

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 7/23/2024 9:08:27 PM

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am using part of Janet Rivera's July 12 letter to show my approval of her "Plan D", and my approval of her conclusions. A State Park would add too much traffic to a narrow and mainly dirt road. From a personal standpoint, my property is on one of the narrowest stretches of paved road, and would require road widening to accommodate RVs and increased traffic. I would prefer this not to happen.

Thank you,
Jarrett Osborn

From Ms. Rivera's letter:

D.Creative Alternative with CPW, Concessionaire, and Community involvement

This alternative allows for what Governor Polis suggested, "We want to make sure that we have a sustainable level of visitation and people that visit here have that special experience and it's a different experience than people might expect at other parts of our state park system... preserving the undeveloped nature of the property"

This alternative starts by developing a 3-way partnership between CPW; the former resort managers who become park concessionaires; and the local Sweetwater Community. The USFS will have minimal oversight, only so far as to make sure all Forest Service regulations and legalities are followed, with no need for design nor management input.

Working together, the three partners will design an "out of the box", creative future for Sweetwater Lake that retains both the history and culture of the area. One such example is given here, but the actual end result could be even better if the three representative groups are genuinely allowed to direct this project.

Sweetwater History and Conservation Area is one sample idea.

In this scenario, the former restaurant building will be remodeled to become an ADA compliant Nature Center with plant, animal, and fossil displays, a classroom for environmental education and nature crafts, a home base for children's nature projects, family nature hikes, guided bird walks, exploring animal tracks and signs, and other programs. These programs would be kept small - for example one school classroom or boy scout troop at a time. These programs can be run by CPW Interpretive Staff or contracted with a local expert group such as Walking Mountain Science Center.

A new History Museum and Diamond Jack Restaurant will be constructed in the area above and across the street from the previous restaurant. This location is where a former lodge/restaurant had been located historically. This new building can house a CPW information desk and small safety office if desired. It would also house a small office for the concessionaire, and perhaps a small store. The focal points, however, would be the History Museum and Restaurant. The museum would house displays and discussions of the extensive history of Sweetwater Lake. The restaurant would continue the western motif of the former restaurant and emphasize historic (and locally sourced) menu items such as buffalo burgers, elk steaks, rainbow trout, sourdough bread, and homemade pies. The size would be small with dining room seating for about 50, with 20 more on the deck overlooking the lake.

For lodging, the Historic Houses formerly used as rental cabins would be restored, each to its period. These houses were built in the 1920's to 1950's. Local businesses from Gypsum and Eagle (or as far as Vail to Aspen) would be solicited to "adopt a house" and help to pay for its remodel, guided by local historical associations. A historic plaque would be placed on each house with credit given to the company who restored it. Guests,

especially multigenerational families, could once again rent the rustic yet fully furnished homes from the concessionaire. All of these cabins have kitchens while some have working fireplaces. Even historic board games (and no wifi!), would be available in the homes. The authentic atmosphere would give a true "living history" experience to the visitors.

Rowboats and canoes would be rented, fishing encouraged, hiking to the overlook or Indian Caves (once reopened), picnicking, and horseback rides would be reinstated as recreational activities. Small events would be permitted.

Other than the museum/restaurant, no new buildings would be necessary. The former motel units would be renovated for the employees of the concessionaire, along with the house nearest the barn for an equestrian office, staff housing, and equine equipment storage.

No housing would be needed by CPW as the concessionaire could cover round-the-clock routine oversight as they have done for the past 30 years. They also have close relationships with police, fire, and search and rescue departments in the area

The USFS could turn their campground over to CPW to manage. CPW could choose to move campsites up to the area near the USFS cabin in order to open the previous campground for day use, or just keep the small campground where it is. However, the campground would stay the same size - maximum 12 sites - and primitive with no electrical, water, or sewer hookups, and no generators permitted.

Equestrian camping could continue as previous with locations just below and beside the barn area used for camping before riding into the wilderness, or parking in the large turn around parking area while out day riding.

The lack of additional amenities, other than a museum and nature center for interpretation and programming, would keep the visitor numbers closer to the previous levels. If the marketing is also kept minimal, we could preserve the undeveloped nature of the property. The 20 year lease to CPW by USFS would also be a 20 year cap on additional development. If, in 20 years, a change was desired, a new NEPA process would be necessary.

The focus of this scenario is history and historic use of the Sweetwater Lake area. It builds on the unique experiences discovered there by locals and tourists alike over the past three decades. The only expansion is in interpretation of that history - both human and natural. The visitor's experience would be unique and different from other state parks.

*Cost to taxpayers: Medium - new museum building, minimal CPW management; some offset income generated by concessionaire license with the state park and sales tax to county.

*Impact to community: Low - use would be consistent with prior use over the last three decades.

*Impact to environment and wildlife: Low - visitor levels similar to previous 30 years, only one new building in a previously disturbed area. Pastures kept for horses in summer and for wildlife year round.

Conclusions

In conclusion, a state park is not the best use of the USFS's Sweetwater Lake Property. This area is unique in plant and animal species, in its deep history, in its extended community, in its isolated location, and in the use enjoyed there for 100 years or so. I have illustrated three alternative plans that would be preferable and more cost effective than the proposed state park.

The scoping project described in this NEPA process is not a unique experience. Other than supporting equestrian camping, it looks exactly like what one might expect at other parts of our state park system. I have

hopes that a new partnership with more local expertise could devise more creative ideas to preserve the undeveloped nature and history of the property.

Looking around Colorado at the other state parks, there are 4000 camping spots and 70 cabins already available. We don't need more of these at Sweetwater. We also don't need entrance fees for day use. Most parks are supported by camping fees. Consequently, viewing the established parks, RV's are one of the main things you see. This is not a bad use, just not a use compatible with Sweetwater Lake. Folks may come to a state park's RV camp for a week, bringing outdoor rugs, lawn chairs, bird feeders, etc. There is enjoyable chit chat back and forth between rigs. And there is noise from the close proximity of units: TV's, air conditioners, radios, generators, gas stoves, etc. The wildlife viewed will be the ground squirrels or camp birds looking for handouts. There may be a playground for kids. The development of this type of campground-park might be fun for some, but it would have a huge negative impact on the surrounding Sweetwater community.

The previous cultural focal points of the Sweetwater Lake property was the lake and the restaurant that overlooked it. A visitor would come to the lake for recreation, but the restaurant was usually part of it. While food was important, it was more that the atmosphere combined old time western charm and an amazing view of the lake, and with welcoming, friendly staff. While 90% of the restaurant customers were from town or further away, usually there were locals at one or two tables. And conversation was relaxed and open between all the guests.

A typical visit to Sweetwater lake included lunch in the restaurant and then a hike to the overlook and on to explore the Indian Cave.

Or breakfast at the restaurant before going out to big game hunt using the cabins as a home base.

Or a half-day horseback ride, followed by dinner in the restaurant.

Or fishing in a rowboat followed by pie a la mode at the restaurant while watching the hummingbird feeders (about 8 feeders covered with a dozen hummers each!).

Or an evening of bringing your relatives to the lake for dinner and watching the eagle's nest through the spotting scope. (or the bears at the water's edge across the lake, or the moose near the inlet).

Or stopping into the restaurant's office/store for information and some light necessities for your campsite and staying to page through the scrapbooks and talk to the staff about the history of the area.

These experiences are not duplicated at other state parks. There are 42 of these parks around Colorado. There is only one Sweetwater Lake nature and history experience.