

## Fire and Safety Issues: Current Road Conditions, Increased Fire Risk, and Slow Response Times

The proposed park visitor traffic in addition to local community traffic could make Sweetwater Road a non-survivable evacuation route. Residents on Sheep's Creek, CR 151, and Sweetwater Road have no other egress than Sweetwater Road, which is an approximately 10-mile dead end road that serves over 80 families.

According to the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control, "Nearly 85% of wildfires are human-caused". According to the August 22, 2023, Axios Denver article, the majority of the human-caused fires is from "recreation and ceremony".

The Fire Intensity Scale is predominantly "High" in the Sweetwater Park area, the Sweetwater neighborhood along Sweetwater Road, as well as CR 151, and Sheep's Creek Road per Colorado's Conservation Data Explorer (CODEX). According to Western Chiefs Fire Association "Wildfires can spread up to 14.27 miles per hour."

Is the proposed development a recipe for disaster?

1. Proposed increased human recreation activity by 1000%. Recreation activities being the number one cause of wildfires,
2. Collecting 100s of recreators at the end of a dead-end road, with only one egress,
3. The geographic setting is ranked "High" on the Fire Intensity Scale.

This not only seems unfair to the families along Sweetwater Road, CR 151 or Sheep's Creek Road, it also could be disastrous to the hundreds of visitors potentially trapped at the wrong end of the only egress. The conditions, geographic setting, and number of people appear to be a reckless combination.

The proposed development will add 105-155 vehicles to the road and a capacity of over 250 visitors. This is around a 1000% increase over historical use of an average of about 30 people/day during peak months\*. As seen in the news for the past several years, wildfire occurrences and intensity have increased. With climate change, it is only expected to get worse.

There is poor road capacity for simultaneous opposing traffic for wildland firefighters and people evacuating down Sweetwater Road. The winding, narrow road with multiple blind corners, bordered by steep topography, and washboard conditions is a recipe for disaster. The current emergency response time is an hour. The response time will only increase with the proposed added traffic from the park.

The 1-hour response time is based on the local fire department in Gypsum. If the USFS or CPW will be responsible for emergency response in the park area, what will their response time be? Will it be slower adding more risk to the community? Where are their emergency resources?

The typical width of a fire engine in the U.S. is 8-10 feet, and RVs or RV trailers have a standard width of 8.5 to 10 feet. Sweetwater Road in its current condition in large part not is not wide enough for opposing traffic of regular sized vehicles to pass without having to slow down to a crawl or having to pull off at one of the pull-off areas. It will be impossible for fire engine trucks to get through when opposing traffic includes numerous RVs and trailers. Traffic in emergency situations would require a road width of at least 20-22 feet to be able to pass without considerably slowing speed or stopping to find a pull-off. There are multiple locations that the road is only 17 feet wide and, in a few locations, only 15 feet wide.

The proposed capacity for the state park along with the geomorphic setting of a box canyon with one ingress/egress, and inadequate roads is putting the safety and lives of park visitors and the local community at risk. Does the USFS and CPW have plans to mitigate the risk imposed by their park? Maybe significant road improvements or the construction of a new road specifically for evacuation? If neither option is feasible, the capacity of the park needs to be drastically reduced as to not impose an increased risk to health and safety of the residents and visitors.

Think about these slow response times in this rural area. Think about the slow evacuation due to inadequate roads with opposing traffic, and then think about the speed at which a fire can spread.

In an emergency situation with the volume and type of traffic (numerous trailers/RVs) proposed for the park, added to the local residential, farming, ranchers traffic, negotiating this road could prove to be impossible and could result in injury or death.

\*Historical use of Sweetwater Lake area is an average of 31/people day. This is based on use during 6-month peak season using USFS campground data and a January 2017 State of Colorado Dept of Health and Safety use classification for the tenant/supplier (outfitter) indicating "serves an average of 23 people during the supplier's busiest 60 days". Amenities such as cabin rentals and restaurant have been eliminated from Outfitter, and campground usage is in decline, so existing use levels are lower than historical. (See Historical use analysis and documentation in the "Historical Use Levels, Surface Occupancy and Wildlife and Habitat Protection" NEPA comment/report submitted for this NOI dated August 1, 2024).