to keep numbers down at the park. However, after driving so far, it is unreasonable to think people will just shrug their shoulders and turn around. Instead, they will park along the road or on neighboring private property.

## **Personnel**

Previously, AJ Brink Outfitters has had staff living on the property year round. They helped stranded visitors, gave directions, opened their rentals for emergencies, kept trails clear, communicated with local police and fire districts, rescued boaters, saved injured hunters, and extricated lost hikers. In addition, they protected their business equipment housed there. In order for CPW to have this same level of coverage, it will cost the taxpayers a lot of money and will mean building many additional structures. Yet, CPW will not be able to present a safer experience than the concessionaire has in the past, and it will take years before CPW staff will have knowledge of the area even close to that of the current outfitters.

## **Trails**

Numerous trails begin at Sweetwater Lake. These are used by hikers, horseback riders, backpackers, and hunters. The plans should be to keep these trails accessible, but be careful of which trails are shared. Hikers with dogs meeting equine users is especially dangerous. Any new trail work should protect access while keeping people safe. The proposed new trail near Keep Ditch is a horrible idea. These and other trail plans should be detailed in the scoping proposed action for comment.

The Hilltop trailhead is used by backpackers. However, if use is increased, then the road to Old Hilltop would need to be repaired. The idea of just making people walk up to Old Hilltop is awful, as it would add significantly difficult hiking to reach the trailhead. This would definitely decrease access to backpacking in the Flat Tops.

## **Wildlife**

Sweetwater Lake has long been a haven for wildlife. However, with more people, there will be more human/wildlife interactions. These can be inconvenient when running into a skunk or beaver. These can be dangerous with bear, moose, mountain lions, elk, deer, and, potentially, wolves. The greater the visitor population, the greater these unsafe interactions will become.

In addition, wild turkeys roam the roads. Deer cross the road daily. Even livestock and pets are on the road making driving dangerous.

## **Lake Concerns**

Safety on the lake is always a big concern. The south end of the lake gets overgrown with water weeds. By mid summer, this is a dangerous place to capsize a kayak or to fall off of a Stand Up Paddle board. Should a swimmer struggle in these weeds, they would wrap around their arms and legs and could pull them under. Even experienced swimmers can drown in water weeds. Yet, the USFS's plan is to encourage more "hand launched watercraft". With no beach, I doubt there would be a lifeguard on duty, but this could be an extremely dangerous area.

### **Road Concerns**

To get to the proposed park, a visitor first has to navigate the Colorado River Road which is overrun in the summer with bicyclists, rafting shuttles, visitors to Round-Up River Ranch, and is often packed with back up traffic at the Dotsero end when the Glenwood Canyon is closed.

Then add the 10 miles of narrow, curvy Sweetwater Road. This dirt road isn't even two lanes wide in places! It could not handle the RV traffic a state park would invite. In addition, the community fears accidents from people driving too fast; increased human/wildlife interactions (esp. worrisome are moose and bear); and trespassers on the private lands that border this possible new park. The nearest police station is in Gypsum, 24 miles away.

Mudslides and rockslides have closed numerous portions of Sweetwater Road and the Colorado River Road over the years. This is a risk to the park visitors who will be stranded in our box canyon.

The repeated closures of the Glenwood Canyon back up traffic at Dotsero making it hard for residents, visitors, and even safety services to get through. This could exacerbate any emergencies that happen at Sweetwater Lake.

Sweetwater Road is mostly a dirt road. Seasonally, it gets washboards and potholes, which are graded out by the county on a rotating schedule. The increase in traffic will only exacerbate road damage.

Improvements to the road will cost the taxpayer - whether through County construction or State Park funding - a significant amount of money, in the millions. Yet, if the road was widened and improved, that would just increase the speed at which people navigate it. The isolated location means it is rarely patrolled for speed enforcement.

Some RV's will be too long or wide for the road, which might end up blocking the narrow road for local traffic and park guests

A traffic count on the lower end of Sweetwater Road in 2021 showed 240 vehicles daily. The scoping report as presented at input sessions, puts 100 more cars on the road (250 people with 2.5 people per car). However, since there is only one way in and out, that results in 100 cars going up and 100 cars going down. So, 240 becomes 440. More people means more road upkeep and more vehicle accidents.

The intersection of County Road 150 (Sweetwater Road) and County Road 151 (sometimes referred to as the 7W Road) in Garfield County is a huge concern. Even at the current level of traffic, this is a dangerous, blind intersection. Deliberately increasing traffic on the road without mitigating this danger is unconscionable.

### Conclusion

Nowadays, a driver to Sweetwater Lake has to drive through a gauntlet of bright yellow and red "No State Park" yard signs lining both sides of the road. All the residents feel that Sweetwater Lake is a very bad location for a state park, especially due to safety concerns.

There are many reasons that all these residents feel this way. Sweetwater Lake is a good spot for the small, primitive Forest Service Campground located there. A resort that has been operating in the area for years and has hosted tourists from around the world is another good idea. These smaller and historical uses around the lake maintain the wildlife, the beauty, and the riparian ecosystem while welcoming visitors.

Our number one worry is how unsafe this location would be for all the visitors if expanded, developed, and marketed into a State Park!

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Michael Thompson

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Ketih and Leigh Birdsong



Eric Eckdahl



Robert Beyer, Catherine Beyer and Mia Beyer



Scott and Carol Vasina



Jennifer, Matt, Kodi, and Austin Raper



Katie Hood



Thatcher Family

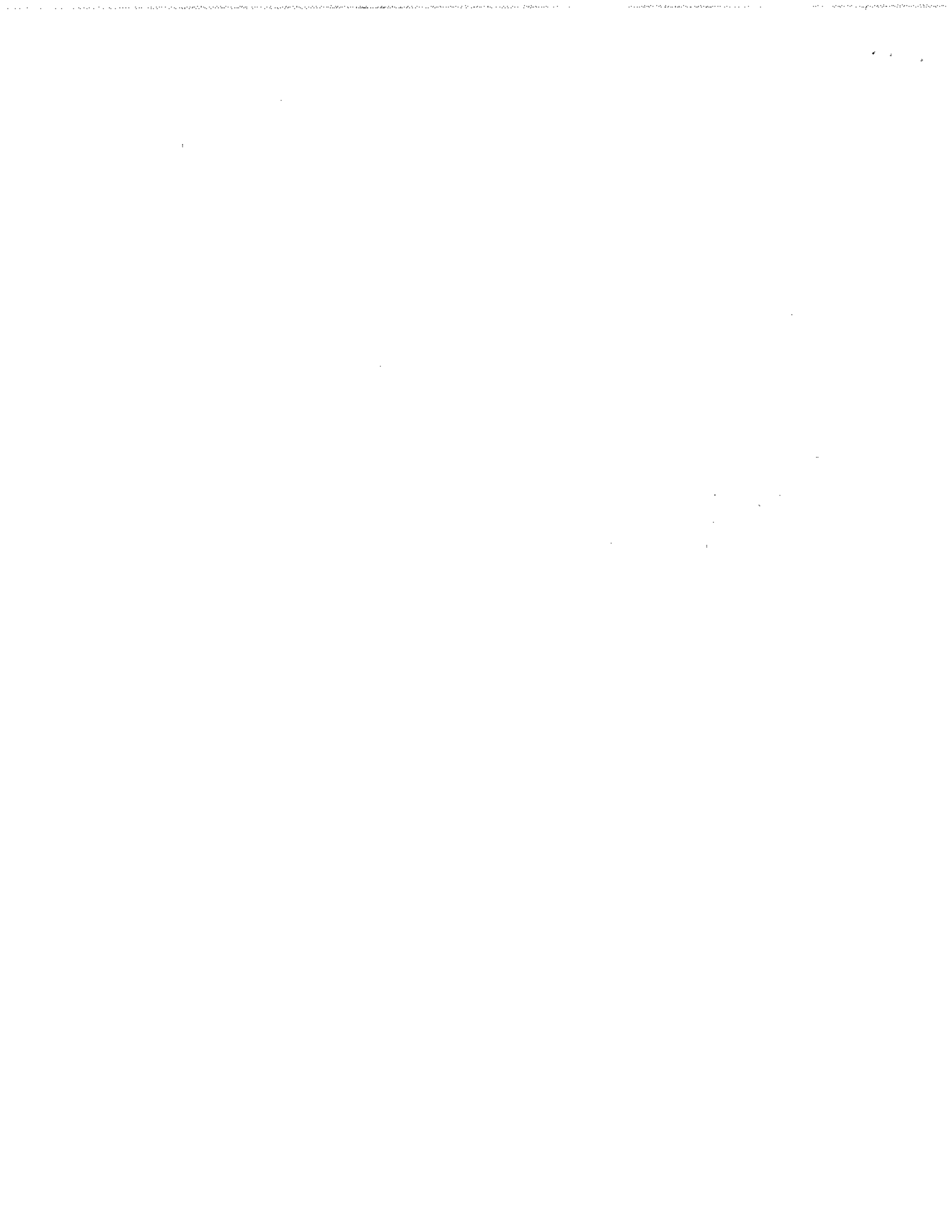


Bill Bohannon



Lynn Brown







## What We Want

In a recent communication, a Forest Service (USFS) Representative asked us to write about, "whatever it is you'd like to see..." at Sweetwater Lake. What we would like to see is what we had there previously returned to us. What we had there before the sale and transfer of the land is what all those locals, county residents, state residents, and national and international visitors were hoping for when they donated so much money so quickly to the Save the Lake campaign. What we had before was a unique experience, not the same state park encounter one could find at 42 other parks around Colorado. It felt like stepping into the past with traditional western culture and the familiarity of deep history.

### Size

The previous footprint of current buildings, campgrounds, pastures, etc. is the future footprint we propose. This size was a sustainable level of visitation, as it stayed at this size for 30 years. While we would like to welcome new visitors to this wonderful lake, we don't want them all at once! This is the size that allowed bald eagles to nest beginning in 2006 (when they took over the osprey's nest!), that allows deer to have their young, and that allows the river otter to frolic on the bank. This was the ideal use level that encouraged the humans, the wildlife, and the unique plant communities to thrive.

The average daily visitation in the past was between 35 and 60 people, depending upon what records you review. While occasionally, the numbers went up, it wasn't usual. The USFS suggests that the new state park would have a daily average of 250. This is 4 to 7 times bigger! This is way too many people for that fragile environment. We understand that the Colorado Park Service (CPW) needs a minimum visitation in order to break even. This is one reason we don't think a state park is the best use of this property. We adore this lake and so many visitors would overrun the region and love it to death!

### Restaurant

We want Sweetwater Lake to include a restaurant. The beloved, former restaurant was the heart of the Sweetwater experience. Most of the visitors who came to the lake frequented the restaurant - sometimes for a meal, sometimes for dessert, and sometimes just to talk. The restaurant only seated about 30 people inside with another 20 on the deck. While it turned over several times a day, it was rarely full. Finding a restaurant 21 miles from the nearest town was a jewel. The homemade menu was limited yet delicious. The cost was reasonable. It was open to the public. This was a central point for wildlife viewing with spotting scopes and bird feeders on the deck. It was also the history center with photos, memorabilia, and scrapbooks detailing the area's past from homesteads to outlaws to Denver celebrities.

We really desire this restaurant experience, whether the previous restaurant is remodeled or a new one is constructed. We do not want a lunch counter with deli sandwiches. We do not want food trucks. We want the enjoyable experience of sitting down in a small restaurant with friendly

staff, open 3 meals a day, 7 days a week, 6 months of the year. If the restaurant must be moved, we suggest across the road where a previous lodge was located.

In addition, this restaurant served meals for staff, packed food for overnight trail rides, and occasionally catered small events like anniversary parties or team dinners. It served as the focal point with a small convenience store - ice, bait, candy, firewood, ice cream, sweatshirts, sodas, etc. It offered free water and bathrooms. It would be nice for some ADA bathrooms to be added.

Moreover, the restaurant was the information center for lodging, camping, riding, hiking trailheads, parking, boat and dock use. It contained the office for the resort managers who took reservations for horseback riding, lodging, and events by phone and Internet. It was also the safety center with First Aid kits and an Emergency Response kit. All the resort staff was trained in First Aid. For safety, this office had landline phones, Internet, and a cell phone booster service. This round-the-clock presence by the concessionaire staff offered additional safety. All of this we would be in favor of seeing at Sweetwater Lake once again.

### **Cabins**

Participation in staying in a historic house with a wood burning fireplace, kitchen, bathrooms, no wifi, and a multi-generational family playing together is part of the experience we would like to revisit at Sweetwater Lake. We do not agree that these old vacation homes are beyond repair. We feel that remodeling the houses built in the 1920's to 1950's is preferable and cheaper than building new "cookie cutter" cabins. If one or two of the present houses needs to be torn down, we prefer it be replaced with a similar "wet" structure with the same number of bedrooms, located in the same general area. We are not in favor of "dry" cabins, even with log siding. These are just camping spots ("shed with a bed") that do not give an equal experience to the one we found so pleasurable. Keep the number of lodging spots the same. The "motel" area can be renovated for staff housing. We are fond of staying in these historic homes, playing games at the table with our grandparents and kids, and sleeping in comfortable beds with bathrooms nearby.

