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Sweetwater Lake Proposed Action

Authorizing a 20-year special use permit to Colorado Parks and Wildlife to implement improvements and manage the 832-acre site

For many years the Forest Service has tried to work with the Colorado Parks to run Yeoman Park and Fulford Cave Campground and have other Special Uses but they were not able to meet some of the FS special use regulations. One being that the Forest Service requires the permittee to co insure the Forest Service and the State is self-insured and could not meet that requirement. Wondering what has changed?

Forest Service Manual Direction

FSM 2300 - RECREATION, WILDERNESS, AND RELATED RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

CHAPTER 2340 - PRIVATELY PROVIDED RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

2340.3 - Policy

1. Issuance of Authorizations to State, County, or Municipal Agencies for Recreational Improvements.
 - a. Issue special use authorizations for State, County, or Municipal agencies to develop or manage recreational improvements on National Forest System lands for:
 - (1) Lands that over a long period should be dedicated to that purpose, or
 - (2) Lands that could logically be conveyed to State or local governments through land-exchange procedures without detriment to National Forest System administration or programs.
 - b. In either case, National Forest System lands eligible for such use should meet at least two of the following conditions. The lands must be:
 - (1) Tracts adjacent to exterior National Forest System boundaries.
 - (2) Small tracts associated with adjacent, larger tracts managed by other agencies or privately owned that are not suitable for acquisition for National Forest System purposes.
 - (3) Tracts adjacent to lands owned by the agency proposing or applying for the authorization and needed to complete a unit for development as a park or recreation area.
 - c. Although it would be preferable to adhere to the conditions in the preceding paragraphs 1 through 1b(3) for target range authorizations, target ranges may have specific needs for special site conditions, safety zones, and sound buffers that cannot be achieved along exterior boundaries, on small tracts, or adjacent to other privately owned lands. Therefore, consider special use proposals and applications for target ranges not meeting these criteria on a site-specific, case-by-case basis.
2. Denial of Proposals by State, County, or Municipal Agencies for Recreational Improvements. Deny special use permit proposals by State and local agencies proposing to develop parks or recreational areas that do not qualify under the provisions in the preceding paragraphs 1(1)c, except in unusual circumstances or when the authorization is clearly in the public interest. Obtain review and advice of the Chief before approving permits based on these exceptions. Review by the Chief is not required for roadside rest and picnic developments by county or State agencies if no suitable private land or other agency land is available for such purposes.

Redesigning the current site to promote recreational opportunities compatible with capacity, historic us, resources and the surrounding area. The proposed site design would minimize impact to wildlife and natural resources by utilizing those area and lands that have been previously disturbed and would include the following actions.

2341.2 - Planning for Changes in Development and/or Use

When it appears necessary to change development and/or use of an established site, conduct needs assessments and studies, preferably as part of the forest planning process, and, if appropriate, prepare and approve updated site development plans.

Developing sites in the upper pastures which have not been previously disturbed and adjacent to a 5A -Big game winter range is not appropriate and totally against Forest Service Policy.

I don't know if the Forest Service has contacted the Colorado Geological Survey Colorado Landslide Inventory ON-006-01, specifically Sweetwater Lake. The area around Sweetwater Lake has very high potential for Landslides, particularly the area north of the County Road.

When the Forest Service was designing the campground trailhead, parking lots back in the 90's they had planned to put some facilities up around the Ranger Station and a mudslide came of the mountain and put about 2 feet of mud all around the Ranger Station. Forest Service Soil Scientist evaluated the area and say we shouldn't put a public recreation facilities any where near the Ranger Station.

The Forest Service should look at any of the ditches on that hillside, everyone of them, Keep ditch, Turret Creek ditch and Sweetwater ditch have slide off the mountain.

Potentially restoring retained buildings to the historic character of their 1920 to 1940 construction if feasible

I think this is an excellent idea and should be limited to the number of existing buildings and if they can't be restored than a new building should replace the building in a historic construction similar to other building around the Flat Tops such a Budges and Trappers Lake.

Developing new campground with 15-20 primitive or semi-primitive sites in are known as the lower pasture.

Definition of Primitive Opportunity for isolation from man-made sights, sounds, and management controls in an unmodified natural environment. Only facilities essential for resource protection are available. A high degree of challenge and risk are present. Visitors use outdoor skills and have minimal contact with other users or groups. Motorized use is prohibited.

Definition of ROS Semi-primitive motorized Some opportunity for isolation from man-made sights, sounds, and management controls in a predominantly unmodified environment. Opportunity to have a high degree of interaction with the natural environment, to have moderate challenge and risk and to use outdoor skills.

Concentration of visitors is low, but evidence of other area users is present. On-site managerial controls are subtle. Facilities are provided for resource protection and the safety of users. Motorized use is permitted.

This would eliminate the addition of water hookup and electricity at the sites.

