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Organization:

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Comments: Livestock Concerns

Sweetwater's original homesteaders brought cattle, and cattle have been welcome in our area ever since. All of Sweetwater Road is officially "Open Range". This means cattle can wander wherever Homeowners have to fence them out if they don't want them in the driveway and front yard! Historically, we have enjoyed watching the cattle drives move up the road in the spring and back down in the fall.

The cattle get driven onto the US Forest Service (USFS) property in the spring where the ranchers pay for summer grazing permits. These permitted areas can be accessed by a few select routes. One of these routes is via the road that leads into the current USFS Sweetwater Campground. Part way along that road is a turn off onto a USFS dirt track up into the forest. In the Scoping Documents, this area will be turned into day use for paddle boarders and picnickers.

It is hard to be a cattleman in today's world, and this new state park idea at Sweetwater is aiming to make it even harder. About 488 acres were taken out of private use and given to the USFS, which wants to give it to Colorado State and Wildlife (CPW) to make a big state park. But then, to make this more attractive to CPW, the USFS decided to add some more of its property to the new park's boundaries. This additional piece includes some of the permitted areas used by the cattle to graze! It's not like there is any new area to, in turn, lease to the cattlemen. Instead, their summer range has just decreased, meaning they will have to reduce their herds. This makes raising cattle even less financially viable and affects the cattlemen's livelihood. In addition, these grazing leases are with the USFS and not CPW. There is genuine fear among the ranchers of losing some leases, affecting their family businesses.

CPW's own rules demand that a proposed new state park:

"Provides community value. Future state parks engage nearby communities. Local economies and quality of life improve by having a state park."

Obviously, to cattlemen and women, their economies and quality of life will be significantly negatively impacted from this proposed park! And, needless to say, they were not "engaged" nor asked for input prior to the state park being announced.

Using this route to the summer range through the park will become dangerous, both to the greatly increased number of tourists and to the cattle. The cattle can trample people or their picnic sites. Cars can run into cattle, damaging both. And pet dogs and cattle are a potentially awful and rowdy combination! In addition, a cow might have a new calf accompanying her in the spring, and she is a lot less tolerant of dogs, cars, and people.

It has been suggested that the ranchers simply put the cattle into trucks and drive them up to the summer grazing areas. This might sound reasonable, but currently there are no roads that could hold a semi full of cattle! The roads are both too steep and too narrow (County Road 151 or Sweetwater Road to Old Hilltop). A small operation might be able to bring a few cows via a horse trailer to the campground/day use site, but that won't work for the majority of the cattlemen. And there would still be the negative tourist/cattle interactions near the old campground.

Should the ranchers safely get their cattle up to the higher country around the lake, there is now more interaction within that area, too. When the park attracts its goal of 250 people per day, some of those people will go hiking or riding up into the forest. They will find gates whose purpose is to keep the cattle up there, which they may pass through and not close. They may confront cattle on the trail, or the cattle may wander back down to the park.

In the fall, the cattle are rounded up and driven by cowboys and cowgirls on horseback several miles back down Sweetwater Road, to where the road is wide enough for waiting semi-trucks to take them to market. There will be more dangerous interactions along this route. First, the increased traffic will block and hinder the cattle drive. And secondly, the traffic will make it difficult to use the road for loading the livestock.

Unfortunately, not every single cow makes it into the initial roundup. There are always a few stragglers, who are now attempting to find the rest of their herd. They, too, will wander back through the park. Only now, the calves are bigger and curious and less easy to manage!

The former Concessionaire at Sweetwater was a good partner of the cattlemen, who might stop to use her phones or bathrooms or even grab a meal at her restaurant. We foresee Park Rangers being less pleased to have the cattle arrive on the property.

The Sweetwater Community is proud of our cattle heritage, and we don't want to see it negatively impacted by a

park. We also care about our neighbors and don't want to see their livelihood destroyed by a park. Due to safety concerns and economic reasons, we really feel that Sweetwater Lake is not a good place for a state park, especially not one of the size in the proposal!

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