### **Camping**

We want the Sweetwater Lake area to continue to offer camping. We prefer that this camping be primitive - absolutely no hookups. The only thing that we agree could be added to the vault toilet amenity is a pump for water. We don't want to see shower houses, nor RV pads. Building these kinds of amenities only attracts more use than the area can sustain. We would keep the campground where it is, or move it to near the old USFS cabin. This area has been historically disturbed and would make nice camping spots. The total number of primitive-only campsites should not exceed 12.

We don't mind small RV's or pull behind trailers (17 feet or less) as long as they dry dock and have no generators. The old campground allowed a pickup with a shell on the back or a family

VW bus. We do not want to require hike-in camping! We do want the camping spots spread out enough to give the feeling of privacy in nature.

We emphatically desire the pastures to stay as such. These pastures have been there for over 100 years! The Keep Ditch was established in 1915. Besides the scenic attraction, once pastures have been in place for so long, they have become an integral part of the ecosystem. They feed elk and deer year round. They have attracted insects and birds who use that kind of habitat. Changing the use of pastures to campgrounds now, after 100 years, would have a huge negative impact on the wildlife.

### **Equestrian Camping**

One of the things that made Sweetwater unique, and that we would like to see continued, is equestrian camping (without generators). We understand that these rigs need to be larger due to hauling horses. However, this is a historic use, and subsequently, we want it to stay. Too many points of access for horses in White River National Forest have been closed. Since this use has always been popular, we would like to offer it. Space for six or seven rigs is sufficient and can be located near the barn. Up to a dozen horse pens (used by campers and those staying in cabins) can be located nearby with water troughs.

The equestrian camping could stay where it is - by the parking triangle - or moved to an area of its own below the barn. It needs a pull-through configuration. A water pump and an outhouse can be added. This location gives good access to all the riding trails.

### **Events**

We hope for small events to be sanctioned. These could be limited in size, and limited to only one per week so as not to have much impact on the area or the experience. Porta Potties could be brought in. Events might use the volleyball field by the motel or the nursery pasture or the lodge. They may include live music or speakers. Events might use boats, horses, lodging, camping, and the restaurant, or on-site catering. We have enjoyed the following type of events in the past: reunions, birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, weddings, business meetings, church gatherings, community meetings, town or county government meetings, clubs, school district, Vail rec district, Fire District, Girl and Boy Scouts, 4H clubs, and lots more.

### **Day Use**

We prefer to start with no day use fees. This isn't fair to limit use to those with better financial means. We feel that as long as we keep the amenities in line with what was there previously, we won't need a reservation or fee system for day use.

We would like to see a day use picnic area where the former USFS campground was located, but ONLY if this means moving the campground to the area by the old USFS cabin and NOT to the pastures. The parking area should not need to be increased.

## **Boating**

In our vision, boats can be rented and the boat house location kept where it is. 10 row boats or canoes could be available for rent. The boat house would store life jackets, oars, and repair materials. Keep the dock where it is. There used to be a second dock over by the USFS campground. We would like to see this one rebuilt for fishermen. In addition, it is fine for visitors to bring their own small fishing boats as they have always done.

## **Fishing**

We are partial to fishing and expect it to continue to be offered in the lake. Most fishing is done by boat, but adding a dock or two for shore fishing and ADA access would be acceptable. This is safer than having people creating their own paths below the cliffs or cutting their own trails through the willows.

## **Hiking**

We are attached to hiking in this area. Many people hiked to the overlook, up the big rock on the east side, or to the Indian Caves. We hope to see these trails maintained and the Indian Caves to reopen to tourists. All current trailheads into White River National Forest should be maintained without user fees.

## **Barn for Horseback Rides**

We delight in the horses. They are much enjoyed by visitors, even those who are not riding. They don't need to be removed from the central area as just the sight of the horses gives that feeling of western culture. We would like to see one hour rides and pony rides in the immediate area, with 2-hour, half-day, and full-day rides offered into other parts of the forest. We'd need enough horses for 25 people and 5 wranglers per day, and up to 40 during hunting season. In addition, offer overnight pack trips for 2 to 7 days with 2 to 12 guests and 3 to 5 wranglers. Private users can also bring their own horses to ride into the forest.

We would rather the barn stay where it is, but enlarged and repaired so all equine equipment can be located there. The nearest cabin can become housing for the wranglers or a new bunkhouse could be constructed, and an office for the horse business.

The horse operation includes the irrigated pastures, ditches, corrals, hitching posts, and the barn. All of which are essential, but could use some upgrades, esp. the ditches and headgate. The hay meadows are used for grazing and exercising horses, necessary for healthy, working stock. These fields must be maintained with consistent irrigation. For safety, a telephone should be located in the barn. We would consider the addition of an improved parking area, an accessible bathroom, and a water pump for guests.

The triangular parking area must be maintained for truck turnaround and parking.

### CPW Involvement

We are not opposed to State Park involvement, but we do not see how this finite area can sustain park employees if we keep it as small as we all prefer with extremely limited new amenities. It seems to make a lot more sense for the USFS to just give the former concessionaires a new permit to continue to operate as previously.

If CPW takes over management, one employee house (perhaps with seasonal housing downstairs) and one maintenance building could be built on Dead Horse Flats across from the barn. While USFS seems worried about penstemon, in reality the penstemon is all over the area, not just in Dead Horse Flats. This area has seen heavy human use over the years, and would be the best place for minor development.

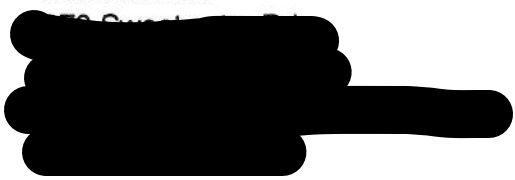
A 20 year contract with CPW seems excessive. We feel a 5 to 7 year permit is better, so all can see just how this new partnership idea would really work. We are also very worried that in 10 to 15 years, CPW would decide to expand their footprint. We would like some guarantee that the size would remain the same through their contract period.

In addition, we would rather have Sweetwater given a name besides "state park". Just the name alone will bring in more visitors than the site can maintain. Without the amenities like a beach, RV park, and bike trails, some visitors expecting the routine state park experience would be disappointed. Instead, we could call it "Sweetwater Conservation Area" or "Sweetwater Historic Complex". We would like for the area to keep its unique, western culture and historical nature and *not* become similar to a state park.

### Conclusions

What we would love to see near Sweetwater Lake is the same unique type of uses that were there before the sale of the property and subsequent ownership by the USFS. While we believe this can be best offered by the previous concessionaire, we are not opposed to state management IF the numbers are kept small (and not increased in the future); any state housing is limited to the Dead Horse Flats area; it is not referred to as a state park; and the previous concessionaire is allowed to run a restaurant, cabin rental, and horse business. I have delighted in recreating at Sweetwater Lake for the past 40 years, bringing out of town family and guests to this unique, old fashioned experience. That is what we would like to see here!

Janet Rivera



Katie Hood



Bill and Louisa Sepmeier



Dan & Casie Ward



Brent and Shirley Luark



Scott and Carol Vasina



Jan and Bill Martin



Bill Bohannon



Lynn Brown



## Environmental Concerns

Sweetwater Lake is one of the few pristine, natural areas left in Colorado. Most of our water bodies are actually man made reservoirs, so it is wonderful to have Sweetwater to view what the habitat is like around an actual lake. This lake, its intrinsic surroundings, and several historic pastures have developed into a singular ecosystem. We would like to conserve this uniqueness as we plan for the future of this Colorado gem.

While seemingly a small lake compared to our reservoirs, it is actually one of the largest natural lakes in the state at 72 acres. Sweetwater Creek flows into and out of the lake, all of which is a tributary to the Colorado River. This Sweetwater Lake ecosystem provides refuge for a rich diversity of native wildlife and plant species.

### Current Ecosystem

Around and in the lake one can find mammals including elk, deer, moose, bear, river otters, racoons, marmots, rabbits, weasels, woodrats, fox, mink, skunks, coyotes, bobcats, mountain lions, porcupines, pine martens, beaver, muskrats, bats, numerous squirrels (ground and tree), chipmunks, mice, moles, voles, and shrews. In addition, there are numerous reptiles (green snakes, garter snakes, bull snakes and others; countless lizards, etc.), and amphibians (tiger salamanders, boreal toads, and several frogs).

The lake has long been stocked with fish by the Colorado Parks and Wildlife. There are brook trout, brown trout, rainbow trout, and kokanee salmon. One can also find suckers. The amazing invertebrate (love the tree snails) and insect populations are innumerable!

The bird watching at Sweetwater is great. The different kinds are too many to list, but the local Audubon Society found 83 breeding species, not counting innumerable more who pass through or winter here. Some at-risk bird species that breed here include Black Swift, Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Golden Eagle, Swainson's Hawk, Virginia's Warbler, Brewer's Sparrow, and Lazuli Bunting. And on any given day, one can observe dippers, ducks, sparrows, juncos, flycatchers, solitaires, hummingbirds, and lots more. The declining Pinyon Jay is found nearby.

Of course, besides the great wildlife, there is an amazing variety of plant species. With the different habitats – lake, lake shore, wetlands, irrigated pastures, upland pinyon/juniper, shaded cliff sides, evergreen forest, and sagebrush flats – an amazing number of plant species can be found in just a small area. Colorado's own Harrington's Penstemon can be found all over here, along with mountain willow and more! Scrub oak, serviceberry, wild rose, chokecherries, Gambel oak, cottonwood, Douglas fir, and sagebrush are just a few of the flora that grow near the lake. Wildflowers are prolific, such as scarlet gilia, wild iris, lupine, arrowleaf balsamroot, kinikini, Indian paintbrush, cinquefoil, and asters. It's especially fun to see the prickly pear cactus and barrel cactus blooming in the spring.

## The Problem

So, how do we protect all these native plants and animals, and the various habitats on which they depend, while opening the area up to increased recreation? The answer is, we can't. In order to protect all of this and have it for our children and grandchildren to see, we need to keep the human impact at a level equal to that which has been here for the past 30 or 40 years. This previous amount of use has evolved into a balance, letting the flora and fauna flourish.

Increasing the human presence above the 60 person per day average of the past, to the 250 person per day listed in the USFS scoping documents, would have a huge negative impact on the animals, the plants and the entire environment. We hope that CPW will follow their own rules for protecting raptors, waterfowl, songbirds and others from recreational and developmental disturbances.

Environmental damages foreseen include overused trails, light pollution affecting our dark skies, excess human waste, use of drones, and, of course, noise. More people in this area will cause an increased risk of the introduction and spread of non-native and noxious weeds. Mankind's consequences would lower the quality of the outdoor experience while also damaging the ecosystem.

## Effects on Plants

More people equals injury to the plant population. Most outdoor visitors underestimate their own impact. Trampling from hiking and off trail explorations damages and kills plants, and also compacts the soil. Any bike use, even just around the campgrounds, will pack the ground even further. Compacted soil impedes seed germination and causes run-off, further degrading the soil nutrients. People enjoy picking flowers and collecting leaves which hurts the plants.

Campfires sterilize the soil. People cutting wood - even if it is supposedly not allowed - will affect the number of bushes and trees. Trees might be partially cut into and then left when felling is too hard, leaving an injured tree. Weeds (less desirable species) can overtake the desirable plants.

The chances of wildfire will go up with the number of visitors. It only takes one careless match or cigarette to ruin the whole area and endanger nearby residents.

Any damage to soil, water, or air quality will damage the plant life. For instance, just the car exhaust will cause air pollution, which can hurt delicate herbs. Researchers have found that even plain old noise can have a lasting effect on trees and plants.

## Wildlife Concerns

In addition, we would expect more negative and unsafe human/wildlife interactions.



**Bears.** Several years back, the voters in Colorado chose to end the spring bear hunt (against expert advice). Since then our bear population has been growing. The last time that I know of someone actually being bitten by a bear in the Sweetwater campground was in the late 70's, but there are more bears now. From the deck of the restaurant, we liked watching the sows bring their cubs down to the shore, across the lake.

In the past, wildlife officers had a habit of tagging problem bears in the nearby resorts and towns, and then releasing them in remote locations. Sweetwater was one such spot. We fondly refer to the tagged bears as our "Aspen bears" and know to give them some extra space. Now CPW wants to bring 250 people a day into our area. What happens to the bears when there are no more remote locations?

**Wolves.** Again, Colorado voters (ignoring the professionals' recommendations) voted to have wolves reintroduced. And since there really isn't enough feed for them, the newly introduced wolves are ranging widely. We are only being told which watersheds they are in, and ours is one of them. Not sure that this will work so well with increased tourism.

**Moose.** Just a few weeks ago, a person was chased down the road by the inlet to Sweetwater Lake by a moose. In Alaska, more humans are hurt by moose than by bears. We love seeing the moose drift into our area, but are not sure how this is going to mix with increased human pressure.

