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Organization: Congressman, 3rd District of Colorado
Title:
Comments: September 23, 2026

White River National Forest
Supervisor Brian Glaspell
900 Grand Ave.
Glenwood Springs, CO 81601

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

Dear Supervisor Glaspell:

I write regarding the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Sweetwater Lake Recreation Management and Development Project. Sweetwater Lake is a special place in my district, and I have heard from residents and local elected officials who are deeply invested in protecting this landscape. There is broad agreement that Sweetwater Lake should remain publicly accessible, protected, and responsibly managed for future generations.

I ask that the Forest Service carefully consider and directly respond to the detailed comments submitted by Garfield and Eagle Counties in their roles as cooperating agencies, as well as the concerns raised by residents who live in and around Sweetwater Lake. These constituents have invested substantial time and effort in this process, and their concerns deserve meaningful consideration.

Garfield and Eagle Counties ultimately recommend different management approaches, but their comments reflect substantial agreement on the challenges facing Sweetwater Lake. Both emphasize the limitations of the existing road, the importance of protecting wildlife and natural resources, the strain that increased visitation could place on local emergency services and infrastructure, and the importance of preserving the rural and historic character of the area.

I am particularly persuaded by Garfield County's emphasis on a lower-intensity management approach. Their comments recognize that the scale of future visitation and development should be shaped by the capacity of the existing road and emergency-response network, as well as the constraints of the surrounding landscape and local community. I believe that approach deserves significant consideration as the Forest Service determines the future management of Sweetwater Lake.

Both Garfield and Eagle Counties identify public safety as a significant concern. Sweetwater Lake is at the end of a box canyon, with one narrow road providing a single route for ingress and egress. In an emergency involving wildfire, flooding, or mudslides, that road may need to accommodate residents and visitors evacuating at the same time firefighters, law enforcement, and emergency medical personnel are trying to enter. These concerns are not theoretical. The Derby Fire resulted in evacuations in 2025, and mudslides blocked access to the Sweetwater Lake area in August 2026.

The counties also raise an important fiscal concern. Federal decisions about recreation at Sweetwater Lake should not leave local governments with unfunded obligations for road maintenance, infrastructure, law enforcement, fire, EMS, or search and rescue.

Before selecting a management framework that would substantially increase visitation or development, the

Forest Service should determine what level of use the existing road and emergency-response network can safely support during both normal operations and foreseeable emergencies, and identify how additional infrastructure and public-safety costs would be addressed. The Final EIS should directly address evacuation and emergency access, road capacity, and the impacts on the local governments responsible for providing these services.

The Forest Service should also give meaningful consideration to the residents who live at Sweetwater Lake and along the road. These residents are not commenting on an abstract management proposal. They live with the road conditions, wildfire risk, emergency-response limitations, wildlife impacts, and seasonal visitation at the center of this decision. Their experience should be reflected in the Forest Service's analysis, and the Final EIS should clearly explain how the concerns raised by local residents and governments were considered and addressed.

Garfield and Eagle Counties do not agree on every aspect of the proposed management framework, but the significant overlap in their concerns should be instructive. Sweetwater Lake has real physical, environmental, and infrastructure constraints. The final decision should reflect those constraints rather than leave foreseeable public-safety and infrastructure problems to be resolved after a management framework has been selected. It should also reflect the experience of the residents who live with those constraints every day and will be most directly affected by the Forest Service's decision.

I appreciate the work of the Forest Service throughout this process. As you move toward a Final EIS, I urge that the final decision fully accounts for the concerns of the people and local governments most directly affected by it.

I appreciate your full and fair consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Jeff Hurd
Member of Congress