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Organization:

Title:

Comments:

I am concerned, as a longtime resident of Western Colorado, that the cultural heritage and significance of the Sweetwater Lake property to the surrounding communities will not be taken into account and that the concerns of the immediate community and the requests of larger communities of Garfield and Eagle counties will be ignored.

Sweetwater is not just a neglected piece of land waiting to be developed and the community is not just a handful of uneducated land owners who want to be left alone. It is an extremely unique situation, comparable to an Appalachian "Holler" or a New Orleans neighborhood, and it absolutely qualifies as an intangible cultural heritage site under NEPA Section 106.

A strong and notable community has been in place for over a century with the lake at the center of it as a communal gathering place, for locals and visitors. Spending even a day at Sweetwater Lake, a visitor could realize they were both at the center of a tight-knit Western community with a vast, even global, network of former workers, visitors and supporters.

This Western lifestyle and ranching culture, while misunderstood, connects multiple cultures across history- Sweetwater offers the opportunity to educate others on the complex history and the effects this culture continues to have. Furthermore, guests can experience the realities of this culture and the lasting impression it leaves on not just the local community, but on Western America.

Many residents of the Sweetwater community use the surrounding Forest Service land for subsistence in the form of cattle grazing, ranching and hunting. Their collective knowledge and appreciation of the ranching profession and its corresponding lifestyle and respect for the wilderness areas that they use is not something that can be replaced. However, they are more than happy to share their lives and involve newcomers in the form of tourists, seasonal workers, college interns, ranch hands, and others seeking employment and career and learning opportunities. Many residents of Sweetwater are also seasonal workers in the surrounding towns of Gypsum, Eagle, and Vail which further involves and influences that sense of community to the greater area and exhibits and encourages the best aspects of Western American culture.

But I am concerned that the immediate community members are not prepared for the onslaught of tourists expecting full amenities to be provided, and who are not aware of, or educated about the area. While outside spaces should be accessible, true wilderness can be dangerous, which many people do not understand or appreciate. I am afraid that these misunderstandings, which have happened, will lead to an increase in conflicts which will destroy the uniqueness of this community, and have rippling effects throughout the state.

I am also concerned that the people involved in the development of this project seem to not care about any impacts that they will have and they don't seem to be treating community members with respect.

The loss of this long-standing thriving and vibrant community to a thoughtless development project would be devastating.

Please listen to and respect the community members- they will be deeply impacted by this project. This project isn't about keeping a local's favorite place away from the masses. This will impact livelihoods, careers, heritage, educations, and quality of life. As stewards of the land, we must be held responsible for the protection of these places.

Sweetwater belongs in the hands of the people who have managed it for generations.