**Mountain Lions.** We don't see them very often – I have only seen six or so in my 40 years on Sweetwater – but their tracks in the snow down the driveway let us know that they see us much more regularly. The population seems to be healthy, and hunters bring a few out each season. Will the big cats react favorably to such an increase in human activity in their range?

**Coyotes.** We have lots and lots of coyotes who serenade us all night. The main problem we've had with them over the years is occasionally when a pack decides to lure a dog or cat away from its home, and then attack it. How will a family who is camping at the lake react if this should happen to their beloved pet? Leash laws are important, yet often ignored.

**Skunks.** I have fond memories of the time my brother hid behind a bush to jump out and scare us while we were staying in a cabin at Sweetwater Lake. He didn't know that a skunk was already hiding behind that bush and got quite a surprise! Needless to say he had to strip outside before we would let him into the cabin to shower and scrub down! Now, with "dry cabins" in the plans instead of houses, where will folks like him wash up?

The smaller mammals are cute, and people don't exercise enough caution. First, they will get too close to take photos. Then, a visitor might hold food out to them, or even reach out to pet one. Adults and children are in danger of getting bitten. Unfortunately, some mammals, such as skunks, bats, raccoons, and foxes can carry rabies. These seemingly mundane human/wildlife interactions can be dangerous. And the lake is located over 30 miles from the nearest medical facility.

## Water Quality

An additional environmental worry is water quality. The expanded human use will be detrimental to the whole watershed. Increased boat/paddle board activity will alter bird species behavior and drive some away. Run-off from campgrounds and parking lots will injure the lake. Increased road use could mean more mag-chloride needed on the dirt road which could wash into Sweetwater Creek and spread impacts downstream.

Also, it is important to keep the irrigated pastures in that use. This use has been going on for over 100 years! These pastures and the ditch that feeds them have been here since at least 1915 when the ditch was registered. The elk long ago counted on these pastures for calving and food; the mule deer have their babies along the edges; and many birds feed on the insect diversity the fields bring in. The USFS has proposed building roads around the pastures; putting RV pads within them; and cutting off the irrigation. This leads to habitat fragmentation and degradation. This road will interrupt traditional migration patterns, winter food sources, and calving grounds. An already declining elk population will be further impacted, along with songbirds and others.

## Soil Quality

Additionally concerning is the influence of so many people on the soil. More buildings, parking areas, and people result in more compacted soil. This equals more runoff, affecting the lake. But it also deteriorates the soil so that native plants can't grow as well. Trash and human (and dog) waste can affect the soil quality.

## Conclusions

Developing this area into a state park will mean increased stress on the animals due to decisions made by the very entity - Colorado Parks and Wildlife - who is tasked to protect them. This could mean nest abandonment; excessive use of energy from reacting to humans; big-carnivores leaving the area; and poor reproductive success. A park will cause breakdown, damage, and division of habitat. It will reduce and impair the interesting variety of plants, especially if the pastures are graded and dried for RV pads. A park of this size would be detrimental to the water and soil quality. We can all look forward to a loss of biodiversity at Sweetwater Lake! Ultimately, a state park bringing 250 people a day would destroy the very habitat that the people are coming to see in the first place.

Less harm to the environment can be accomplished by not developing amenities that will attract so many people. In order to conserve the unique plant and animal ecosystem at Sweetwater Lake, an alternative plan should be developed that keeps the visitor use to the previous level of about 60 people per day, while still inviting new people to see this beautiful area.

Janet and Benny Rivera

[REDACTED]

Matt & Hope Kapsner

[REDACTED]

(still owns land on Sweetwater)

Gretchen Hennum

[REDACTED]

Jerry & Susan Semrod (former resident)

[REDACTED]

Mia Beyer

[REDACTED]

Bob Beyer, Catherine Beyer

[REDACTED]

Cynthia Ebert

[REDACTED]

Brian Widhalm

[REDACTED]

Susan Savage and Charles Fuenzalida

[REDACTED]

Bill Bohannon

[REDACTED]

Lynn Brown

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Katie Hood

[REDACTED]

Bill and Louisa Sepmeier

[REDACTED]

## Livestock Concerns

Sweetwater's original homesteaders brought cattle, and cattle have been welcome in our area ever since. All of Sweetwater Road is officially "Open Range". This means cattle can wander wherever Homeowners have to fence them out if they don't want them in the driveway and front yard! Historically, we have enjoyed watching the cattle drives move up the road in the spring and back down in the fall.

The cattle get driven onto the US Forest Service (USFS) property in the spring where the ranchers pay for summer grazing permits. These permitted areas can be accessed by a few select routes. One of these routes is via the road that leads into the current USFS Sweetwater Campground. Part way along that road is a turn off onto a USFS dirt track up into the forest. In the Scoping Documents, this area will be turned into day use for paddle boarders and picnickers.

It is hard to be a cattleman in today's world, and this new state park idea at Sweetwater is aiming to make it even harder. About 488 acres were taken out of private use and given to the USFS, which wants to give it to Colorado State and Wildlife (CPW) to make a big state park. But then, to make this more attractive to CPW, the USFS decided to add some more of its property to the new park's boundaries. This additional piece includes some of the permitted areas used by the cattle to graze! It's not like there is any new area to, in turn, lease to the cattlemen. Instead, their summer range has just decreased, meaning they will have to reduce their herds. This makes raising cattle even less financially viable and affects the cattlemen's livelihood. In addition, these grazing leases are with the USFS and not CPW. There is genuine fear among the ranchers of losing some leases, affecting their family businesses.

CPW's own rules demand that a proposed new state park:

**"Provides community value. Future state parks engage nearby communities. Local economies and quality of life improve by having a state park."**

Obviously, to cattlemen and women, their economies and quality of life will be significantly negatively impacted from this proposed park! And, needless to say, they were not "engaged" nor asked for input prior to the state park being announced.

Using this route to the summer range through the park will become dangerous, both to the greatly increased number of tourists and to the cattle. The cattle can trample people or their picnic sites. Cars can run into cattle, damaging both. And pet dogs and cattle are a potentially awful and rowdy combination! In addition, a cow might have a new calf accompanying her in the spring, and she is a lot less tolerant of dogs, cars, and people.

It has been suggested that the ranchers simply put the cattle into trucks and drive them up to the summer grazing areas. This might sound reasonable, but currently there are no roads that could hold a semi full of cattle! The roads are both too steep and too narrow (County Road 151 or Sweetwater Road to Old Hilltop). A small operation might be able to bring a few cows via a horse trailer to the campground/day use site, but that won't work for the majority of the cattlemen. And there would still be the negative tourist/cattle interactions near the old campground.

Should the ranchers safely get their cattle up to the higher country around the lake, there is now more interaction within that area, too. When the park attracts its goal of 250 people per day, some of those people will go hiking or riding up into the forest. They will find gates whose purpose is to keep the cattle up there, which they may pass through and not close. They may confront cattle on the trail, or the cattle may wander back down to the park.

In the fall, the cattle are rounded up and driven by cowboys and cowgirls on horseback several miles back down Sweetwater Road, to where the road is wide enough for waiting semi-trucks to take them to market. There will be more dangerous interactions along this route. First, the increased traffic will block and hinder the cattle drive. And secondly, the traffic will make it difficult to use the road for loading the livestock.

Unfortunately, not every single cow makes it into the initial roundup. There are always a few stragglers, who are now attempting to find the rest of their herd. They, too, will wander back through the park. Only now, the calves are bigger and curious and less easy to manage!

The former Concessionaire at Sweetwater was a good partner of the cattlemen, who might stop to use her phones or bathrooms or even grab a meal at her restaurant. We foresee Park Rangers being less pleased to have the cattle arrive on the property.

The Sweetwater Community is proud of our cattle heritage, and we don't want to see it negatively impacted by a park. We also care about our neighbors and don't want to see their livelihood destroyed by a park. Due to safety concerns and economic reasons, we really feel that Sweetwater Lake is not a good place for a state park, especially not one of the size in the proposal!

Janet and Benny Rivera

Bill Bohannan  
Lynn Brown

[Redacted]

Cynthia Ebert

[Redacted]

Brian Widhalm

[Redacted]

Chris Lindley

[Redacted]

Joseph T Srholez

[Redacted]

Katie Hood

[Redacted]

Scott Skelton

[Redacted]





## *Proposed Action*

*The White River National Forest is proposing multiple actions to meet the purpose and need of the project as described below, Maps of the project are available on the project webpage at*

*<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/whiteriver/?project=64047>.*

- *Authorize a 20-year special use permit to Colorado Parks and Wildlife, under the Granger-Thye Act, to implement and maintain improvements described below and manage the area consistent with the purpose and need.*

We would prefer that the Granger-Thye Permit be issued to AJ Brink Outfitters who have been excellent stewards of the Sweetwater Lake area for over 30 years. We see no need to pile another government agency on top of the US Forest Service when a local small business can do the same thing, only better. And we oppose putting a local company out of business, affecting the family's livelihood. We especially object to a 20 year special use permit issued to CPW.

- *Redesign the current site to promote recreational opportunities at a scale that is compatible with the capacity of the project area, its resources, and the surrounding area. The proposed site design would minimize impacts to wildlife and natural resources by utilizing those areas and lands that have been previously disturbed and would include the following actions.*

The current site needs minimal redesign. Recreational opportunities already abound. The capacity of the project area has been at a level that is compatible with the resources and the surrounding area. A state park would increase the scale of visitor numbers until the safe capacity has been surpassed, the resources stretched, and the surrounding area adversely impacted. The present design of Sweetwater Lake Resort is significantly superior to the USFS Scoping design. The Sweetwater Lake Resort already has minimized impacts to wildlife and natural resources while this new state park design would introduce negative effects. There is no need to develop the property further. Leave "previously disturbed" areas as they are, and do not build out a larger footprint.

- *Evaluate existing structures for retention with an emphasis on those buildings that provide the best opportunity to interpret the rich history at Sweetwater. If feasible, some structures may be restored to the historic character of their 1920-to-1940 construction and used as part of the cultural interpretative program for the site. Existing structures that are in a state of severe deferred maintenance and out of compliance with various laws, regulations, and policies may be removed.*

The best way to interpret the rich history would be by letting guests rent out the historic houses. This living history immersion is far superior to an interpretive program. These houses were constructed in the 1920's to 1950's. The houses are in "severe deferred maintenance" because first the realtor and secondly the USFS have decided to allow them to deteriorate. A better plan would be to remodel them into their previous era adornments while bringing the buildings up to current codes. The USFS would try to convince us that this is too expensive. However, we believe tearing buildings down and constructing new ones is more expensive than remodeling existing buildings. The Concessionaire and the Community are willing to fundraise to improve these buildings.

- *Develop a new campground area to provide 15 to 20 campsites in a historically disturbed area that currently contains little native vegetation ("lower pasture").*

Developing a campground in a pasture is one of the worst ideas in this scoping document. While you can call a pasture "historically disturbed", in reality this pasture was created prior to 1915. For over 100 years, this pasture has provided feed to both wild animals and domestic horses. Destroying pastureland where elk graze and calve, where deer regularly feed and bed down, and where any number of small animals and birds have adapted to this habitat is irresponsible.

While we are not in favor of a new campground, if it's going to be developed, it should be smaller - more in line with the older USFS campground of 8 or 9 sites. It should be primitive only so as to have less impact on the environment. And it could be built on Dead Horse Flats (across the road from the current barn) or next to the older USFS cabin. While the USFS will claim endangered penstemon as a reason not to build there, in actuality the penstemon grows all over the property.

And Dead Horse Flats is significantly more historically disturbed as it is the site of a previous human-made dump among other past uses. The area around the older USFS cabin is also highly disturbed as it was previously grazed by both cattle and horses.

- *Construct 8 to 12 new cabins to provide an overnight recreation opportunity similar to that which historically existed in the vicinity. These cabins would be constructed with materials and architecture designed to provide a "rustic" western character similar to the styles of other cabins and lodges in the Flat Tops area of Colorado.*

Remodeling old cabins would be preferable to tearing them down and building new ones. However, if this should be done, construct a maximum of 6 cabins in the 2 to 3 bedroom category with kitchens, living rooms, and bathrooms as this will present the typical Sweetwater experience. Dry cabins are just camping spots and should be included in campgrounds, if at all. Log siding is okay for a "rustic" character.

- *Construct equestrian facilities in the "middle Pasture." Proposed facilities would include barn and stable operation, 4 to 7 overnight equestrian camping sites, and extra day-use parking for equestrian users. This area could also provide overnight parking and access to the surrounding Flat Tops Wilderness Area. This location is previously disturbed and is proposed for equestrian facilities to minimize the impact to the natural resources, while separating use between equestrians and other visitors.*

Do not build anything in any of the pastures! Instead, improve the current barn and stable operations. Build 4 to 7 equestrian camping sites below the current barn. Put extra day-use parking beside the barn. This area has always provided overnight parking and access to the surrounding Flat Tops Wilderness Area. This location is previously disturbed. Changing the location of the barn creates more impact to the natural resources than leaving it where it is. We do not need to separate use between equestrian and other visitors, as the barn is already located on the edge of the day use area. Many visitors are not aware of equestrian opportunities until they see them in action.

