

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 8/5/2024 6:00:00 AM

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Comments: William B. Stephens

August 3, 2024

Heather Noel, Acting Forest Supervisor, White River National Forest US Forest Service

900 Grand Avenue

Glenwood Springs, CO 81601

Dear Heather Noel,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the lack of adequate egress routes for traffic at Sweetwater Lake in Colorado, which poses significant risks in terms of fire safety and emergency preparedness.

As a resident and frequent visitor to Sweetwater Lake, I have observed that the current infrastructure does not meet the necessary fire code requirements for safe egress in the event of an emergency. Specifically, NFPA 1141, Standard for Fire Protection Infrastructure for Land Development in Wildland, Rural, and Suburban Areas, outlines crucial guidelines that emphasize the need for clear and accessible egress routes to ensure the safety of visitors and staff during emergencies, such as wildfires .

According to NFPA 1141, it is imperative that all public spaces, especially those with high visitor counts like Sweetwater Lake, maintain efficient egress routes capable of accommodating swift evacuation and emergency vehicle access. Failure to comply with these standards increases the risk of congestion, delays in evacuation, and potential impediments to firefighting efforts, which can result in severe consequences for both human safety and property.

Recent incidents in similar settings across the state have highlighted the critical importance of proactive measures in fire safety and emergency planning. For instance, the devastating Camp Fire in California demonstrated how inadequate egress routes can lead to tragic outcomes when rapid evacuation is needed.

The Glenwood Canyon fire starkly highlighted the inadequacy of the egress routes for the Sweetwater Community. The fire's rapid progression necessitated an emergency evacuation that took over two days to complete, underscoring the critical shortcomings in the existing escape infrastructure. The evacuation process had to be conducted as a rolling evacuation, further illustrating the challenges faced by residents in safely and efficiently exiting the area. This incident underscores the urgent need for improved and more robust egress routes to ensure the safety of the Sweetwater Community in future emergencies.

Without adequate egress routes meeting NFPA 1141 standards, there is a heightened risk of endangering lives and exacerbating property damage during emergencies. Therefore, I urge the US Forest Service to conduct a thorough review of the egress routes at Sweetwater Lake and deny the creation of a state park based on NFPA 1141. The denial of the state park will help to ensure the safety of not only the firefighters fighting the fires but also all the families that live in the Sweetwater Community.

Additionally, I request transparency throughout this process, including engaging in public consultation and providing regular updates on the progress made to rectify these critical safety issues. It is essential that all stakeholders, including visitors, residents, and park management, are actively involved in efforts to enhance safety and mitigate risks effectively.

Thank you for considering my concerns regarding the fire safety infrastructure at Sweetwater Lake. I look forward to your prompt action and to receiving updates on the measures taken to address this matter in alignment with NFPA 1141.

Sincerely,

William B. Stephens, Sweetwater Fire Brigade Leader

Mary K. Stephens

Ty LaFramboise

Katie LaFramboise

Malorie K. Stephens

Lucas B. Stephens

References

1. **NFPA 1141, Standard for Fire Protection Infrastructure for Land Development in Wildland, Rural, and Suburban Areas**. Available at: [NFPA 1141](https://www.nfpa.org)
2. **USDA Report, 2015** - Livestock Grazing on Public Lands. Available at: [USDA Report](https://www.usda.gov)
3. **Center for Biological Diversity, 2015** - Costs and Consequences: The Real Price of Livestock Grazing on America's Public Lands. Available at: [Center for Biological Diversity](https://www.biologicaldiversity.org)
4. **Western Watersheds Project, 2021** - The Real Price and Consequences of Livestock Grazing on America's Public Lands. Available at: [Western Watersheds Project](https://www.westernwatersheds.org)
5. **Camp Fire Incident, 2018** - Case study on the impact of inadequate evacuation routes during the Camp Fire in California. Available at: [Camp Fire Case Study](https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/2018/11/8/camp-fire/)
6. **Emergency Egress and Fire Safety Planning** - Guidelines for improving egress routes and ensuring compliance with fire safety standards. Available at: [Fire Safety Guidelines](https://www.firesafety.gov)

To: Heather Noel, Acting Forest Supervisor White River National Forest

900 Grand Avenue Glenwood Springs, CO.

August 3, 2024

Dear Heather Noel,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed development of additional campsites in the meadows near Sweetwater Lake, Colorado. This area is known for its rich biodiversity, including vital habitats for elk, deer, moose, and various avian species such as peregrine falcons, bald eagles, golden eagles, and various owl species (National Audubon Society, Birds and Climate Report, 2019; Colorado Parks & Wildlife, Colorado Wildlife Action Plan, 2015).

The proximity to riparian zones makes this area particularly sensitive, as these habitats are crucial for the survival of many species. The disturbance caused by campsite development would undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on these animals, disrupting their natural behaviors and potentially leading to a decline in their populations (USDA Forest Service, Riparian Ecosystems: Wildlife Benefits and Threats, 2003; Environmental Protection Agency, Riparian Buffer Zones, 2020).

Additionally, the flora in these meadows represents a finite resource in the Colorado region. Development in this

area would lead to the loss of native plant species, which play a significant role in maintaining the ecological balance. The introduction of campsites would also likely result in soil compaction, pollution, and increased human activity, further degrading the environment (US Forest Service, Soil Compaction from Recreational Use, 2008; Colorado State University Extension, Native Plant Conservation, 2016).

Pastures and meadows in Colorado, especially those near Sweetwater Lake, are precious and limited resources. It is crucial that we prioritize the conservation of these areas to ensure the sustainability of their ecosystems for future generations (Colorado Natural Heritage Program, Colorado's Natural Areas Program, 2018).

I urge the U.S. Forest Service to reconsider this development and explore alternative locations that do not pose such a significant threat to wildlife and plant species. Protecting these natural habitats should be a priority, and I believe that with careful planning, we can find a balance between recreational use and conservation.

Thank you for considering my concerns.

Sincerely,

William B. Stephens

Mary K. Stephens

Katie A. LaFramboise

Ty LaFramboise

Malorie K. Stephens

Lucas B. Stephens

###- References

1. **National Audubon Society, 2019** - Birds and Climate Report. Available at: [Audubon](<https://www.audubon.org/climate/survivalbydegrees>)
2. **Colorado Parks & Wildlife, 2015** - Colorado Wildlife Action Plan. Available at: [CPW](<https://cpw.state.co.us>)

3. ****USDA Forest Service, 2003**** - Riparian Ecosystems: Wildlife Benefits and Threats. Available at: [USDA Forest Service](https://www.fs.usda.gov)
4. ****Environmental Protection Agency, 2020**** - Riparian Buffer Zones. Available at: [EPA](https://www.epa.gov)
5. ****US Forest Service, 2008**** - Soil Compaction from Recreational Use. Available at: [US Forest Service](https://www.fs.usda.gov)
6. ****Colorado State University Extension, 2016**** - Native Plant Conservation. Available at: [CSU Extension](https://extension.colostate.edu)
7. ****Colorado Natural Heritage Program, 2018**** - Colorado's Natural Areas Program. Available at: [Colorado Natural Heritage Program](https://www.cnhp.colostate.edu)