

Dear Mr. McClain,

I am asking the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to urgently review and oppose Alternative 2 of the Sweetwater Lake Recreation Management and Development Project before the September 23, 2026, comment deadline.

This is not a speculative wildlife conflict. The Forest Service's own Draft Environmental Impact Statement acknowledges that the Proposed Action would place new roads, a campground, and an equestrian facility in severe winter range; reduce Elk and Mule Deer habitat effectiveness; and create year-round disturbance that does not currently exist.

Alternative 2 would:

- Add 6.4 miles of new nonmotorized trails and 1.9 miles of new roads.
- Construct a 20-site campground, up to 12 cabins, equestrian facilities, employee housing, and extensive new parking.
- Increase projected annual visitation from 10,905–21,809 visitors under No Action to 51,999–103,997 visitors—nearly five times as many.
- Disturb approximately 100.4 acres in the short term and 41.3 acres over the long term.
- Amend the White River National Forest Plan by converting 741 acres of Management Area 5.4 habitat and 105 acres of designated Management Area 5.41 Deer and Elk Winter Range into a new developed-recreation designation covering the entire 846-acre project area.

These figures and the underlying documents are available on the [Forest Service Sweetwater project page](#). Formal comments are due September 23, according to the [Forest Service's Draft EIS announcement](#).

Several conflicts deserve RMEF's immediate attention:

1. The Forest Service admits that the Proposed Action conflicts with its existing winter-range standard.

The current [White River National Forest Plan](#) says Management Area 5.41 is to provide quality forage, cover, and solitude for Elk and Mule Deer. It directs that human activities be managed so the animals can effectively use winter range, that disturbance be limited during winter and spring, and that new roads avoid important forage, cover, and birthing areas.

The Sweetwater DEIS nevertheless states on page 67:

“Inconsistent with Mgt Area 5.41 Infrastructure Standard 2. New roads, new campground, and a new equestrian facility would be built in severe winter range.”

Instead of relocating or removing the conflicting development, Appendix B proposes eliminating the 105-acre winter-range designation and replacing it with a developed-recreation prescription.