- *Develop additional lake access points. Any new access will include minimal disturbance to the lakeshore and lakeside willows by utilizing perpendicular-only paths through the willows to fishing docks or watercraft launching docks to minimize any disturbance on the lake edge.*

We are in favor of two new lake access points using perpendicular paths and fishing docks, one by the old campground and one by the old cabins.

- *Convert the existing Forest Service Campground and parking to day-use individual or group picnic sites and maintain the existing day-use trailhead and lake access parking in this area.*

We are in favor of converting the existing Forest Service Campground and parking to day-use individual picnic sites and maintaining the existing day-use trailhead and lake access parking in this area. However, we are only in favor of converting this old campground if the new campground is built in the disturbed areas of Dead Horse Flats OR the area around the old USFS cabin. If the only spot for a new campground is in a pasture, which involves drying up the pasture and taking it away from animal habitat, then we insist on keeping the campground where it is currently located.

- *Construct a new lodge with administrative, educational, and interpretive spaces to enhance the visitor experience through site amenities and services. This new lodge building may offer small-scale food service capabilities such as a small coffee and pit shop or limited prepackaged food offerings that would align with Forest Service policies for providing food service on National Forest System lands while not necessitating an increase in wastewater accommodation. The construction of a group picnic site with possible food truck or mobile kitchen parking will also be explored in this area for small events or day-to-day operations.*

Again, it makes more sense to renovate the current lodge than to build a new one. We are not interested in small-scale food service like a coffee shop or limited prepackaged food. We would prefer a small, sitdown restaurant permitted under the Granger Thye Act as can be found in numerous other spots in the US Forest Service.

The previous restaurant offered administrative, educational, and interpretive spaces. It included wildlife viewing with spotting scopes and bird feeders. It offered historical interpretation with photographs, news articles, and scrapbooks. In addition, it had an office, restrooms, a small store, information services, phone services, and was a safety center.

If a new restaurant needs to be constructed, we prefer the location across the street from the current restaurant where the last lodge/restaurant was located (burned down in 1954). The foundation can still be seen there.

We do not mind a group picnic site in addition to a restaurant, but do not feel that a food truck or mobile kitchen would be appropriate. Instead, the restaurant can cater any small event in the area.

- *Evaluate establishing day-use hiking and equestrian trails on the northeast side of the lake. These trail would provide loop trails and connections between the existing UTe Trail, to the new equestrian area, and the Keep Ditch Trail. These trails could provide an additional access to the Flat Tops Wilderness Area other than the existing Hilltop trailhead north of the project area. Evaluate establishing trails to a new overlook on the southwest side of the lake to provide an additional scenic overlook of the lake. Evaluate additional trails within the project area to highlight the historical significance of the site and its buildings as part of an interpretive trail system or provide other recreational opportunities*

The northeast side of the lake makes a poor trail head due to the steepness of terrain and soggy soil. The Keep Ditch Trail is not safe for horseback riding with its sheer drop off. Construction of additional trails does not really make sense when the USFS has not been able to maintain the trails it already has. The constant and difficult trail maintenance in the area has been accomplished by the local outfitters.

We are not opposed to a new overlook on the southwest side of the lake, although it should not be located near to the nesting raptors.

- *Construct appropriate maintenance facilities, equipment storage and personnel housing necessary for management and maintenance.*

If we keep the footprint small, we should not need more than one building for maintenance and equipment storage and another for staff housing, with possible seasonal apartments downstairs.

A park with visitor numbers under 60 people per day, as has historically been the use, does not need a huge staff. We suggest these administrative buildings be built in the Dead Horse Flats area or near the old USFS cabin.

- *For the cave within the project area, develop a cave management plan in consultation with the tribes to ensure the vital cultural history is preserved and incorporate the plan in the proposed special use permit.*

We agree with this cave management plan in consultation with the Ute Tribes, as long as the end goal is opening the caves to visitation and interpretation.

## Sweetwater Lake Working Group's Site Plan Vision for Sweetwater History and Conservation Area

Managed by CPW, owned by USFS



### *Governor Polis at Dedication*

"...preserving and conserving some of our most amazing wild areas..."

We want to make sure that we have a sustainable level of visitation and people that visit here have that special experience and it's a different experience than people might expect at other parts of our state park system... preserving the undeveloped nature of the property"

The Sweetwater Lake Working Group knows that "the sustainable level of visitation" to be the level that occurred here in the two decades before the area was closed to visitors in 2017. That level of visitation allowed "that special experience" for a wide variety of people from locals, to citizens of nearby towns, to across the state, across the country, and international tourists. At the same time, it allowed the bald eagles to nest beginning in 2006, the elk to calve, and the river otters to frolic on the banks. This was the ideal use level that allowed the humans, the wildlife, and the unique plant habitat to thrive.

Our site plan includes:

### **Lodging**

**Historic Rental Cabins** - *This participation in staying in a historic house with wood burning fireplaces, no wifi, and multi-generational families playing together is part of this special experience.*

3 Three-bedroom cabins with kitchen and living room

3 Two-bedroom cabins with kitchen and living room

1 One-bedroom with kitchen and living room

4 Motel rooms

Also 4-5 bedrooms and a kitchen are needed for staff use.

**Total: 24 bedrooms; 49-53 people**

*SLWG prefers to discuss each of the individual cabins in detail with the cooperating entities to decide which to restore; which to move and restore; which to change the use of, such as to a museum; and which to replace.*

## **Camping**

### **Primitive Camping**

*Continue primitive-only camping.* Move the camping area to around the current USFS cabin on the hill overlooking the resort. The current camping area is too small and cramped, sites are too close and eroded, and there is no access to drinking water.

Previously, there were 9 USFS campsites, although only 6 were realistically used. In addition, the concessionaire rented out 7 sites around the property.

**Total camping sites 14 - 16. Total possible people primitive camping 64.**

### **Equestrian Camping**

Previous use was space for 7 rigs and 12 - 15 horse pens (visitors in the cabins or campgrounds might also use the horse pens).

The SLWG proposes moving the equestrian space out of the parking triangle and into an area of its own below the barn. Put a pull-through configuration with horse pens at each site.

Also needed are water and outhouses or bathroom/showers for equestrian campers, and water troughs for theirs and the public's horses.

**Total number of people equestrian camping: 28**

### **Safety**

Formal First Aid supplies and an emergency response kit are housed in the restaurant/office. Phone service, a cell phone booster (the only cell service in 20 miles) and Internet are located here. The round-the-clock presence of the concessionaire staff offers additional safety. Rescue helicopters serving the Flat Top Wilderness and surrounding lands and neighborhood can use the "nursery" pasture as a helipad, as they have done several times in the past. An emergency response protocol should be developed.



## Day Use

Move the day use area to the former USFS campground with minimal parking increase.

Boats 10 boats for rent - 20 people at a time (boats are rented multiple times per day)

Roughly 5 private boats per day

Several stand-up paddle boarders per day, about 5 cars = 10 people

Boat house for storing life jackets, oars, and repair materials.

Dock.

Parking slightly expanded near the boathouse for those using the rental boats.

Add a second dock for lake access for kayakers and stand up paddleboarders located by the day use parking area (where one was formerly located).

Picnickers, Fishermen and women and Sightseers - about 10 cars per day, roughly 4 per car = 40 people

Three small fishing platforms have been added to offer fishing access without bank erosion. One is near the boat dock and restaurant. The second is further down by the cabins and also accessible for the equestrian campers. The third one is by the former campground/new day use area. This would be safer than having people creating their own paths below the cliffs, or cutting trails through the willows.

Hikers on trails, mostly to Indian Caves and overlook - about 6 per day, with occasional larger groups

Barn for Horse Day Rides - 1 hour rides and pony rides on property; 2 hour, half-day, full-day rides onto other parts of the forest. About 24 people (and horses) plus 3-5 wranglers per day. During hunting season there can be 40 horses out on some days with hunters, guides, and gear.

Private users also bring their horses to ride into the forest, from 0 to 20 horses at a time. In addition, 2 to 12 overnight pack trips per season from 2 - 7 days long with 2 to 12 guests and 3 to 5 wranglers.

The horse operation includes the irrigated pastures, ditches, corrals, hitching posts, and the barn. All of which are essential, but could use some upgrades, esp. ditches and headgate. The hay meadows are used for grazing and exercising horses necessary for healthy, working stock. They will be better maintained with consistent irrigation. For safety, a telephone is located in the barn.

In the barn area, add an improved parking area, an accessible bathroom and water for guests, increased storage for horse operation (so what is stored downstairs in the restaurant can be moved closer) and perhaps a bunkhouse for the crew.

The triangular parking area is better organized for truck turnaround and parking.

## Day Use Continued

### Restaurant

Open 7 days per week for 6 months. 30 guests when full, 40 with the outside deck. Restaurant turns over several times per day. The restaurant's industrial kitchen is also used for food preparation for the crew, for trail riders including overnight pack trips, and catering for groups. The SLWG proposes that the restaurant be restored and repaired, keeping the historic theme, and adding ADA bathrooms.

Store and Info Center in restaurant building - Information to the public for lodging, camping, riding, trailheads, parking, boat and dock use. Store supplied free water and bathrooms. Store sold firewood, showers, ice, worms, fishing supplies, camping supplies, ice cream, candy sweatshirts, t-shirts, hats, and sodas among others. Store did not bring in more visitors other than a few locals who might need supplies.

Office - Most of the riding, lodging, and events are by phone reservation. Phones are also a lifeline for safety in this remote area. The office includes Internet, landlines, and cell phone service. Does not bring in more people as it is used by staff only.

### Events

Two to eight events per season, 40 to 250 people per event.

Porta Potties and sometimes tents brought in.

Events might use the volleyball field by the motel, the nursery pasture, or in the lodge. May include live music or speakers.

Events might use boats, horses, lodging, camping, and restaurant or on-site catering.

Events have included reunions, birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, weddings, meetings, church gatherings, community meetings, town or county government meetings, clubs, school district, Vail rec district, Small Champions, Valley View Hospital Rehab, Fire District, Epic Cancer Camp, Girl and Boy Scouts, and lots more.

**Total people on site during the day, including 8 - 10 staff members, could be from 10 to 300. However, the total people on site during the day averaged under 60 in a multiple months-long study done for the water system by the State of Colorado.**

*Prior use was about 10% Sweetwater Creek residents and 90% visitors from outside of the valley - from nearby towns, across the state and nation, and international tourists.*

**Representative Perry Will at Dedication - "I want to see that tradition carried on because I can tell you, the best meals I've ever had and the best pie I ever ate were down there in that lodge".**

Feb. 2022

## Sweetwater Community Input On Sweetwater Lake as part of the US Forest Service and, perhaps, a Colorado State Park

In keeping with the MOU Vision Statement that has been presented to the public, the Sweetwater Community feels that the following items support the stated Goals.

### Keep:

- Rustic Atmosphere
- Restaurant concession with upgrades
- Unique, historic cabins with safety upgrades
- Barn and pastures for horseback riding programs
- Access to Indian Caves
- Truck turnaround
- Primitive camping, with camper vans and small trailers as previously, preferably hidden in willows or oak brush with no electrical/water/sewer hookups.
- Hunters welcome
- Horse camping as a traditional use
- Water rights maintained
- Low noise levels – no loud parties, camping generators, et.
- A consideration for the local people
- Good water quality
- Good snow plowing to lake access during ice fishing
- Maintain unspoiled environment for plants and wildlife
- Wildlife protection zones
- Outfitter and guiding business
- Dogs on leashes except on horseback rides
- Keep areas around meadows pristine and safe for elk calving
- Trail to scenic overlook
- Electric trolling motors 5 hp or less
- Fishing and ice fishing
- Cattle operations in the nearby forest and cattle drives on the road

In Feb 2022, the <sup>Sweetwater</sup> community was surveyed for input by SLWG. We wrote what we heard and sent it back to them. We made changes again. This is the synopsis of what they agreed to and signed.



## Improvements:

- Protect Indian Caves from vandalism but keep them open to visitation
- Move or improve small campground. Should a reservation system be initiated for all or some spots to limit use?
- Better maintenance of camping sites.
- Better boat dock or ramp
- Equestrian camping area. Historic use as horse folks have camped in the parking area previously owned by the forest service but paid the concessionaire for use of corrals and hay.
- Possible second scenic overlook on big rock cliff behind barn
- Better, but limited parking area
- Stargazing area
- Current hiking and horse trails maintained better
- Good fire mitigation and weed control
- Entrance area road and parking improvements for safety
- Improved water system
- ADA access
- Road improvements within the park
- Better picnicking and day use area



## **Possible Additions:**

- Good general upkeep and maintenance
- A few small cabins
- Specific day use area with picnic tables (perhaps at the old campground area), perhaps fire grates
- Hiking trails
- Common water spigots for campers or day use
- Cross country skiing trail and areas for snowshoeing
- A few new areas of fishing access along the shore
- Night sky designations and the improvements for this to happen
- Good trash access and removal
- More toilets that will be well cleaned and maintained
- Info Kiosks which can include educational and interpretive panels
- Good signage that is clear, but not posted on private lands, esp. at Sweetwater Rd. turnoff from the River Road.
- Safety fence and new lookout on cliffs above the cabins
- A second boat dock for SUP and Kayakers from the current campground area (there was one there previously).
- Small event venue (perhaps in combo with park amphitheater or separate pole barn structures.
- Ranger on duty for safety and policing issues
- Ranger attends trips to Indian Caves (other community members would prefer that we continue to be allowed to make these trips unsupervised)
- Regular restoration periods to let the land and animals revive.

