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First name: Tamara

Last name: Stuart

Organization:

Title:

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To:

Heather Noel, Acting Forrest Supervisor, White River National Forest

We are essentially the entrance to the proposed state park at Sweetwater Lake.

Known to some as "The Gatekeepers of Sweetwater," our home, built over 100 years ago, is the known and recognizable feature located at the base of Sweetwater Road, where it joins the Colorado River Road (Hwy 301). The main house at Anderson Camps is a landmark in this area and beyond, with many referencing it when giving directions to Sweetwater Lake. Yet, there is little discussion of the impact the current plans for the lake will have on this historic location.

The home predates the Colorado River Road, which today divides the property. The original materials were brought by horse and wagon over Trail Gulch Road. The property's history is lengthy. While built in the early 1920s, it became the Lucky GJ Ranch in 1947, inviting city dwellers to experience life on a dude ranch. In 1962, Anderson Western Colorado Camps was established and served for decades to introduce children from around the globe to the beauty of the wilderness and outdoor activity. In recent years, the property has hosted the Boys Scouts of America.

We have owned this property since 1979 and, over the decades, have witnessed a substantial increase in local growth, recreational activity, and traffic. Yet, improvements beyond routine maintenance on the Colorado River or Sweetwater roads have not happened. Since Governor Polis announced that Sweetwater Lake was Colorado's newest State Park, combined with the ongoing publicity regarding the development plans, traffic has further escalated, as have the sizes of the vehicles using the roads. Tight curves forcing a large motor home to back down Sweetwater Road onto the River Road is a dangerous yet common occurrence.

We own the property on all three sides of the Sweetwater, Colorado River Road intersection. As such, we will be directly impacted by every change that presents due to the proposed development of Sweetwater Lake. We are deeply concerned that our quality of life will be severely depleted and our property physically compromised to accommodate the increase. Furthermore, we are discouraged by the lack of mention or awareness of this integral junction in the current planning process.

Signage And Future Road Development

[bull] As property owners, the type of signage that will be used to designate the turn to the park and its placement are obviously paramount issues of concern for us.

[bull] Any changes to the road to eliminate congestion at the intersection will directly impact our property and home.

Lack Of Cell Service And Emergency Response

[bull] Despite an obvious sign at the base of the Colorado River Road stating there is no cell service for the next 40 miles, a large majority of people are unaware of the situation or simply ignore it.

[bull] As the only visible and easily accessible house in the immediate area of the intersection, we have often found ourselves having to provide strangers with the use of our landline, shelter, or other access to our property in emergencies such as domestic disputes, car trouble, rafting or biking incidents, or mudslides because there were no other options. While generally inclined to help, there are times when these situations have not felt safe.

[bull] More recently, we are asked for our internet passwords so they can look up numbers or text messages instead of placing a call. Many, already frustrated by their situation, become agitated and verbally abusive when we decline to give them access to our security codes.

[bull] We are concerned that the increased activity in our area due to the proposed state park will also present an increase in similar situations. This increase and the lengthy response time for medical and law enforcement responders will put us and our property in more frequent, potentially detrimental positions based on our location alone.

[bull] Closures on I-70 bring many impatient travelers in every type of vehicle up the Colorado River Road, Deep Creek Road, and Sweetwater Road. Without GPS to guide them, they travel aimlessly onto whatever road they feel will lead them in the right direction, including private roads.

[bull] These issues apply to every home and local resident living along the Sweetwater corridor. It represents an unfair burden for the community.

[bull] When all residents of the Colorado River Road and Sweetwater community were ordered to evacuate during the Grizzly Creek Fire, this intersection was used as a base station. While the response and quick action were greatly appreciated, the multitude of vehicles from law enforcement, stock trailers, and volunteers parked on every available opening or departing to inform other residents was confusing and further congested this, the only exit for the residents above us.

[bull] The evacuation took place in the dark after 9 pm. It mainly involved locals who knew about the roads' hazards and could navigate the situation well despite the increased anxiety of an evacuation. That is an advantage visitors would not have, increasing the confusion, the potential for a panic response, and the difficulty in safely evacuating a substantially higher number of people and vehicles. Most residents have an emergency exit process in place for just these reasons.

[bull] The target number of visitors discussed in the current proposal would significantly increase the potential for fire, increasing the risk for all of us. With only one narrow, twisted dirt road in and out, it represents a severe danger and potential tragedy.

In closing, quite a bit of planning has gone into what the proposed development at the lake site will involve and how the history and physical beauty of the lake will be preserved. However, little effort has been invested in planning for the protection of the residents already using the area roads due to current and future traffic loads, much less for the safety of the visitors it will bring who are not familiar with the hazards. Additionally, the current plan does not address the substantial disruption to the properties that lead to the park. These issues should be thoroughly investigated, evaluated, and results actually implemented BEFORE encouraging further increased public access to the upper areas of Sweetwater Road.

In contrast to the spirit of preservation currently being focused on in the park's planning, the failure to adequately resolve these issues, if indeed possible, will result in loss for many who strived to preserve Sweetwater Lake, its community, and its history. Let's all hope it is not the loss of a life.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott and Tamara B. Stuart