This is a good idea but in a bad location these campsites should be in the site of the current campground and not in the lower pasture which has not been disturbed and is adjacent to a the 5A prescription. There should be no development north of the county road. In the late 1990's under direction of the Great American Outdoors the Forest Serve designed a 20 unit campground in the location of the existing campground and included horse facilities as well as vehicle camping.

Eric Martin was the Landscape architect on the White River National Forest that designed these facilities and copies of plans are in the Supervisors Office in Glenwood Springs.

Putting the campground in the lower pasture will result in a long distance for campers to travel to get to lake and the majority will probably drive and use the parking in the day use area.

Converting the existing nine-site Forest Service campground to day- use picnic sites.

Existing Forest Service campground should not be converted to day- use facilities but should be replaced with the 20 unit campground that was designed back in the 90"s that the design in already done.

Placing a developed campsite at the base of a very steep brush covered hill side that has a history of wildfires does not seem to be a good idea.

Constructing 8 to 12 new cabins to provide an overnight recreation opportunity similar to that which historically existed in the vicinity. These cabins would be constructed with materials and architecture design to provide a "rustic" western character similar to the styles of other cabins and lodges in the Flat tops area of Colorado.

Only new cabins that should be constructed are those need to replace cabins that cannot be restored. These cabins should be constructed with materials and architecture design to provide a "rustic" western character similar to the styles of other cabins and lodges in the Flat tops area of Colorado. 4-5 restored cabins and 8-12 new cabins for a total of 17 cabins- This would amount to 12 more than Sylvan Lake State Park if you figure 5 per cabin you already have 85 people at one time and possible 25 vehicles.

Construct equestrian facilities in the "middle pasture." Proposed facilities would include barn and stable operation, 4 to 7 overnight equestrian camping sites, and extra day-use parking for equestrian user. This area could also provide overnight parking and access to the surrounding Flat tops wilderness Area. This location is previously disturbed (how was this area previously disturbed) and propose for equestrian facilities to minimize the impact to the natural resources, while separating use between equestrians and other visitors.

The barn and stable operations need to stay in its current (which is already disturbed) and not into the "middle pasture" which is not previously disturbed. Would like an explanation why the Forest Service states that this location is previously disturbed area? The 4 to 7 overnight equestrian camping sites should be located in the current campground and where designed into the 90's design. Extra day-use parking for equestrian users should be located where the current Trailhead is across the Ranger Station.

Evaluated establishing day-use hiking and equestrian trails on the northeast side of the lake. These trails would provide loop trails and connections between the existing Ute Trail. To the new equestrian area and the Keep Ditch Trail. These trails could provide an additional access to the Flat Tops Wilderness Area other than the existing Hilltop trailhead north of the project area. Evaluate establishing trails to a new overlook on the southwest side of the lake to provide an additional scenic overlook of the lake. Evaluate additional trails within the project area to highlight the historical significance of the site and its buildings as part of an interpretive trail system or provide other recreational opportunities.

This is the second proposal to provide additional access to the Flat Tops Wilderness the other being in the proposal to move the equestrian facilities into the "middle pasture" all closer to the wilderness. In all the meetings I have attended not once has the Forest Service or Colorado state have mentioned impacts to the Flat tops Wilderness. I would like to see some analysis of these impacts and how it relates to the Capacity Studies for each compartment. Moving the trailhead to the existing trails and providing a connect to the trail system on southside of the lake would provide a better opportunity and no impact to the Flat Tops Wilderness.

Creating several new access points to the lake, likely near the existing Forest Service campground and the northeastern shore, and improving the current access point and boat dock.

Excellent idea my first suggestion would be to replace the dock at the existing Campground that the Forest Service tore out prematurely back in the 90's with the promise to replace it when all the money came for the America Great Outdoors, which never came. There a design the Eagle / Holy Cross office for this boat dock.

Constructing a new lodge building with administrative, educational, and interpretive spaces to enhance the visitor experience through its amenities and services. This new lodge building may offer small-scale food service capabilities such as a small coffee and pie shop or limited prepackage food offerings that would align with Forest Service policies (would like to see what these policies are) for providing food service on National Forest System lands while not necessitating an increase in wastewater accommodation. The construction of a group picnic site with a possible food truck or mobile kitchen parking will also be explored in this area for small events or day-to-day operations.

Construction a new lodge building should be constructed with materials and architecture design to provide a "rustic" western character similar to the styles of other cabins and lodges in the Flat Tops area such as Budes and Trappers Lake of Colorado

I would like to see what these Forest Service policies are for providing food service on National Forest System lands that limit them offer small-scale food service capabilities such as a small coffee and pie shop or limited prepackage food offerings. Budes and Trappers Lake Lodges offer full dining services.

2343.4 - Restaurants, Cafes, and Other Food Services

1. Authorize Concessioners to provide food services at dining rooms, coffee shops, lunch counters, and temporary, quick-lunch counters that are a part of a resort operation.
2. Authorize Concessioners to provide restaurant, cafe, or other food service facilities as separate enterprises only where there is an overriding public need for such facilities.
3. Disapprove applications to sell prepared or packaged food in Forest Service campgrounds and picnic grounds.

