Traffic:

Incidents, Accidents, Injuries, and No Cell Service.

Anyone that has traveled Sweetwater Road knows it can be a white-knuckle trip at times. There are times when the washboard conditions are so bad, that even going below the speed limit on a curve can cause you to bounce right off the road. Getting tires stuck in the narrow steep roadside drainage ditches often requires help from others to escape. This happens often because the roads are so narrow. Trips up the side roads of Sheep’s Creek and 151 often result in inadequate vehicles for road conditions getting stuck. Daily rockslides range from scree to boulders along Colorado River Road and Sweetwtaer Road and can be a near miss every day. Having to come to an abrupt stop when you encounter a boulder in the road and opposing traffic at the same time on a blind curve can be particularly frightening.

The over 100-year history of livelihood of locals along this road include agriculture, horse farming, and cattle ranchers. As part of these operations, they often need to block portions of the road for loading/offloading supplies, animals, or park in the road while they open gates to access fields, run cattle at the change of the seasons etc. This can be done with no adverse effect based on current traffic levels.

Now think of all of the wildlife that uses this road. The road is very rural with low traffic which appears to allow for the coexistence with wildlife. During the last few weeks on Sweetwater Road, I have stopped in the road to watch a mother skunk try to keep her babies rallied together as they crossed to the other side, which took several minutes. Mule deer are encountered on every trip along this road. Turkeys and their young are often loitering in the road. They often try to flee, staying in the road, the same direction you’re going, until they finally figure it out and leave the roadway. I’ve also seen bobcats, mountain lions, foxes, a bear and a moose crossing the road. The mountain lions were young, confused as to what they should do, but eventually fled the roadway.

I’m hoping that painting this picture of current road conditions was effective. Now think of these current conditions when you increase traffic to the park by about 1000% with a considerable amount of the traffic increase being trailers and RVs.

Now think about the fact that there is **NO CELL SERVICE** along Colorado River Road nor the entire length of Sweetwater Road and the side roads.

**Anyone that has an incident, accident, or injury on this road is in the hands of the local residents.**

Think about how locals will have to alter their lives to accommodate the traffic from a 1000% increase in visitors and the impact to wildlife this will have on the roads.

The hundreds of additional visitors the park plan proposes will have to seek help from the locals as there are no other options for them. The locals are already burdened with having to assist with vehicle issues of the volumes of daily visitors on Colorado River Road, and the repeated mishaps of drivers on their way to their Air B&B destinations up Sweetwater Road and 151, now imagine this increased this by about 1000%. Whether or not the visitors see the “No Cell Service for 40 Miles” sign at the beginning of Colorado River Road at Dotsero, they are still at the mercy of the locals to get help for any incident, accident or injury.

Also, what is the USFS and CPW plan to handle the roadkill resulting from such an increase in traffic?

Is this a fair ask of the locals who oppose this plan and whose livelihoods this will effect? The majority of the residents are ranchers, farm hands, and caretakers that work from sun up to sun down and do not have time to handle the burdens that will be forced upon them due to the added traffic. If they see someone stranded or injured it will be in their nature to help, but they too will have to travel from their fields to go get a signal to call for help, or they will be mobilizing their own equipment to pull a vehicle out of a ditch or a remote mud hole.

How will the USFS or CPW mitigate as to not cause this burden on locals? Will they regularly patrol the roads (Colorado Road, Sweetwater Road, CR 151 and Sheep’s Creek)? The burden to the locals and their livelihood that the proposed traffic will cause is not a fair ask from the USFS or CPW. Therefore, respectfully, it is requested that the proposed capacity of the park be reduced to historical levels.

\*Historical use of Sweetwtaer 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).