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First name: William

Last name: Stephens

Organization:

Title:

Comments: We are against the development of Sweetwater Lake by the USFS/State of Colorado for the attached reasons. We are also strongly against the USFS leasing this land to the State of Colorado on an unprecedented setup for the next 20 years.

Attachment:

William Stephens

Annalies Stephens

7/16/2024

Subject: Objection to the Recreation and Development Plan for Sweetwater Lake

Dear US Forest Service Officials,

I am writing to formally express my objection to the proposed recreation and development plan for Sweetwater Lake. As the third generation of my family to live on Sweetwater for over 80 years, with my children and grandchildren also living here as the fourth and fifth generations, I have a profound connection to this area and a vested interest in its future. This development threatens to significantly impact our way of life and the safety and well-being of our community.

Traffic and Safety Concerns:

The proposed development will inevitably lead to a significant increase in traffic on Colorado River Road. This road is frequently used by local residents, including children, for various activities, such as exercising animals, riding bikes, and playing. The surge in traffic poses a serious safety risk to these children and others who use the road for recreational purposes. The potential for accidents and injuries will undoubtedly rise, creating a hazardous environment that is entirely avoidable.

Environmental Impact:

Sweetwater Lake and its surrounding areas boast a delicate ecosystem that has remained relatively undisturbed for generations. The introduction of large-scale recreational activities and infrastructure development threatens to disrupt this balance. Increased human activity, waste generation, and potential pollution could lead to irreversible damage to the flora and fauna unique to this region. Protecting the natural beauty and biodiversity of Sweetwater Lake should be a top priority, and this development plan contradicts that goal.

Cultural and Historical Significance:

Sweetwater Lake holds significant cultural and historical value for my family and many other long-standing residents. The area's rich history and traditions are intertwined with the lake and its surroundings. The proposed development risks erasing these cherished aspects of our heritage in favor of commercial interests. It is vital to preserve the historical integrity of Sweetwater Lake for future generations to appreciate and enjoy.

#### Economic Impact on Local Residents:

While the development may bring short-term economic benefits through tourism, it is crucial to consider the long-term consequences for local residents. The influx of visitors could strain local resources, increase living costs, and potentially disrupt the livelihoods of those who have called this area home for generations. The voices and needs of the local community must be prioritized over transient economic gains.

#### Opposition to the 20-Year Lease:

I also do not support the proposed 20-year lease from the USFS to the State of Colorado, which is being touted as a "first of its kind" agreement. This long-term lease sets a concerning precedent, potentially leading to increased commercialization and privatization of public lands. Such a lease could compromise the public's access to these lands and prioritize state and commercial interests over the preservation and conservation of our natural resources. It is crucial to maintain federal oversight to ensure that the primary focus remains on protecting the environment and serving the local community's interests.

#### Conclusion:

In conclusion, I strongly urge the US Forest Service to reconsider the proposed recreation and development plan for Sweetwater Lake. The potential risks to safety, the environment, cultural heritage, and the local community far outweigh any perceived benefits. I respectfully request that alternative approaches be explored that prioritize the preservation of Sweetwater Lake's natural and historical integrity while ensuring the safety and well-being of its residents.

Thank you for considering my objections. I look forward to your thoughtful response and hope that together, we can find a solution that honors the legacy of Sweetwater Lake and protects its future.

Sincerely,

William and Annalies Stephens