## **Limit**

- Snowmobiles except for ice fishing access in winter (for seniors and children to get across the lake)
- Is there a way to limit the number of visitors without excluding historic use?
- Mountain bikes not allowed on hiking/horse trails, but okay on roads
- Should there be a limit on number of boats on the lake?
- Campfires must be limited when conditions warrant and be patrolled by park rangers.
- Quiet hours after 10 or 11 PM.





**Exclude:**

- ATV's
- Large RV's and camping amenities like hookups and sewer
- Light pollution
- Noise pollution
- Do not turn pastures into campgrounds or parking lots.
- Do not charge day use fees for people just eating at the restaurant. Perhaps the design of the entrance area can enhance this idea.
- No herbicides, especially Round-Up

**Suggestions from residents:**

- Keep the community informed with regular updates, meetings, and email communications.
- Let community representatives sit on the design team to facilitate communication and transparency
- Design the development in phases and start slowly.

**Still to be worked out:**

- Road issues (to be worked out with the counties)
- Access to fire department, law enforcement, and life support EMT's
- Electric power capability and how this will affect electric power to residents in the area
- Phone/cell/computer issues
- Roads and parking areas within the park. Overnight parking areas that don't affect pastures but keep access to Turret Meadows and other Wilderness trails open.
- Trash removal



These are the Sweetwater Community members who asked to have their names listed in support of the above consensus of ideas for Sweetwater Lake.

Larry and Tish Mabry  
Tim and Gretchen Hennum  
Michael Thompson  
Chris and Corina Lindley  
Matt Statman and Taylor Woodard  
Ken Wright and Maria Summerlin  
Scott and Tamara Stuart  
Dan and Doris Schoenfelder  
Mark and Amy Wilhelm  
Jim and Irene Dysart  
Mark Herman and Diane Frantz-Herman  
Scott and Carol Vasina  
Robert and Cindy Ebert  
Tim Ebner  
Derrick and Tammi Wiemer  
Patty Hood  
Michael Weinreb and Nathalie Flautat  
Bill Sepmeier  
Louisa Sepmeier  
Matt Lou  
Jerry and Ruth Butters  
Bill Bohannon and Lynn Brown  
Kai and Diana Stobbe  
Bob and Shere DeHerrera  
Monte and Doris Miller  
Bill and Annalies Stephens  
Bill and Mary Stephens  
Malorie Stephens  
Lucas Stephens  
Ty and Katie LaFramboise  
Ern and Liz Mooney  
Jerry and Georgianna Irvine  
Grant and Dani Laman  
Justin and Joselyn Brubaker



Todd and Wendy Mann  
Bonnie and Russ Ammon  
Claire Wilson  
Brian Widhalm  
Kent Scheu and Adrienne Brink-Scheu  
Aura Brink and Todd Schlegel  
Cathy Davis  
Matt and Hope Kapsner  
Bryce Kapsner  
Quin Kapsner  
Cameron Clower  
Robert and Catherine Beyer  
Mia Beyer  
Joshua and Mickey Fried  
Matt and Daryl Bergstresser  
Evan and Maggee Koster  
Jerry and Susan Semrod  
Walt and Jan Hensrud  
Chuck and Beth VanDevander  
Danny and Mary Lynn Tartaglia  
Liam Foutz  
Jules and Tali Landsman  
Art and Yvonne Babbit  
Jerry and Linda Gates  
Chris Leverich and Nancy Bryant  
Paul and Janet Testwuide  
Phil Butcher  
Debbie and Hank Vernell  
Justin and Amy Marquardt  
James and Phyllis Bolin  
Ben and Janet Rivera  
Daniel Rivera  
Autumn Rivera  
Jacob and Katie Rivera  
Shirley Herman  
Kay Vincent  
Chris Vincent



Ryan Surprise  
Scott and Angie Sunken  
Ursula Nisonoff  
Bob and Cathie Jarnot  
Katy, River, and Hazel Davis  
Scott and Rita Skelton  
Matt and Jennifer Raper  
Austin Raper  
Kodi Raper  
Louise Ingalls  
Steve Conlin  
Jarrett and Diane Osborn  
Alan Hood and Katie Langdoon  
Travis Achen  
Lydia Widhalm  
Jennifer Widhalm  
Chris Matthews  
Jan and Bill Martin  
Jim Brink  
Rod and Jackie Schlegel  
Ken and Lisa Stann  
Larry and Pam Dupper  
John and Demi Thatcher





## **Sweetwater Lake Timeline: A History of Sweetwater Lake**

**Prior to 1873 - Ute Territory.** Sweetwater Lake was on the Ute Trail, which the Ute peoples traveled seasonally between the high and low elevations for thousands of years.

**Late 1800's -** John Root and Hiram Marks took up ranches on the west end of Sweetwater Lake; after years spent traveling with the Utes and then living at Red Dirt on the Grand (Colorado) River. Roots built a log hotel and hired Nellie Davenport as his cook, giving her half ownership in the hotel. Root's name is signed in the Indian Cave on the property.

**1891** Nathan Peel purchases a 149.5 acre parcel that includes the lake and some surrounding land.

**October 16, 1891** - President Benjamin Harrison proclaims the 1.2 million-acre White River Plateau Timberland Reserve in Eagle, Garfield, Rio Blanco and Routt counties, which includes lands along the southern shore of Sweetwater Lake. This is the second Timber Reserve proclaimed in the United States and the first in Colorado.

**1910's** - a lodge is built on the inlet and several cabins are built including the "Honeymoon" Cabin and another one that burnt down in 1954.

**1916** J.B. Green becomes owner of the Sweetwater property.

**1918** - Green sold the property to Denver newspaper artist Paul Gregg. He added onto a house which is called the "Gregg" cabin.

**1910s-1920s** - Another lodge is developed above the location of the current restaurant and run by Stanley Billy Currier. There is a post office above it on the hill. The West Lake Cabin is built.

**1920's** - A Forest Service Guard Station is built on the southeast side near where the campground is now located.

**1926 - 1932** - Chicago gangster Louis "Diamond Jack" Alteri (also known as Leland Varain) purchases property, reportedly as a remote place to avoid murder charges in Chicago. Reports state that he rented boats, but prevented access from the public land side.

**1932** - Alteri defaults on the mortgage and Sweetwater lake reverts to Paul Gregg who will own it for another fourteen years.

**1940-s** The property changes hands several times and continues to be managed as a resort. The Hartz home is built by the lake.

**1950's** - The Kings from Midland, Texas subdivided the land into 119 lots. Parcel owners construct their own houses, including the current lodge, which replaced an older structure

destroyed in a 1954 fire. The cabins include a new Miller house, after the old one burnt down. The Clayton, Bullock, and Williams homes are built at this time.

**1950's** - The White River National Forest constructs a small campground on the southeast side of the lake on National Forest System lands which continues to be seasonally open today.

**1960's** - General Frederick Anderson begins purchasing the subdivided parcels for \$400,000, and reforms the Sweetwater Lake Resort once again into a single property. His son Travis Anderson and wife Lislott operated three riding and western themed camps for boys and girls in the area along and above the Sweetwater Creek drainage, one camp on adjoining property. Elizabeth Campbell (previously Mrs. Anderson, the General's wife) continued to own the lake property until 1984.

**1960-s to 2017** - Sweetwater Lake Resort continues cabin rentals, boat rentals, camp site rentals, a restaurant, horseback riding, and outfitting. The ownership changes a least a half dozen times. The Gay family managed the property for 22 years, followed by short stints by Gore, Laman, and Oaks. In 1984 the Brinks took over management and managed it for most of the next 33 years.

**2017 - present** - Most of the resort is closed for the land sale, but Brinks are permitted to retain partial use of several cabins for employees, and use the barn for their separate AJ Brink Outfitting Business.

June 14, 2022

Dear Forest Supervisor, State Parks Manager, and Land Trust Director,

We realized that we have overlooked the opportunity to truly explain what Sweetwater Lake means to so many people. This communication shortcoming is totally our fault! This letter is an attempt to solve this missed narrative.

What is the unique Sweetwater Lake experience that we are trying to save? What brings the Wick family up from Eagle every Father's Day for 20 years for a great steak dinner in an out of the way restaurant? What brings the Swartzes, Tenzcas, and a half-dozen more Anderson Camp counselors from the 70's, who now live on the front range and all over Colorado, to the lake every summer for a mini-reunion dinner? What brings continuing generations of the Menkel family from Wisconsin to the cabins every fall for over 20 years to go hunting here? What makes the community argue so vehemently for keeping the restaurant, cabins, and barn? What made the town of Gypsum residents willing to vote to donate such funds? Why was the Save the Lake campaign able to raise so much money locally so quickly? What is this open secret about this special area?

The Sweetwater Community is not trying to preserve the lake for ourselves. We want to gift a singular, distinctive experience to others. However, we can't do that if we haven't explained to the decision makers what it is we want to save and share. We don't want to change our area into a Sylvan Lake or Ridgeway State Park. There are many, many parks around the state to give that RV, shore fishing, and picnic encounter. We want to give visitors something different, something exceptional and irreplaceable.

Sweetwater Lake is a step back in time.

It's a quiet rowboat on the lake with Grampa followed by a bison burger lunch.

It's a hike to the Indian Caves with the Girl Scout troop followed by milkshakes made with real ice cream while sprawled under the big shade tree beside the restaurant.

It's a walk along the peaceful lakeshore in the evening, with the full moon reflected in the water and being surprised by a skunk, and running, shrieking and laughing, all the way back to your cabin!

It's a Saturday horse trip that begins by trailering your horses up to the lake the night before, getting permission to put them in a corral overnight, buying hay for them, a quick, early breakfast at the restaurant, and picking up a sack lunch for yourself for a spectacular ride into the wilderness.

It's a weekend family reunion in the log cabin, sitting snuggled together by the stone fireplace with no WiFi nor TV.

It's fly fishing below the outlet, getting your line tangled, giving up, and walking up to the store to buy worms and catch fish the old way!

It's lounging in the restaurant on a cool, early summer afternoon with a couple of close friends, looking through a spotting scope, watching the osprey hatchlings in their nest.

It's a small wedding at the head of an amazing scenic canyon, the unspoiled nature surrounding your guests speaking eloquently of promises and hope.

It's a trail ride through a wildflower pasture on horses that lift their heads to survey the fields instead of plodding nose-to-tail down an overused trail.

It's the local high school track team driving 25 miles to have their annual team banquet in the restaurant.

It's doing nature crafts with your toddlers down by the dock, as they explore their "treasures" in a tin bucket.

It's camping in a tent without RV generators next door, using an outhouse, and watching shooting stars in the clear, dark sky over the lake.

It's a 50<sup>th</sup> birthday gathering with four generations to boat, fish, and eat a great, catered outdoor luncheon with the honored guest relaxing in a wooden armchair to ref the volleyball game.

It's taking an 18-mile guided horseback ride with a grizzled guide, and losing your cell phone somewhere along the way, but being too exhilarated and sore to worry about it!

It's coming on a spring break trip from Colorado College, renting some cabins with your friends before the snow has even melted, and staying up all night playing board games in front of the fireplace.

It's a quiet canoe glide across the glass top lake, to the opposite silent shore, with a couple of fresh baked cookies from the restaurant in your pocket, when SMACK! a beaver tries to warn you off!

It's laying out in the sun on the dock, with a quick trip up to the store to buy an ice-cold soda.

It's a walk to the overlook with your family visiting from Vermont, followed by quesadillas and homemade salsa in the restaurant while you page through photo albums, sharing the area's history.

It's being a stranger from the big city -- and finding a restaurant at the end of a road -- walking hesitantly in the door -- and being instantly greeted like family!

It feels like coming home to a place you've only dreamt of.

And, of course, it is lounging on a wooden deck, overlooking an incredibly scenic lake, eating delicious homemade pie, and watching your kids sit perfectly still long enough to get the hummingbirds to perch on their fingers.

No amount of hired planners, nor consultant companies, can bring our guests these adventures.

The community thought we raised money to Save the Lake. Now we are told that this only meant the physical environment, not the heart and soul of the lake experience.

The eagle nesting area will rightly be preserved for the raptors. The Indian Cave will deservedly be preserved for the Native Americans' heritage. The wetland habitat will be preserved for the wildlife to safely gather. Yet, the people who have called this place home since their families first homesteaded in the valley, will be forced to give up their nests, their heritage, and their gathering spot. We don't want to give all of this up, we want to bestow it on others (just not all at the same time!).

