

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".