



Vail Valley Mountain Trails Alliance
PO Box 3986
Avon, CO 81620
www.vvmta.org

Re: Comments on Sweetwater Lake Recreation Management and Development Project and Plan Amendment Draft EIS

Dear Forest Supervisor Glaspell,

Vail Valley Mountain Trails Alliance (VVMTA) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the future management of Sweetwater Lake. We support maintaining public access, protecting natural and cultural resources, and sustaining historic and compatible low-impact recreational uses that contribute to the area's identity. These include equestrian use, fishing, boating and stand-up paddleboarding, hiking, access to the Flat Tops, and permitted outfitting and guiding for hunting.

Sweetwater's quiet setting and the character of its surrounding rural community should guide this decision. VVMTA generally opposes a significant increase in recreational visitation and development. We are concerned that the access road and gateway community are not suited to the substantial influx of visitors contemplated under the more developed alternatives.

We support a modified Alternative 3 that incorporates selected management and resource-protection provisions from Alternative 2. This approach should retain Alternative 3's limited development while providing reliable staffing, protection for historic uses, and protection of Sweetwater's quiet character.

1. Use Alternative 3's development scale as the starting point.

Table 2-2 projects annual visitor market demand of 51,999–103,997 under Alternative 2, compared with 12,993–25,987 under Alternative 3 and 10,905–21,809 under the No Action Alternative. Although these estimates do not establish actual future attendance, they demonstrate the substantially different scale of use contemplated by the alternatives.

Our preferred approach is to manage recreation intensity primarily through the scale and character of development. A modified Alternative 3, without state park designation, rental lodging, or substantial expansion of camping and visitor amenities, would reduce the potential for development-driven increases in visitation. Parking and other facilities should be sized to sustain historic uses and protect resources.

We support modest improvements necessary for sanitation, accessibility, resource protection, safe parking, and maintenance of existing access. We do not support Alternative 2's full package of expanded overnight accommodations and recreation infrastructure without a demonstrated need consistent with preserving Sweetwater's quiet character.



Vail Valley Mountain Trails Alliance
PO Box 3986
Avon, CO 81620
www.vvmta.org

The Final EIS should evaluate a smaller facility footprint with active management and explain how each proposed improvement supports existing uses or addresses an identified problem. Meeting projected recreation demand should not itself determine the appropriate level of development. If monitoring identifies recurring congestion, unauthorized parking, or resource damage, managers should address those impacts rather than default to expanding infrastructure to accommodate additional demand. We oppose Alternative 4's approach of accommodating visitation without the proposed capacity limit.

2. Provide dependable management and consider a broader range of partners

We recognize the Forest Service's limited resources. Alternative 3's constrained staffing, maintenance, and funding raise concerns about whether the site can be adequately managed and protected.

CPW could provide valuable management capacity, but state park designation is not necessary for responsible stewardship. We are concerned that state park branding and expanded amenities could increase visitation. The anticipated gubernatorial transition in 2027 and potential changes in leadership, priorities, or funding also raise questions about the state's long-term commitment and capacity.

We request evaluation of management partnerships consistent with Alternative 3's smaller development scale, including CPW participation without state park designation. Other options should include nonprofit organizations, volunteer groups, Eagle County Open Space, qualified operators under special use permits, and combinations of these partners, based on their demonstrated interest and capacity.

3. Preserve historic equestrian access and require clear responsibility for specialized facilities.

VVMTA supports continued equestrian access, hunting-related outfitting and guiding, and targeted improvements that sustain these historic uses. Such improvements should remain consistent with Sweetwater's quiet character and should not be designed to drive substantial growth in visitation.

We support consideration of a special use permit allowing an outfitter or guide to construct, own, and maintain an appropriately scaled building or related facilities, subject to Forest Service approval and applicable resource protections.

We do not support the Forest Service or CPW constructing specialized outfitter or equestrian facilities without a secured operator, dependable maintenance commitments, and a clear



Vail Valley Mountain Trails Alliance
PO Box 3986
Avon, CO 81620
www.vvmta.org

long-term management arrangement. Public construction should not proceed on the assumption that a future operator or volunteer group will take responsibility.

Improvements to shared equestrian facilities—such as trailer staging areas, hitching posts, corrals, and equestrian campsites—should depend on clear maintenance commitments from equestrian users, operators, and organizations such as Mountain Trekkers Back Country Horsemen. These commitments should be secured before construction. We identify the organization as a potential partner without presuming its agreement.

The final alternative should distinguish between basic public access facilities and facilities serving specialized equestrian or commercial operations. It should preserve practical horse-trailer parking and trail access while tying additional specialized infrastructure to demonstrated need and durable commitments from its users and operators.

VVMTA supports a future in which Sweetwater remains accessible, well cared for, and recognizably quiet. We ask the Forest Service to select a limited-development alternative that preserves historic uses, secures dependable management, and keeps development and visitation compatible with the area's quiet character and surrounding community.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ernest Saeger
Executive Director
Vail Valley Mountain Trails Alliance
vvmta.org