Is this idea compatible with being a state park? We don't know. Yet it would be an amazing, one-of-a-kind, park experience!

We know these remarkable and priceless events are so out of the ordinary these days, that we want to provide them to new guests in the old restaurant and cabins that the Forest Service now owns.

The Colorado Parks people tell us the restaurant doesn't make enough money to be viable in a state park. Well, a restaurant with a limited menu and distance from distributors will never make a lot of money. But it breaks even. And this personal service; relaxing, slow-paced meals; fresh coffee with conversation; and hand-dipped a la mode ice cream in comfortable, antique surroundings has value beyond money.

The complete Sweetwater Lake encounter includes the amazing scenery, but it is more than that. It includes friendly people, historic cabins, scenic horseback rides, and a restaurant experience that has been welcoming guests for over a century.

Sincerely,

The Greater Sweetwater Community

Representing over 30 states and three countries

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town and State of Residence</u>	<u>Favorite Memory*</u>
Aaron Gaitan	Provo, UT	Rustic freedom I enjoy almost every year with friends who have a cabin near there
Abbey Stump	Gypsum, CO	I was born Glenwood Spring raised up Sweetwater! My childhood was a fairytale childhood for sure!
Adam Gratrix	Castle Rock, CO	The beauty and serenity is unparalleled, these attributes are hard to find these days.
Addie Pecord	Edwards, CO	Dinner with my amazing husband at the lake
Adeline Watkins	Blackfoot, ID (Eagle, CO born/raised)	I spent years working at Sweetwater Lake; I can pack an elk on a horse out of the high country, fold a fitted sheet and make pie crust pinwheel cookies from scratch all in one day. Sweetwater is where I call home; it's a feeling not just a place!
Adrienne Brink	Gypsum, CO	In 1969 I came off of a 10 day pack trip that had been very warm, to come down to the restaurant for the best chocolate shake I ever had in my life!
Alan Hood	Sweetwater, CO	
Alayna Wade	Edwards, CO	My favorite memory is the first time I saw it at dusk.
Alesha Nadeau	Grand Junction, CO	Girl scout camp & many weekends with special friends!
Alex Longacre	Yuma, AZ	
Alexandra Bratschie	Eagle, CO	
Alison Prine	Burlington, VT	
Amanda Nagel	Avon, CO	My grandparents bringing my brother and I to dinner at Sweetwater, and my parents having their rehearsal dinner there before their wedding.
Amy Thorland	Thompson, IA	Sweetwater is filled with unspoiled beauty with a strong sense of community and family values.
Andrea Feldman	Gypsum, CO	The very first time I experienced Sweetwater Lake was 25yrs ago for a friend's wedding... coming from NY I thought I had experienced the best weddings but boy was I surprised... it was the most enchanting weekend and an experience I will never forget.
Andrea Meza	Denver, CO	
Andy Chabot	Columbus, OH	
Angie Suntken	Sweetwater, CO	
Angie Vincent	Sweetwater, CO	
Anna Erickson	Avon, CO	
Annalies	Gypsum, CO	Sitting on the deck looking at the view and hearing stories from years ago.
Anne Klein	Lafayette, CO	I have such fun memories of riding horses from the Girls Camp up to the restaurant at Sweetwater, enjoying company and food and riding back.
Annette Thomas	Wapello, IA	Great place to relax and enjoy the scenery.
Arminda Ryter (Faulkenberg)	Gypsum, CO	

Ashley Page		Hiking and SUP'ing with my daddy and daughter.
Ashley Wilson	Goodyear, AZ (born/raised in Eagle)	The amazing scenery, food and memories are too much to fit in one sentence. I love Sweetwater lake!
Aura Schlegel	Sweetwater, CO	Almost 40 years of laughter and shenanigans whether we were out on the trails or in the restaurant learning life skills.
Austin Page	Salem, UT	Hiking to the caves and watching the eagles from the overlook.
Austin Raper	Gypsum, CO	
Autumn Rivera	Glenwood Springs, CO	Paddleboarding on the lake while watching a bald eagle fly over.
Barbara Prine	Burlington, VT	Eating pie at the restaurant, watching the hummingbirds, after a guided horseback trail ride.
Becky Burgess	Gypsum, CO	
Becky Wiemer	Grand Junction/Eagle, CO	1981 was our family's 1st memory maker of "SWEETWATER LAKE"
Benny Rivera	Sweetwater, CO	
Beth Owens	Edwardsville, IL	
Betty Nestor	Gypsum, CO	
Bill Stephens	Gypsum, CO	Adrienne
Bill Bohannon	Sweetwater, CO	
Bill Stephens	Gypsum, CO	ice fishing with my grandad and hot chocolate afterwards.
Blanca Lazareno	Pto Vallarta, Mexico	
Bob Beyer	Sweetwater, CO	Fishing at night with David during a full moon, water like glass, beaver and bats gliding by. Then dinner and Pie at the restaurant
Brad Ernest	Avon, CO	
Brad Stiles	Gypsum, CO	
Brandi Wally	Bayfield, CO	Having a location to horseback ride and pack into the flattops is priceless and preserves our western heritage.
Breanna Guevara	Thornton, CO	Growing up down the road!!
Brenda Worley	Bond, CO	I've had some very memorable dinners there.
Brian Vestal	Vail, CO	As a young adult, gaining invaluable perspective into the real world as told by the Sweetwater Lake community.
Brian Widhalm	Sweetwater, CO	
Brianna Bowen	Eagle, CO	
Brisa Zubiran	Gypsum, CO	Always looking forward to the summer to go to the lake and spend the afternoon there.
Britney Burch	Firestone, CO	
Brittany Thatcher	Sweetwater, CO	Taking our kids fishing and going for chicken fried steak.
Brittany VanderLinden	Kremmling, CO	
Brittany Wathen Bush	Taylor, WI	
Bryce Kapsner	Sweetwater, CO	

C W (Bill) Sepmeier	Gypsum, CO	The day my kids and I walked up to the cave and on the way, discovered the floor of an Aspen grove was covered with wild strawberries ... thousands of them ... and they were all ripe ... an Unforgettable family memory now!!
Calista Mallos	Gypsum, CO	
Carla Nelson	Eagle, CO	Quaint, family style restaurant with awesome food, extraordinary views and lots of activities to do while you are there. Been going there for years.
Carol Fischer	Clark, CO	I caught my first fish and rode a horse for the first time there 60+ years ago.
Carol Macumber	Thornton, CO	A little piece of heaven
Carol Pruett	Gypsum, CO	my favorite restaurant, views, hummingbirds, pie and sharing a horseback ride with my California cousins, there just isn't anyplace to compare....
Carol Vasina	Gypsum, CO	
Carol Wick	Eagle, CO	We love the beautiful uniqueness of the Sweetwater Lake!!
Carter Haycock	Parker, CO	
Casie Ward	Gypsum, CO	Canoeing around the lake
Cassi MacUmber	Red Cliff, CO	Too many to count, it's a piece of my soul
Catherine Beyer	Sweetwater, CO	Taking friends and family to the restaurant at Sweetwater Lake has been our favorite Summer experience!
Catherine Carver	Portland, OR	A huge part of our family's culture resides at Sweetwater.
Catherine Del Sesto	Phoenix, AZ	
Cathryn Classen	Grand Junction, CO	Started visiting Sweetwater when I lived in Western New York about 12 years ago.
Chad Mitchell	Blackfoot, ID	The people and the Brinks are what make Sweetwater great.
Charlie Mason	Central City, NE	I served as Assistant Director of Anderson Camps from 1967-1975. Sweetwater Lake was a large part of the campers' total experience. A quick soda or a lure from the cafe/store was essential for a day at the lake. Campers from all over America and foreign countries have returned to the lake to share their experience with their children.
Cheyenne Richardson	Sweetwater, CO	
Cholpon Lord	Gypsum, CO	Best place for horseback riding.
Chris Estes	Gypsum, CO	
Chris Gamble	Minneapolis, MN	Sweetwater was where I rode my first horse and it was also there that I realized that the name isn't lying, it really is the best tasting water in the world!
Chris Pitman	Gypsum, CO	
Chris Stone	Orlando, FL	
Chris Vincent	Gypsum, CO	My dad, Cliff, fishing in the spillway while I was working and always coming into the restaurant and ordering a chocolate malt from Adrienne, and then we would go sit on the swing bench outside and talk.

Christine Bohannon	Columbus, OH	
Christopher Lord	Gypsum, CO	It's a beautiful place to hike, to rest and have food.
Chuck VanDevander	Urbandale, IA	Our family has been going to Sweetwater Lake for 50 years to meet with old friends during a relaxing dinner by the lake.
Cindy Brink	Fort Collins, CO	
Cindy McBroom	Jamestown, PA	
Claire Wilson	Gypsum, CO	
Clay Willians	Edwards, CO	Sunset while fishing to rising trout with nobody around
Corey Rudrud	Eagle, CO	
Courtney Miller	Walden, CO	Sweetwater is home! The entire experience is one of a kind and priceless!
Craig Williford	Arvada, CO	
Cregan Ortner	Steamboat Springs, CO	
Cris Medina	Wabasha, MN	I remember working at Anderson Camps. We would go to Sweetwater Lake and explore the caves with campers. It was always a peaceful place..
Cynthia Sibley	Eagle, CO	Great summer evening dinner and walk by the lake.
Dan Schoenfelder	Sweetwater, CO	
Dana Millet	Colorado Springs, CO	Eating lunch on the patio watching the hummingbirds.
Daniel Rivera	Clifton, CO	Chicken fried steak dinner followed by the best vanilla malt anywhere, families, friends, home, happiness!!
Danielle Bennett	Eugene, OR	Spending summers at the ranch and enjoying time at the lake, eating all the salsa and pie!
Danny Eaton	Gypsum, CO	
Darcy Beck	Gypsum, CO	This is where I made my first real group of friends after I moved here and met my now husband!
Daryl Miller	Colorado Springs, CO	
Dave Main	Ovid, MI	Been only one time, but had a great time hanging out with family and good fishing!
Dave Mutton	Columbia Falls, MT	I spent over 7 years there, those years were some of the best in my life.
Dave Wathen	Taylor, WI	
David Beyer	Sweetwater, CO	Summer evening on the lake seeing bear cubs swimming with mom watching close by.
David Callomon	Needville, TX	An Anderson camper in the early 80's. Have returned as an adult with my children. This place is so very special.
David Frazier	Gypsum, CO	
David Pleshaw	Vail, CO	I haven't been there in 20 years, but remember it like it was yesterday.
Dayna Cress	Eagle, CO	
De Mézerac Heloise	Caen France	
Deacon Winters	The Woodlands, TX	Awesome place! Great food and service!



Dean Quint	Sweetwater, CO	Eating at the Sweetwater Lake Resort before we bought a home here.
Deb Gifford	Eagle, CO	Many memories hiking, breakfast and camping at the lake. Such a beautiful place
Debbie J. Eachus	Gypsum, CO	
Debbie Vernell	Gypsum, CO	My favorite memory is paddle boarding with the family early one 4th of July morning. We were the only ones on the lake except for the eagles.
Debbie Webber	Gypsum, CO	
Deborah Spohn	Edwards, CO	
Deena Eaton	Gypsum, CO	
Deirdre Kinkel	Lakewood, CO	
Demi Miller	Gypsum, CO	
Dendy Heisel	Glenwood Springs, CO	Our annual day trip with my mom and boys to fish, row, ride, and of course eat chicken fried steak and pie for lunch!
Derrick Wiemer	Gypsum, CO	Bison burgers and hummingbirds at the lake with my parents and grandparents back in the 80's.
Diane Frantz-Herman	Pine, CO & Sweetwater, CO	I have been coming to Sweetwater Lake for 3 decades with extended family, children, grandchildren and now new great-grandchildren. Always enjoyed the Supper Club dinners with our neighbors too.
Don Miller	Palm Springs, CA	
Don Van Devander	Glenwood Springs, CO	Paddling a canoe around the lake, enjoying the quiet and serenity the lake has to offer.
Donna Troiani	Eagle, CO	
Doris Schoenfelder	Sweetwater, CO	My home
Dwayne Noriega	Gypsum, CO	Bears and Eagles
Eden Varela	Yuma, CO	
Elizabeth Longacre	Casper, WY	Heaven on earth
Elizabeth Oatney	Wellton, AZ	
Elizabeth Stacy	Denver, CO	
Emily Bonfoey	Gypsum, CO	
Emily Magers	Coupeville, WA	Gathering at the Sweetwater lodge and restaurant with family and horseback adventures.
Eric Eckdahl	Eagle, CO	
Eric Gilmore	Erie, CO	One of the most special places in CO. I took my son there for a father-son trip and we stayed in an awesome cabin and enjoyed several great meals at the restaurant when he was going into middle school. I hope he can do the same for his kids someday.
Erica Haycock	Parker, CO	I spent all of my childhood summers there visiting my grandparents. I'd go hiking, fishing, canoeing and horseback riding. It's so important to me that my children get to have those same experiences at Sweetwater Lake.

