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

These comments on the Draft EIS for Sweetwater Lake are being submitted by a citizen of the Town of Gypsum.

Comments here are directed toward the 25 pages under Section 2.3 Summary Comparison of Direct and Indirect Environmental Consequences. It seems like these environmental consequences should be a major focus of what happens to Sweetwater Lake and the surrounding lands and therefore should play a dominant role in the final selection of alternatives.

The intent of this submittal is to focus on Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 as these are the only logical possible selections. The consequences are summed up in the 13 Resource Area and Issue statements where each Indicator outlines their particular impact.

When looking at the Indicator evaluations the majority of these are the same for both Alternative 2 and Alternative 3. However it should be obvious that Alternative 3 has less environmental impact than Alternative 2, making Alternative 3 the option that best preserves the natural environment of Sweetwater Lake.

Some specific examples of the lesser impacts of Alternative 3 are as follows:

1. Hydrology and Water Rights - Disturbance to Study Water Sheds - Short term 66.9 acres less disturbance caused by excavation and construction. Long term 26.8 less disturbance
2. Hydrology and Water Rights - Water Quality - Again, less disturbance by 2 acres causes less impact. Less visitation causes less soil erosion and sedimentation. Less visitation causes less waste.
3. Dispersed Recreation - Winter Recreation - Less access and visitation creating more solitude and better winter environment for wildlife populations. Less recreation and commercial endeavors make for less impact from infrastructure, structures and human activity.
4. Roadless Areas - High Quality or Undisturbed Soils, Water or Air - Acreage of disturbance for both short term and long term are less impactful.
5. Scenery - Qualitative analysis of existing scenic conditions... - Only 1/3 the disturbance and less fragmented landscape.
6. Scenery - Qualitative discussion of impacts on dark skies... - Less structures and less traffic allow for greater opportunity that the dark sky attributes will remain in the area.

Since the emphasis of Sweetwater Lake should be on maintaining its unique characteristics it seems that Alternative 3 with some modification should be the selection made.

Totally Outside the Box Option

While Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 are both viable options it seems like the logical end solution is somewhere between these two alternatives.

I offer the following possibilities which combine public and private action to provide a solution that may better protect the qualities of Sweetwater Lake and at the same time provide some of what the Sweetwater community and others interested in preserving the most natural environment are looking to incorporate.

Part 1:

One of the desires of many who remember the great times in the past of Sweetwater is the homey, country style

restaurant that was run by A. J. Brink Outfitters (Adrienne Brink). A place for visitors to sit back and view the lake and have a relaxed meal. It was also a place that locals could do the same or could also meet to discuss issues of the community or just visit with friends. In order to keep this same kind of facility and atmosphere, which will not be available if CPW provides the structure they are currently indicating. I would suggest that a group be formed to purchase the house on the hill above the lake (originally built by Rick Poffenberger, Adrienne's brother, and currently for sale) and convert this house to a restaurant. This restaurant would not have any Forest Service or CPW restrictions placed on it because it would be outside of the Sweetwater Alternative areas. This facility might also accommodate wranglers or others with a second floor bunk house or apartment(s) that would help defray the costs associated with the purchase and operation. This facility would have great views of the lake, has a potential for a great outdoor patio overlooking the lake and also has the potential for a view down the valley as well. Its proximity is close enough to the lake to make it an integral part of the operation that goes on at the lake while being able to run as an independent operation. It would allow the owners to select who would operate the restaurant taking the guesswork out of putting it up for bid by CPW or Forest Service.

This could be achieved through the Sweetwater organization which I understand has a 501 (c) 3 designation. It could also be done through other charitable organizations or a private party or parties.

Part 2:

Instead of the 10 campsites suggested in Alternative 3, provide 11 campsites with a seasonal Forest Service employee acting as both a campground host and a ranger for the Sweetwater area (maybe this needs electricity and sewer and if necessary maybe this could be year-round). Again, utilizing the private sector could some of the funds currently held for Sweetwater Lake by the Eagle Valley Land Trust be utilized to pay for this ranger? Would a town or towns, the county or counties and/or charitable organizations contribute to the Forest Service the funds necessary to provide for this ranger? If this were done the impact of housing and personnel on Sweetwater Lake would be greatly reduced and yet there would be a presence that is not currently there.

Is this all too fantastic? Maybe. Maybe not. It seems like a possibility to provide the environmental protections desired for Sweetwater Lake while at the same time providing access to the lake that is not overly impactful. It provides some supervision of the lake and surrounding area by someone with authority without making it a housing facility for CPW. It also allows a restaurant that might approach the character of the facility that is no longer available and this restaurant's operator could be selected by the Sweetwater community.

Can the governing agencies get on board for something like this? That's up to them and what they want to see as a solution to providing access to Sweetwater Lake while at the same time preserving the unique characteristics of remoteness, a primitive campground experience and environmental quality.