Closing the wetlands and the historic pasture in the wetlands north of the lake to human entry because of their importance to wildlife.

This area has been accessed by fishermen from the county road with permission forever, wondering what impacts have caused the closing to human entry? I agree it should not be used as a pasture. Like to have this address by the FS hydrologist. What wildlife would be impacted and what seasons?

Creating maintenance facilities, equipment storage, and personnel housing appropriate for site for site management and maintenance.

It would be interesting to compare the impacts to the upper pastures that this proposal is planning to the impacts that the private land proposal to the upper pasture? Which I believe was a golf course.

The proposed action may require amending the forest plan. The project areas currently bounding the newly purchase property includes Management Area 5.41 - Deer and Elk Winter Range to the north and Management Area 5.4 - forested flora and Fauna Habitats to the south. Land acquisitions to the National Forest System generally adopt the adjacent management area prescription. The proposed action will be evaluated for forest plan consistency to determine the need for a plan amendment which could require modifications to some plan components or to the plan content.

If Land acquisitions to the National Forest System generally adopt the adjacent management area prescription why is the Forest Service proposing the developed of areas north of the County Road in the pastures which are adjacent to Management Area 5.41 - Deer and elk Winter Range!!!! I think it definitely require amending the Forest Plan !

History

Arthur Carhart a US Forest Service Official (Recreation Engineer) was one of the first to realize the importance conservation and became a nationally recognized authority on conservation practice. In 1919, Carhart surveyed a road in the White River National Forest, near Trappers Lake for the Forest Service. Upon completion of the survey, he decided that the land should be preserved as wilderness.

That same year Carhart wrote a letter to the Regional Forester - Mr. Stahl in regard to Sweetwater Lake after reviewing the Lake for a new Ranger Station and Campground.

"Recreation is recognized s a major use of the forest. Preservation is the first great care that comes with this activity. Fore unless we preserve natural scenic beaty and make it accessible to the public we will be in a position where we will have nothing to offer."

September 12, 1919 - The Eagle Valley Enterprise - GOVERNMENT IMPROVEMENTS AT SWEETWATER LAKE

The U.S. government recreation department is doing a great deal of work in the Rocky Mountain section to make the out of the way places in the mountains accessible to the tourist, and attractive. Following this policy the national forest is making extensive improvements at Sweetwater lake, one of the best fishing resorts in this region.

Four commodious shelter cabins are being erected, a five-room cottage for the use of the resident forest ranger, and a bridge across the outlet of the lake. The cabins will be provided with fire places and be excellent camping places for parties of tourists. Next year the county will build a bridge across the Grand river near the mouth of Sweetwater creek to connect with the new Trail gulch road now being built into Gypsum, so that this lake will be more easily reached than at present.

The state has made an appropriation for a fish hatchery to be built at Sweetwater Lake, also.

The ranger station now located at Burns will be transferred to Sweetwater as soon as the new administrative buildings are completed.

*Development of the area should start on limited bases. In the mid-nineties the Forest Service planned on an expansion of the developed recreation facilities at Sweetwater Lake under a new Recreation Initiative. Plans were to increase the size of the existing Campground to a 20 unit campground (100 People at one time) with horse-camping facilities. The camping facilities were brought off the lake shore and tiered up behind the existing facilities. There are copies of these plans in the White River National Landscape Architects Flat Files in the Glenwood Office. (Designed by Eric Martin).

Also designed trailhead facilities for horseback users, where the existing TH is located below with some facilities around the guard station.

A Hiker trailhead was proposed below the McComber place where existing horse users currently park and moving the existing parking at the Hilltop to this location. This would restrict vehicle off a very dangerous part of the road and lessen the conflicts with private land owner at the trailhead. The Hilltop TH has very limited space and Forest Service nor does the County maintain this section on a regular bases.

*Development of this area will have a high impact on the Flattops wilderness. Currently the Flat tops wilderness is one of the lowest used wildernesses in Colorado and developing easier access and better facilities will impact it greatly!

*I don't feel developing any facilities on the north side of the County road would be of any benefit due the loss of pasture for the horse outfitter, who cannot maintain this operation without the pasture. The pastures good be irrigated and grazed in the summer season for horse and left for the wildlife after mid- September.

Also the soils reports show that this whole side of the valley from the Guard Station all the way up to Wet Sweetwater has very unstable soils. This area has a history of mud slides. When the FS proposed putting developed facilities in this area the soils reports the area was too big a hazard.

*There is also an opportunity for snowmobile access into the Onion Ridge which is currently accessed from the area below Sweetwater Cow Camp, There is an existing road that goes out of the campground up to the Cow Camp and this would be a better Trailhead then along the cow Camp road.