

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 7/22/2026 5:51:58 PM

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Comments: Comments on Sweetwater Lake Recreation Management and Development Project and Plan Amendment Draft EIS

Dear Brian Glaspell and Leanne Veldhuis USFS

I am writing to you regarding the U.S. Forest Service's Proposed Action in regard to Sweetwater Lake (SLDP 64047) in Gypsum/Eagle Colorado. Although I don't own property in the area I've had the pleasure of living in the community for extended periods of time over the past two years. I've heard the inspiring story of how the community pulled together, with the help of Eagle Valley Land Trust, to protect and secure the property under management of the U.S. Forest Service. As a retired federal park ranger, it thrilled me to know that this special place, with the efforts of so many, was protected as a part of our public land system.

The place is magical, with nesting bald eagles and peregrine falcons, and hundreds of other bird species calling it home. Elk, mule deer, moose, black bear and a multitude of other wildlife live here. Wildflowers abound in the surrounding acres. Sensitive historical artifacts are protected there. There currently already exists a horseback outfitter that takes people hunting. Hikers can explore the miles of surrounding trails in White River NF. and the relatively small (72 acre) Sweetwater Lake hosts paddleboards, kayaks, and canoes for fishing and other non-motorized watersports. A wisely- sized, nine campsites campground, hosted by USFS, is nestled on the corner of the Lake.

Sweetwater lake is idyllic as it is, and the proposal for a significant expansion in size and capacity as a Colorado State Park by CPW just doesn't make a whole lot of sense. I'm a fan of state parks, many are gems in our community that give people a wonderful respite in nature, but here, at Sweetwater Lake, it just doesn't fit for a multitude of reasons-

Bait-and-Switch on Protection: > The local community raised money to save this land from commercial development and protect it under federal U.S. Forest Service care. Turning it into a high-traffic state park completely contradicts what the public funded or what the community wants.

Infrastructure and Public Safety Risks: The narrow, windy, 11 mile long, unpaved canyon road cannot handle state-park-scale traffic or large trailers. Furthermore, local emergency services are nearly an hour away-forcing high-density recreation into this canyon is a massive safety liability. Cell service doesn't exist!! Additionally, wildfires, flash floods, and rockslides are real and frequent dangers. I can't even imagine fleeing down this road with hundreds of others in the event of a dangerous wildfire. The infrastructure just isn't set up for the kind of visitation proposed in the draft EIS.

Environmental Damage: > Sweetwater is a fragile ecosystem with sensitive wildlife, plants, and wildlife habitats. Cultural artifacts are present. CPW's plans for massive campgrounds and high visitor metrics will permanently degrade the very environment the Forest Service is tasked with protecting.

For the reasons mentioned above, I highly recommend the U.S. Forest Service select Alternative 1, 'No Action' alternative in the Draft EIS. This means keeping management strictly with the Forest Service under a traditional, low-impact model, rather than transferring control to Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW).

Thanks very much for your consideration.