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First name: Larry

Last name: Mabry

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I Oppose this Project.

As a member of the Sweetwater Working Group, myself and many other members believe that in this preliminary planning process WE WERE NEVER TRULY LISTENED TO.

On November 11, 2021, residents of Sweetwater and many, many other supporters of Sweetwater Lake from around the state and beyond received an email from Eagle Valley Land Trust (EVLTL).

The letter said "Thanks to the success of the Save The Lake campaign, driven from the beginning by this group, the lake is now protected, publicly owned, and incorporated into the White River National Forest. In a first of its kind partnership, Colorado Parks and Wildlife has joined the project to help lead the long term management, activation, and planning of the property so that it can continue to serve our community into the future. The partnership, which includes the Eagle Valley Land Trust, CPW, and USFS, is eager to listen and learn from the community. This process will include in-person meetings and a robust public input process that is currently being planned."

This letter was a shock to many. At no time during the fundraising conducted by EVLT did the EVLT, USFS or CPW publicly indicate that Sweetwater would be leased to CPW. Further, the plan was to run Sweetwater as a state park. It was a slap in the face to the hundreds of people that had provided financial contributions and written letters supporting the purchase of Sweetwater by the USFS so it could be preserved. The word "preserved" was understood by supporters to mean "as is with improvements to existing facilities."

It became apparent that all three organizations - USFS, EVLT and CPW - had been discussing the idea of leasing Sweetwater to CPW long before the idea was released to the public. The entities had been working behind the scenes, but none of them mentioned it to the people who were working so hard soliciting the money to "Save the Lake."

Without any community input, it was predetermined to give a lease to CPW to develop the lake. This was announced to the public. The community expressed opposition and requested a seat at the table making decisions.

Instead, they were permitted to meet with CPW, USFS, and EVLT, along with a consulting moderator (hired by CPW) on the side, so they could initiate discussion. From the beginning, it was clear the moderator was on the side of CPW and USFS.

In one of the first points of business, the Sweetwater community was told their representatives could not be called Sweetwater Advisory Committee, but had to take the name of Sweetwater Lake Working Group (SLWG). At the first few meetings, the community was surprised by agendas not including their items, discussions being more information than dialog, a feeling that some things were being hidden, information changing without notice, even past discussions being denied ever happened, etc. The community was told that some things were non-negotiable.

The meetings developed an adversarial tone. For instance, when the community group requested a restaurant, they were told that there was no chance for a restaurant unless they accepted a State Park. Many meetings down the line, SLWG mentioned they could accept state involvement if it wasn't called a state park.

At this point, they were not awarded the promise of a restaurant, instead they were threatened with being told what kind of restaurant they could accept and that it had to meet their standards of "viable", with large numbers of customers meaning large numbers of cars on the road. They would even be told how many tables and how often they had to turn them over. This kind of bullying or attempted coercion - especially directed toward the past concessionaire - was common in the meetings.

At one public meeting at the Sweetwater Community Building, USFS White River National Forest Supervisor Scott Fitzwilliams yelled at Adrienne Brink of Brink Outfitters. Attendees witnessed it. Fitzwilliams' actions should have disqualified him from any further participation in the discussion around Sweetwater Lake. However, he continued to lead on behalf of the USFS.

After a few meetings, some of the SLWG members stopped attending, citing no progress and an uncomfortable atmosphere. Others stuck with it.

At the midpoint of the meeting schedule, the whole SLWG decided to stage a walk out, which they did. In the hall they talked about the pros and cons of staying in the meetings. They were asked to come back. In the end, they returned to the table.

The moderating group hired by CPW put out an online survey that was extremely biased. The questions often gave several choices, none of which were good. In reaction, many responders did not mark an answer and just wrote in comments. When the summary report was made, the comments were not included. Even with repeated requests for a full list of the comments, they were never shared.

This represented a shocking betrayal of the public process. There seemed to be no sincere interest in collecting the input of stakeholders and the public. It became increasingly evident that the three entities had already decided what their plans for Sweetwater Lake were.

Other documents were not shared when repeatedly requested, such as the flora study.

The last meeting was supposed to be a Pizza Party, but the SLWG refused to celebrate.

They stated that the meetings made no progress, and they had nothing to celebrate. They stated that they felt like they had not been listened to. It felt like SLWG had been used so the box marked "get community input" could be checked off, without any real substance.

One result is that when making comments to NEPA, a few members are not sharing their honest desires for Sweetwater. They are heard making comments like, "Oh, that will never be accepted." This shows the level of harassment they underwent that they filtered their wishes through a predetermined level of acceptance.

The NEPA process requires federal agencies to include public input and cooperate with the public in the planning and decision-making process. The actions taken by USFS, CPW and EVLT in conjunction with developing a long term plan for Sweetwater Lake have seemed deliberately deceptive and adversarial. At no time has there seemed to be honest and sincere engagement with the Sweetwater Lake Working Group or the many concerned stakeholders living outside of the Sweetwater Creek Valley.