

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0605

September 23, 2026

Mr. Brian Glaspell
Forest Supervisor
White River National Forest
900 Grand Avenue
Glenwood Springs, Colorado 81601

Dear Supervisor Glaspell:

I am writing to express serious concerns about the Sweetwater Lake Recreation Management and Development Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The preferred alternative plans to give Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) a special use permit to manage and develop Sweetwater Lake into a State Park. The sequence in which the State Park concept and associated development plans were developed, particularly before meaningful input from the local community, calls into question the validity of the public scoping process and that the NEPA process is now being asked to evaluate a development concept that had already been substantially established. The public should have confidence that the Forest Service did not arrive at a decision before the formal environmental review began. I therefore urge that each alternative be given a fair evaluation and that the Forest Service give proper weight to the comments from the Sweetwater Community.

The record obtained through the Freedom of Information Act warrants particular scrutiny because it indicates that the Forest Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), The Conservation Fund (TCF), and the Eagle Valley Land Trust (EVLTL) were discussing a CPW-managed State Park and significant recreational redevelopment as early as the spring of 2020. A Forest Service briefing held on May 19, 2020, describes discussions among the Forest Service, EVLTL, and TCF regarding a long-term CPW partnership to redevelop and manage Sweetwater Lake for expanded recreational use beyond what had previously been discussed with the community¹ and notes that the acquisition proposal ranked among the Forest Service's top ten nationally for Land and Water Conservation Fund funding.² The Governor of Colorado even advertised Sweetwater as Colorado's 43rd State Park before the formal environmental review.³ The State took it a step further and began appropriating a staff budget in anticipation of Sweetwater becoming a State Park.⁴ These actions again raise serious questions about if the Forest Service's decision to grant the State a special use permit had already been made.

¹ [Garfield County NEPA Scoping Comments](#)

² [FOIA Release 2, Part 4, PDF pp. 395-397](#)

³ <https://www.colorado.gov/governor/news/6531-gov-polis-announces-partnership-manage-sweetwater-lake-newest-colorado-state-park>

⁴ https://content.leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/fy2022-23_natfig1.pdf

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This chronology is deeply unsettling when held up against the fact that the community was not in full support or aware of the plans between the State, USFS, and outside groups. TCF and EVLT presented the Sweetwater community with a conservation and acquisition effort centered on protecting Sweetwater Lake from private residential and extractive development and maintaining primitive recreational opportunities. Despite this messaging to residents, the Forest Service, before acquiring the additional property, sent a support letter for possible expanded recreational opportunities with CPW.⁵ By April 2021, internal concepts contemplated a 3,500 sq-ft guest services lodge, numerous cabins, extensive campgrounds, employee housing, and other amenities.⁶ The State Park pathway was clearly being advanced as the Forest Service was seeking a draft site plan and redevelopment cost estimates. By October 2021, this was no longer simply a preliminary concept. The Forest Service, CPW, and EVLT executed a three-party Memorandum of Understanding stating that the parties desired to use Sweetwater Lake as a Colorado State Park and assigning EVLT responsibilities related to development, management, planning, design, communications, and outreach.⁷ This demonstrates that the basic management and development framework had been formally organized well before the current NEPA process and without meaningful community notice or participation.

The failure to adequately account for the concerns of the surrounding community is particularly evident in the preferred alternative's treatment of access and emergency response. Sweetwater Lake is located at the terminus of a single 11.7-mile road through a box canyon, making it a potential single point of failure in the event of wildfire, flooding, landslides, or debris flows. On page 170, the DEIS directs the public to Section 3.8 for its analysis of "ingress/egress for natural disaster emergencies (e.g., wildfire)." Section 3.8 identifies Garfield County as the primary entity responsible for emergency calls but does not provide a route-specific analysis of evacuation capacity, road impassability, or secondary egress. These concerns are not hypothetical. The Sweetwater area experienced the significant Derby wildfire in 2025, which resulted in evacuations and road closures, and, more recently, the August 2026 landslides, with boulders, closed the single access road at multiple locations, trapping residents and visitors.⁸ CPW said it was "critical" that a robust emergency-response plan be analyzed "for each alternative."⁹ Yet, after a follow-up request specifically asked whether CPW had located any final CPW-authored analysis of evacuation-route impassability, capacity, or secondary egress, CPW's CORA Manager responded on September 17, 2026: "Staff did advise that they had no records responsive to your request."¹⁰

The Forest Service cannot claim the DEIS is procedurally or legally sufficient when it directs the public to an essential emergency evacuation analysis that the state's lead management partner has not identified in response to a targeted CORA request. Before selecting an intensive development alternative,

⁵ [USFS Support Letter 12/14/2020](#)

⁶ [FOIA Vol. 1, PDF p. 521 \(Concept A\) and PDF p. 310 \(Concept B\)](#)

⁷ [FOIA Vol. 1, PDF pp 2, 33-42](#)

⁸ [KDVR, "Massive mudslide blocks road in Eagle County," Aug. 30, 2026](#)

⁹ [Colorado Parks and Wildlife Northwest Region, Sweetwater Lake scoping comment, July 23, 2024, p. 6, CARA Letter 4581859](#)

¹⁰ [Colorado Parks and Wildlife, email from CORA Manager Jason Isenhardt to Larry Mabry \(Sept. 17, 2026\)](#)

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the Forest Service should at least demonstrate that the proposed increase in visitation can be safely accommodated without placing unacceptable demands on the surrounding community and emergency response infrastructure.

I urge the Forest Service to undertake a rigorous and genuinely independent evaluation of every alternative in the DEIS and to ensure that the final decision is not constrained by planning decisions made before the formal NEPA process and without meaningful public participation. I also strongly urge the Forest Service not to issue a Record of Decision until a rigorous, route-specific analysis of evacuation clearance time and capacity, including road impassability, responder access, and the lack of secondary egress under reasonably foreseeable emergency conditions, is completed and made available for public review. The public deserves confidence that the NEPA process is being used to determine the appropriate future of Sweetwater Lake, rather than serving as a procedural review of a development concept that was substantially developed beforehand. Federal land managers have an obligation to be good neighbors, to respect the communities affected by their decisions, and to maintain public trust. The record and deficiencies in the DEIS raise serious questions about whether those obligations have been met.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Crank", with a stylized, flowing script.

Jeff Crank
Member of Congress