Erin Flaherty	Silt, CO	Fish fries at the restaurant...there's nothing that can compare to the kindness of the people in Sweetwater, the fresh fish, and the cordiality of everyone up there.
Em Mooney	Westhoff, TX	
Ezra Harris	Gypsum, CO	Chicken fried steak and pie at the lake with friends and family
Gail and Mark Muehlethaler	Eagle, CO	We would drive up to the lake for our Anniversary dinner.
Garrett Haycock	Parker, CO	Taking our young boys up to the Indian cave and watching the bald eagles on the way up. Also, having Buffalo burgers and pie at Adrienne's.
Gary Bernard	Dickson, TN	Enjoy visiting Sweetwater Creek every late October for second rifle season, the cabins and restaurant why I visit there.
Gene Bray	Gypsum, CO	
Grant Laman	Gypsum, CO	I've been going up to the lake and lodge for many years. It's a beautiful place and it's always been nice seeing the members of Sweetwater community at the lodge for dinner. The photos on the wall with the history of Sweetwater are amazing.
Gretchen Hennem	Gypsum, CO	Paddle boarding on the lake with our dogs on a hot summer day
Hannah Jaramillo	Eagle, CO	I miss eating at the restaurant- its one of our favorite places to visit in the summer, with the simplicity and rustic nature of the restaurant it makes a burger taste better than any gourmet meal in town.
Hannah Waltz	Gypsum, CO	
Heather Bailey	Denver, CO	My favorite Sweetwater experience was getting caught in a torrential down pour while fishing along the lake. The flash flood eroded the paths and swept us into the lake. Scared as hell and soaked, my family and I laughed at the adventure as we scrambled back to the camp ground.
Heather Duncan	Gypsum, CO	
Heather Greene	Eagle CO	
Heather Taylor	Del Norte, CO	My now husband and I enjoyed the cabins and family time there for decades.
Holly Golen	Arvada, CO	Sleeping in the motel, eating in the restaurant and hiking.
Hope Kapsner	Gypsum (Sweetwater), CO	My first date with my husband.
Ivy Whiddon	Lakewood, CO	Riding horses with great company in some of the most beautiful country you've ever seen!
Jackie and Rod Schlegel	Burns, CO	It was so nice to be able to come down to the restaurant after a long hot day of moving cows and get a nice cold glass of ice tea and a piece of pie.
Jackson Vincent	Gypsum, CO	
Jacob Lafleur	Gypsum, CO	Fishing
Jacob Rivera	Eagle, CO	Hummingbirds sitting on your finger at the feeders on the deck of the restaurant.
James Bolen	Winter Park, FL and Vail, CO	

James Ewing	Eagle, CO	Many hiking and camping trips with friends and family. Wonderful escape into nature!
Jan and Bill Martin	Grand Junction, CO	The best meals anywhere, with wonderful, welcoming staff, especially after a long day of moving cattle!
Janet & Paul Testwuide	Vail, CO	We have been blessed to be part of such a lost dynamic in today's world... COMMUNITY!
Janet Ewing	Eagle, CO	
Janet Rivera	Sweetwater, CO	
Jared Baranowski	Eagle, CO	
Jason Butters	Gypsum, CO	
Jayne Cianio	Brighton, CO	Enjoying a rowboat on the lake, then visiting and eating at the best restaurant ever!
Jean Clegh	Eagle, CO	
Jeanine Kenney	Eagle, CO	
Jeff Harper	Avon, CO	
Jennifer Parmenter	Gypsum, CO	Family, friends, peaceful experience and the best chicken fried steak, the kind at grandma's house.
Jennifer Raper	Gypsum, CO	Family dinners at the restaurant on the deck enjoying the best chicken fried steak and homemade pie overlooking the beautiful lake surrounded by hummingbirds.
Jennifer Trude	White Salmon, WA	It was my first chosen home, and for over 20 years it still feels like coming home, to the place and the people, every time.
Jennifer Widhalm	Gypsum, CO	Canoeing on the Lake to a Full Moon
Jereme Odom	Palmyra, TN	
Jerry & Ruth Butters	Gypsum, CO	Ordering rhubarb pie before our meal to save it before Adrienne ran out! Memorial service for our close friend, Rick Poffenbarger, along the lake shore.
Jesse Masten	Gypsum, CO	
Jessica Rivera	Gypsum, CO	
Jill Baron	Montrose, CO	Love the tranquility & pristine beauty of the lake - God's magnificent artwork! Would take out of town family & guests for dinner!
Jill Jesch	Denver, CO	Some of my best memories are from bringing campers to see the Indian Caves. There is something so peaceful and grounding about Sweetwater Lake that I will always cherish and want future generations to cherish as well.
Jill Kane	Colorado	Riding with friends and family and coming back to eat at the Restaurant. Life slows down when you get there, it's an experience that you will never forget, and you'll find that it will hold a special place in your heart.

Jilly Brogdon	Arvada, CO	I have fond memories of driving up there with my great grand-pop, my Grampy and my daddy. Now I take my babies there...this historical group of buildings was our gathering spot. My specific memory would be hours spent hiking around the lake and exploring with my mom and siblings. One time it rained so hard, and when we were running back we all started sliding down into the lake. It was like the mudslide scene from Romancing the Stone. We ended up outside on the deck at the restaurant and just laughed and laughed. It was hilarious.
Jim & Marie Goedert	Ft. Morgan, CO	I have gone to Sweetwater for the past 55 years, took my husband there when we were dating and Sweetwater is why he married me!
Jim Schultz	Gypsum, CO	
Joan Mantel	Eagle, ID	
Joanie Baranowski	Eagle, CO	
Jodie Lynch	Libby, MT	I love how quiet and serene Sweetwater Lake is, where you go to get away from hustle and bustle.
Jody Cox	Eagle, CO	Beautiful experience, have rented cabins, camped, hiked to Indian caves and overlook. Been canoeing and fishing with the kids.
Joe Estes	Eagle, CO	Ice fishing with the local group that lives up Sweetwater
Joe Geiman	Eagle, CO	
Joe Srholez	Sweetwater, CO	It sure was nice being able to run up the road for some food and pie without having to make the trek to town.
Johanna Johnsson	Lakewood, CO	
John Thatcher	Gypsum CO	Always stopping by for lunch at Adrienne's restaurant and meeting the love of my life that was working there at the time
Jon Paul Testwuide	Lakewood, CO	
Jonah Mueller	Gypsum, CO	
Jonah Utley	Huntsville, AL	My soul has never felt more at peace than the 18 years I spent at Sweetwater Resort.
Jonathan Engelkemier	Saint Albans, WV	
Jordyn Main	Woodland Park, CO	
Josh Bye	Poplar Grove, IL	Some of my best experiences have started at Sweetwater, its quietness and peace is what makes it a special place.
Josh leach	Eagle, CO	My grandfather taught me to fish up there, just like I've gone up with my father, my son and my daughter.
Joshua Westfall	Camden, TN	
Joyce L. (Amichaux) Reiche	Eagle, CO	I was raised in Glenwood and as a child spent many week-ends picnicking and hiking at the Lake. Love it up there.
Judy Grant	Bella Vista, AK	We loved the rustic, calm, scenic experience of Sweetwater Lake and Resort.
Julia Brink	Erie, CO	As a kid I felt so happy and free getting to run around at Sweetwater Lake and spend some wonderful moments with my family.

Julia Cole	Manassas, VA	
Julia Rivera	Salida, CO	
Julianne Flaherty	Silt, CO	Horseback riding, dinner at the restaurant, and a fantastic night's sleep in a wonderful historic cabin!
Julie Geiman	Eagle, CO	Paddleboarding with no one around.
Julie Kieras	Lagunitas, CA	Quiet peaceful serene slice of Colorado
Juline Gilmore	Erie, CO	
June Nestor	Gypsum, CO	
Justin Morey	San Diego, CA	
Justin Rivera	Gypsum, CO	
Kaeleigh Testwuide	Denver, CO	My husband and I were eating bison burgers, across the lake out came a bear and into the lake to catch himself some fresh lunch!
Karen Prine	Berryville, VA	Hiking out to the overlook with my brother-in-law carrying my niece in his backpack.
Karen Vincent	Sweetwater, CO	
Karla Suer	Kremmling, CO	I grew up living on the lake and I am forever grateful for the part it played in my childhood.
Karla Taylor	Oklahoma City, OK	Family and friends gathering
Kassandra Lazareno	Gypsum, CO	Staying at the cabins and eating at the restaurant on summer afternoons
Kate Mitchell	Blackfoot, ID	The Brink family and their hospitality, the cabins, the restaurant with its good food, the hummingbirds, the trail rides into the mountains, the local recipe book with history of the people and area, all added to the beautiful lake setting are unique and a one of a kind place.
Katelin Hennum	Gypsum, CO	
Katherine Hubbard	Bozeman, MT	Staying over night in the cabins
Kathleen Corcoran	Gypsum, CO	Hiking up above the lake and looking down at the beautiful, peaceful natural landscape.
Kathleen Williford	Arvada, CO	
Kathleen Zeeman	Leonard, MI	Love the place, shared many memories with family and friends riding horses there over the years, and restaurant was a highlight.
Kathy and Bill Heicher	Eagle, CO	Not only the peaceful environment, but also the history that the lake offers is important.
Kathy Mikolasy	Edwards, CO	Whenever we have company we go to Sweetwater for a meal and enjoy the rustic environment!
Katie Jean Ewing	Gypsum, CO	
Katie Langdon	Sweetwater/Gypsum, CO	Parking a horse trailer at the lake taking beautiful scenic horseback rides and looking down on the pristine beauty of the lake
Katie Poffenbarger	Saginaw MI	Riding horses with my mom and dad as a little girl

Katie Rivera (Wick)	Eagle, CO	20 years of Fathers Day and exploring the caves whenever friends came to town
Katie Stephens LaFramboise	Belfair, WA	Growing up in Sweetwater, some of my favorite memories are taking our horses and trail riding out of the lake, coming back to the restaurant to enjoy a meal, and then playing on the docks with some of our neighbors.
Kay Q McCarty	Eagle, CO	
Ken Wright	Daytona Beach, FL	We saw both a huge black bear and an elk herd during a 4-hour horseback ride!
Kevin Guevara	Thornton, CO	Raising my children there
Kevin Thatcher	Sweetwater, CO	Losing my fishing pole in the lake when I was learning how to fish.
Kim McInay	Folsom, CA	Every summer visiting my aunt and uncle on Sweetwater.
Kimberly Andree	Priest River, ID	As 45 year residents of Eagle county, we would travel to Sweetwater resort to feel home again.
Kindra Stiles	Gypsum, CO	
Kodi Raper	Gypsum, CO	
Kris Longacre	Alamogordo, NM	Watching my good friend Aura Brink ride a pack saddle four hours out because she gave her horse to a sick elderly man to ride out.
Krista	Bailey, CO	I appreciate not only the beauty of the lake but the community around it.
Kristi Stanford	Breckenridge, CO	
Kristina Tody	Tumwater, WA	
Lara Carlson	Edwards, CO	My favorite memory at Sweetwater Lake is paddle boarding on a beautiful evening at sunset across the lake with my husband and my dog.
Lark Masten	Gypsum, CO	
Larry Lynch	Burns, CO	Super place for a Sunday dinner with friends and family and to watch the hummers
Larry Mabry	Sweetwater, CO	
Larry Mabry	Sweetwater, CO	
Laura Gentry	The Woodlands, TX	Great experience! Best Chicken Fried Steak in Colorado! Awesome service!
Laura Hagen	Gypsum, CO	
Letitia Mabry	Gypsum, CO	Making cookies for the public and enjoying the time with neighbors, visitors and friends.
Lewis Moore	Erin, TN	
Linda Gates	Gypsum, CO	
Linda Joy Ausfahl	Simla, CO	Back pack trip....50th wedding anniversary
Lindsay Pitman	Grand Junction, CO	
Lindsay Schultz	Grand Junction CO	Fishing with family, hiking to the cave, enjoying pie at the restaurant.

