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First name: Bergen

Last name: Tjossem

Organization: Eagle Valley Land Trust

Title: Deputy Director

Comments: The Eagle Valley Land Trust (EVLТ) is a 501c3 nonprofit organization based in Eagle County, Colorado, with a mission to protect forever, as a permanent legacy, the land we love including its scenic beauty, recreational opportunities, and wildlife habitats. Four years ago Sweetwater Lake went up for sale after private development plans failed to materialize once again. The property had been on the verge of private development for decades. Community members eager to protect and maintain public access to this 488-acre parcel reached out to EVLT and The Conservation Fund for help to conserve the property before it went to the highest bidder.

Here the "Save the Lake" campaign was born - a grassroots coalition of community members facilitated by EVLT and The Conservation Fund to help protect the beloved property. Hundreds of donors made contributions and wrote letters of support. And it worked - The Conservation Fund, with support from a Great Outdoors Colorado loan, purchased the property from the developers. Congress caught wind of the campaign's energy - the local action galvanized a regionally unprecedented \$8.5 million request from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. That funding allowed the White River National Forest (WRNF) to purchase the property from The Conservation Fund. EVLT's goal is for the ultimate design of the Sweetwater Lake Recreation Management and Development Project to meet the goals stated during the Save the Lake campaign.

The text of the widely distributed Save The Lake campaign flier states the following:

"The property-if acquired-will provide new public access to the iconic Sweetwater Lake and surrounding public lands. The 488-acre parcel is an important community asset, but public access was revoked after development plans for 240 homes, a hotel, and golf course failed to materialize. Protecting Sweetwater Lake means:

- Creating sustainable public recreational access to Sweetwater Lake for fishing, horseback riding, boating, and camping.
- Maintaining access to surrounding public lands including Flat Tops Wilderness, White River National Forest (the most visited National Forest in the U.S.), and the Ute trail.
- Conserving critical habitat for elk, deer, osprey, bald eagles, and other wildlife.
- Protecting the Upper Colorado Watershed."

As such, EVLT encourages the White River National Forest and Cooperating Agencies (of which EVLT is not) to prioritize small-scale nature-based recreation opportunities, sustainable access to surrounding public lands, and protection of sensitive wildlife habitat. EVLT encourages the WRNF and Cooperating Agencies to pursue the minimum level of development and disturbance required to meet the Purpose and Need of the Sweetwater Lake Recreation Management and Development Project and a "less is more" approach to any additional necessary amenities and infrastructure. Adverse impacts to natural resources should be avoided, minimized, and mitigated. Therefore, the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) should analyze impacts on all wildlife resources known to utilize the parcel; analyze potential impacts on rare and significant plants, and analyze opportunities and impacts from nature-based recreation opportunities.

EVLТ also urges WRNF, Colorado Parks & Wildlife, and Cooperating Agencies to collaborate actively with Ute Tribes regarding the future use, access, and protection of the cultural resources within and surrounding the project area. The EIS should analyze the impact on significant cultural resources on the site, as well as opportunities for ongoing collaboration with the Ute Tribes. Further, EVLT urges the WRNF and Cooperating Agencies to continue engaging with the local public, Sweetwater community, Ute Tribes, and other key stakeholders who will be impacted by the project. The EIS should analyze the impacts of potentially increased traffic and visitation on the residents living along Sweetwater Rd.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a comment. If the USFS would like to follow up with EVLT for more information or clarification, please email [info@evlt.org](mailto:info@evlt.org).