

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 7/23/2024 7:53:06 PM

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Title:

Comments: Sweetwater Lake EIS Proposed Action Comments

July 23, 2024

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My family has been using Sweetwater Lake, the resort & the cabins for 50 years. The reason people love this site and its accompanying amenities is because it has been a low key getaway-whether you are going fishing, horseback riding, staying in the cabins for a quick night or two or a family reunion or just taking friends to the restaurant for a great meal and a piece of pie. It has also served as an important community center for decades. I would hope any master plan, redevelopment, or "improvements" of this jewel of a place won't alter the attributes that make it so special! The comments I am providing are in line with trying to maintain what the Sweetwater Lake experience means to so many in the Eagle Valley/ Colorado River/Sweetwater Communities.

*Proposed capacity of 250 people/day is way too much. All one has to do is look at Sylvan Lake State Park to see what 250 people looks like. Plus, it doesn't appear state parks is equipped to actually manage large crowds. After visiting Sylvan Lake SP on Father's Day weekend, the park was way over capacity with vehicles parking on access roads, and jammed into areas not suitable for parking. When state park staff was questioned, they had no idea how many people were at the park, how many vehicles were inside the park or even if they had a capacity figure. I personally counted over 120 vehicles. I would estimate there were 250+ people at the park and it was not a place myself or my friends would consider visiting with those conditions.

I would think a much more manageable capacity figure for the Sweetwater Lake site would be 100/day. (I used the figures for total number of vehicles as: 23 using campground, 8 using day use & boat launch, 6 using the 6 cabins, 5 using café, 8 using horse area. This would total out at 50 vehicles and 2 people/vehicle = 100, this would be a conservative figure) [The numbers would not include workers/employees or their vehicles so the actual number would be closer to 108-110 including them]

As anybody could readily see the proposed 250visitors/day number is ludicrous.

*Possible new names could be; Sweetwater Lake Conservation Area, Sweetwater Lake Resource Area, or just Sweetwater Lake & Campground-my preferred name.

Any new name should avoid the words Park or Recreation as these will only draw increased number of folks to the site.

*Maintain the area north of the main road as critical wildlife habitat and preclude any development or activities that would negatively impact that area. This would include locating hiking/biking trails, cross country skiing, etc. The pastures could still be used to grow hay and have limited horse grazing but horses should be pulled off by late July to let the grass grow for wildlife.

Current plans indicate moving the campground to an area north of the current road. If this is done how will the impact to the wildlife be mitigated? In most all cases where a development plan mitigates wildlife, that mitigation usually results in a net loss to wildlife.

*Any new campground should not exceed 20-23 spots and be developed in much the same manner as Yeoman Park or Deep Lake. No cement pads, no electrical hookups, no flush toilets or showers. Water service would not necessarily have to be provided as these other campgrounds don't have water provided and yet still see much use. The campground should emphasize primitive camping for tents, and small pop style camper units.

No large campers or RVs should be allowed. Size restrictions should be along the lines of no pull behind trailers greater than 18' in length. Total length of vehicle and towed camper unit should not exceed 38'. No enclosed RV units should be greater than 24'.

Use the campground expansion plan that USFS employee Eric Martin drew up many years ago. This would

increase the existing campground approximately 2.5 times and keep the campground south of the road. If the proposed new campground is moved north of the road, it will require many of those campers to use motor vehicles to get to the lake thus compounding any vehicle & parking issues.

*Parking for visitors to Sweetwater Lake must take into account folks coming to the lake with boat trailers, &/or off-road motorized vehicles. Adequate parking areas should be available &/or strict limits on the numbers of vehicles with trailers.

*There are approximately 12 small cabins proposed to replace the current 4-6 current cabins. I would recommend that not more than 6 be constructed. These cabins could be like the small cabins at Sylvan or the yurts on East Brush Creek. The cabins should not have running water (dry cabins), cooking or heat systems. Solar lights would be OK. These cabins should be in keeping with the low impact, primitive camping experience.

*Improve lake access at the current campground (proposed day use area) by replacing the boat dock the USFS took out over 20+ years ago (they had promised to replace it but they never did). The new dock should span the wetlands and reach deeper water so there is genuine water access for boats, swimmers, paddleboarders, etc.

*Vessels operating on the lake should be limited to electric motors and Wakeless Operation Only. (electric motors are currently being manufactured that would allow water skiing).

*Give Adrian Brink a long-term lease (>20yrs) so she can afford to invest her time, money and energy into bringing the place alive again. The lease must be long enough so that financial investors would be comfortable in financing needed improvements and still allow the lessee to profit from running the operation. Don't set the conditions so the lessee will fail-this would only hurt everybody.

*Maintain seasonal closures in and adjacent to all critical wildlife habitats on the property or immediately adjacent to it (this would include calving/fawning areas, winter range, movement corridors, nesting & roosting sites for raptors, spawning habitats, etc)

*The new plan should allow for a restaurant & or cafe-this was a community and locals social hub plus supplying tourists with quality food in a historic setting. Current plans call for a "snack bar" type development and would not be adequate to serve the local community, tourists and overnight campers. Plus in my opinion, a small restaurant/café could help make the management of the site profitable for the permittee.

*Complete an in-depth archeological analysis of the property by qualified archeologists. Preserve and protect the Indian Cave while allowing structured educational viewing.

*Day parking needs to spread out day users of the lake & to help spread out pressure.

*Current travel corridors will not accommodate larger numbers of vehicles or big RVs. The Colorado River Road and the Sweetwater Road have their own constraints i.e., narrow, curving, twisting, drop-offs, gravel, mud slides, rock falls, wildlife collisions, lack of parking, crowded, etc. These conditions become much more dangerous when severe weather occurs. It is not uncommon for these roads to be temporarily closed due to these conditions. Bicylists and large vehicles exasperate the problems further.

How will these potential impacts be mitigated when considering the limited budgets of Eagle & Garfield Counties? Will the State or Forest Service step up with increase monies to offset these problems? Sweetwater Lake is also far removed from any emergency services with long response times. Increase people use at the Lake will obviously increase the need for first responders. There is limited cell phone coverage and even land line service is often interrupted. What is the long-term plan for addressing this issue?

*Will there be any thought or action to mitigate increased wilderness impacts to Hack Lk., Johnny Meyers Pond,

Ute Trail, Turret Cr Meadows, Lake Cr., etc. With increased use of the Sweetwater Lake area along with improved trails & horse trailer parking there will also be increased use into the adjoining national forest and the Flat Tops Wilderness area.

It's sad and depressing to know the federal officials who will be making the future decision on Sweetwater Lk have no real or familiar knowledge of the Sweetwater Lake prior to the Forest Service acquiring it. There probably isn't a decision making official who has staged out of Sweetwater Lk, spent a night in the campground or one of the rustic cabins or gone for a horse ride with Brink Outfitters. The bureaucrats & lawyers who will decide the future of Sweetwater Lake and the local community are safely ensconced in their administrative offices in Glenwood Springs &/or Denver and will not have to experience or be held accountable for their decision. Doesn't quite seem appropriate or fair.