Lisa Schieetz	Colorado Springs, CO	Loved going to the restaurant overlooking the lake and enjoying the peaceful atmosphere and hummingbirds. There is nothing like it!
Lisa Vincent	Taylor, WI	
Liz Mooney	Gypsum, CO	Stepping back in time every visit to "The Lake" is truly a gift.
Logan Anderson	Edmond, OK	
Logan Brown	Denver, CO	I love biking to the lake from my mom's house. It was wonderful having the restaurant there too, given how remote the area is.
Lucas Pecord	Edwards, CO	Adrienne's cooking best around. Let me tell you what, so many memories.
Lucas Stephens	Gypsum, CO	Enjoying Chicken Fried Steak with a view.
Lydia Widhalm	Gypsum, CO	
Lynn Brown	Scottsdale, AZ	Great getaway to beat the summer heat in AZ!
Lynn Janklow	Gypsum, CO	I love the restaurant and the horses!
Mallory McKinney	Peyton, CO	
Malorie Stephens	Sweetwater, CO	Trail rides and popping in to say hello to friends we all call family while playing games down by the docks. So many great memories!
Marc Hill	Texarkana, TX	
Mariah Andree	Eaton, CO	
Marie Mooney	Victoria, TX	
Mark and Amy Wilhelm	Boca Raton, FL	We have always enjoyed spending time and sharing meals with our neighbors at Sweetwater Lake.  The local historical Resort Restaurant IS the Sweetwater community center where folks have always met neighbors at any time of the week to share the special history that is Sweetwater. For over 68 years I have met original settlers, their many off-spring and many new folks... each with stories about what is the real history of Sweetwater. If only the walls could talk!
Mark Herman	Lakewood CO & Sweetwater CO	
Mark Ullerick	Rifle, CO	
Martha Milbery	Edwards CO	Sweetwater is a sweet gem
Mary Blackburn	Edwardsville, IL	One long weekend, my niece got married, went canoeing across the lake, caught fish in the steam, went hiking through the mountains.....made lifelong memories!
Mary Blomquist	Gypsum, CO	
Mary E. Weaver	Glenwood Springs, CO	...lady hikers gathering for day hike lunch, and then pie a-la-mode, to fishing and laughing so hard finding my friend had no idea how to row!
Mary Lynn & Danny Tartaglia	Gypsum, CO	A haven found 33 years ago while escaping the hustle & bustle of the East Coast.
Mary Stephens	Gypsum, CO	Rowing with my friends in the rowboat in circles. Laughed so hard our stomachs hurt.

Mary Warner	Colorado Springs, CO	I actually worked at Sweetwater Lake Resort during hunting season in 1975 and have spent many times enjoying this beautiful place.
Matt Bergstreser	Sweetwater, CO	Chicken Fried Steak and Strawberry Rhubarb Pie for the last 38 Years!
Matt Herman	Henderson, CO	
Matt Kapsner	Gypsum, CO	The best thing about Sweetwater Lake is Adrienne's Chicken Fried Steak!
Matt Lou	Vail, CO	Having lunch on the deck of the restaurant, while humming birds fly all around. Camping at the lake in the true solitude of silence and open space.
Matt Raper	Gypsum, CO	
Matt Statman	Denver, CO	Watching my then 3 daughter develop a love of horses on pony rides around the corral beside the lake. Heaven.
Matthew Eineke	Sweetwater, CO	
Meagan Wilmers	Gypsum CO	
Megan Flaherty	Aztec, NM	Sweetwater Lake is an amazing example of western history, culture and community.
Megan McIlveen	New Castle CO	
Melanie Sexton	Eagle, CO	
Melissa Dallmann	Eagle, CO	We have loved eating at the cafe and watching SO MANY happy hummingbirds fly around the deck. The pie was amazing!
Meranda Tabor	Eagle CO	Best experience! Went up with my friends on the Fourth of July. Can't forget that. It's incredible.
Merida A Lazareno	Gypsum, CO	Great friends
Merri Chester	Dallas, TX	The beautiful scenery and the PIE the restaurant used to serve!
Merrilee Hohnholz	Laramie, WY	Worked there for years, I love the country and the people (co-workers, who are now family, and guests alike). Such a fun relaxing place, my second home.
Michael Crouser	Minneapolis, MN	Chicken fried steak at the restaurant!
Michael Duling	Newport, NH	
Michael J. Witt	Vashon, WA	Riding horses and enjoying the scenic beauty.
Michael Thompson	Ski Town, CO	
Michael Widhalm	Hudson, CO	
Michelle Klein	Wolcott, CO	
Mike Nebrig	Flower Mound, TX	We had the pleasure of attending a beautiful wedding at Sweetwater Lake!
Mindy Pannell	Edwards, CO	
Molly Lawson	Cedar Falls, IA	Wrangler at Anderson Camps late 80s, returned for honeymoon mid 90s, brought our whole family back to primitive camp, hike, eat bison burgers, enjoy the quiet of the lake and the hummingbirds; we can't stay away
Monte and Doris Miller	Sweetwater, CO	



Morgan Scott	Aberdeen, ID	
Myrt Frenze	Loma, CO	
Namishay Dawkins	Clifton, CO	
Nancy VanDevander	Glenwood Springs, CO	We have spent many wonderful unforgettable times with family and friends from all over up at Sweetwater Lake over the past 50 years.
Nancy Williams	Brandon, FL	I grew up in that area! It's home to me
Nancy Wilmers	Gypsum, CO	Absolutely the most beautiful place with old west feel. Love riding high up in the mountains with wonderful guides. Very peaceful and gorgeous.
Ned Hayes	Powell, WY	Fishing
Nickie Woods	Littleton, CO	Learning that family doesn't always mean blood.
Nicole Vincent	Sweetwater, CO	While living there at the lake, my son who was 2 weeks old at the time (now 21 years old), we would sit on the dock every night at sunset and I would tell him all the dreams I had for him when he would grow up. Best Mom/Son bonding moments ever.
Oulie Hale	Cortez, CO	
Paige Mickley	New Castle, CO	Watching the bald eagles dive into the lake and catching fish since I was 5 years old.
Pat McNally	Stillwater, OK	It is hard (i.e., impossible) to put a hard dollar value on a backcountry experience. More important is the mental, emotional and social value...the people who come to, live in, and flourish from the Sweetwater experience.
Patricia Main	Woodland Park, CO	Family Reunions
Patty Hood	Gypsum, CO	Sweetwater Lake is a treasure that has hosted decades of family outings, weddings, birthday parties, memorial services, and celebrations of many milestones. The restaurant has served as a gathering place for Gypsum, Eagle, as well as the local Sweetwater community.
Paul and Shawna Dumas	Edwards, CO	
Paul Cohen	Lander, WY	
Paula Kurtz	Eagle, CO	
Peggy Ebner	Los Angeles, CA	I grew up coming here and thought it was normal to paddle around the lake, catch a trout then have a bison burger and the world's best pie while catching up with our neighbors. To my friends who I have brought here from all over the world this is a singular experience and their reactions of awe and joy prove what a genuine treasure this place is.
Phil Brink	Erie, CO	Riding through sunny wildflower-studded meadows and shady aspen groves, watching the hummingbirds while sipping coffee on the deck, and getting together with my family and friends in a beautiful place that is relaxing, unpretentious and uncrowded.
Quin Kapsner	Telluride, CO	
Rachel Hintz	Summit County, CO	

Raymond Tencza	New Castle, CO	Dining with friends in the restaurant
Robert and Kimberly Nock	Eagle, CO	
Robert Gentry	Gypsum, CO	The best horse back rides ever !!!!!
Roberto Cortez	Gypsum, CO	
Rocky Mt Silver and Beads	Edwards, CO	Guests of our store and our employees enjoy the staff and atmosphere of Sweetwater resort, the peace of nature and recreational value of this community.
RussAnn Anderson	Edmond, OK	
Ryan Lightfoot	Bailey, CO	Seeing Sweetwater Lake for the first time and realizing it's one of the most beautiful lakes in all of Colorado.
Ryan Suprise	Gypsum, CO	
Samantha Velasquez	Gypsum, CO	
Sandra Blake	Keenesburg, CO	One of my family's greatest memories is at Sweetwater! My kids loved spending the night in the cabin and eating at the restaurant. It's a little slice of heaven!
Scott Dobson	Beckley, WV	Where else can you go to see your friends get married, then end up learning how to ride and pack horses, make amazing life long friends, and continue to return for 18 years?
Scott Everhart	Artesian, SD	No other place like Sweetwater exists!
Scott Kostka	Eagle, CO	
Scott Skelton	Sweetwater, CO	
Scott Sunkten	Sweetwater, CO	
Scott Vasina	Gypsum, CO	
Seth Minkoff	Vail, CO	I have been renting cabins at the lake for many years, brought many members of my family with me, and shared many meals at the restaurant. It is a place out of time and a treasure as such. Nature, history, and hospitality linked with community.
Shane McGinnis	Gypsum, CO	
Shannon Burke	Denver, CO	Generations of Joy
Shari Frye	Avon, CO	
Sharon & Christopher Stromberg	Frederick, MD	We enjoyed a horseback tour with AJ Brinks to visit the Indian cave and other landmarks.
Sharon Bailey	Jackson, WY	Many memories, the restaurant with a good meal and good friends, watching the hummingbirds, taking a real horse pack trip, and appreciating nature the way it should be!
Sharon Conlin	Gold Hill, CO	Beautiful horseback riding and great pie a la mode
Sharon Sommers	Grand Junction, CO	
Shelby Longacre	Longmont, CO	
Sheri Rasmussen	Sterling, CO	I was there a couple of years ago with my lifelong friend...it is a Colorado treasure!

Shirley Herman Lakewood, CO

The Sweetwater Lake is a place where you can hike to your heart's content and not encounter "keep out" signs. After hiking you could count on visiting the Lake Resort Restaurant for refreshments or a great meal. A friendly place "where everyone knows your name" and where you could meet your neighbors over many decades of time.

Sidia Duron Houston, TX

Sonja Beasley Eagle, CO

One of our family's favorite places on earth!

Sonoka Ito-Prine Burlington, VT

Stacy Seay Denton, TX

Stephanie Bonucci Bozeman, MT

This place left a lasting impression on me. The atmosphere and charm should be preserved at all costs.

Stephanie Weeks Gypsum, CO

Stephen Widhalm Kersey, CO

Steven hagen Gypsum, CO

Sue Duncan Gypsum, CO

Suprena Crawford Eagle, CO

I have such fond memories of coming to the lake as a child and now as an adult. Its quiet quaint feel is something that has stood through the test of time.

Susan and Jerry Semrod Sweetwater, CO

Susan Payne Carbondale, CO

Off grid serenity and outrageous pies and lots to do to work that homemade goodness off

Susan Savage Greenwood Village, CO

My grandfather was the second owner of the 7W. He purchased it from his best friend in the 1940s for \$5000. Since then, we have had a presence in the Sweetwater region for 4 generations.

This place is very dear to us

Susan Stacy Portland, OR

My daughter was married there atop the butte with the reception beside the lake...we filled all the cabins and enjoyed our meals at the restaurant for a long, beautiful weekend with old friends and new!

T.C. Townsen Santa Fe, NM

Tammi Wiemer Gypsum, CO

Enjoying the quiet lake from the deck of the restaurant.

Thomas Mitchell Blackfoot, ID

Thanks to Jim Brink, my first experience at Sweetwater was hunting season of 1969 working for Larry Gay horse packing camps in to the back country and packing harvested game out. Oh the amazing experiences and fabulous memories of that one and a half months of nothing but hard hard work, helped me so much to make it home from Vietnam as an army infantryman two years later.

Tiffany Sommers Sarasota, FL

Canoes on the lake & Halloween parties.

Tim Hennem Gypsum, CO

Timothy Ebner Westminster, CO

A physically and visually unique and special place on the planet, shared and cared for by a kind, welcoming, and generous community of people.

Tina Estes	Gypsum, CO	
TJ Stanford	Gypsum, CO	Many wonderful memories with family and friends at the lake and the restaurant!
Todd Huffman	Edwards, CO	
Todd Schlegel	Sweetwater, CO	Lilia's Salsa...Adrienne's cooking in general
Tom Thatcher	Sweetwater, CO	I live here and so does my family; my kids are 5th generation here.
Tommy Hill	Tillatoba, MS	
Trina Richey	Gypsum, CO	
Trisha Hobbs	Cheyenne, WY	Spending the summer working at Sweetwater lake, canoeing, and doing a half day horseback ride.
Trueman Hoffmeister	Granby, CO	This area has fostered an appreciation for nature while bringing us closer together.
Ty LaFramboise	Belfair, WA	First date with my wife.
Tyler Haycock	Parker, CO	I love going to the Indian cave every summer.
Tyler Wathen	Taylor, WI	
Vikki Hobbs	Gypsum, CO	Taking out-of-state family for dinner every summer.
Vincent Scharf	Gypsum, CO	Paddle boarding with Grandson followed by Strawberry Rhubarb Pie!
Wade Burrell	Annaville, PA	AJ Brinks at Sweetwater was supposed to be a "couple-months-job" that turned into an experience that will forever be a part of molding who I feel I've become. The lake itself is a beautiful area of the world that "gets in your blood". It's been over 15 years since I've worked there and I still find myself thinking about it and daydreaming of that area! I cannot wait to get back there with my family so they can enjoy it also!
Walker Bohannan	Seattle, WA	Only recently discovered Sweetwater Lake, but visiting it is truly a unique experience to most outdoor spaces you visit these days.
Wendy Sacks	Eagle, CO	Sweetwater Lake is pristine!
Will Geiman	Eagle, CO	
Will Trude	White Salmon, WA	
William Hargleroad	Gypsum, CO	
Yvonne & Russ Ammon	Gypsum, CO	The hummingbirds on the patio and the great food especially the pie!
Yvonne Mooney Babbitt	Corpus Christi, TX	Perfect place to bring guests when we are there at our summer home.

\*Many people shared longer stories, but were shortened for length and purpose. We are happy to provide the full responses upon request.