

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 9/24/2026 3:09:25 AM

First name: Janet

Last name: Testwuide

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Supervisor Glaspell,

I am writing to submit formal public comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Sweetwater Lake Recreation Management and Development Project. I am a 53-year-old resident homeowner and taxpayer in Eagle County, Colorado, and a 26-year part-time resident homeowner and taxpayer in Garfield County, Colorado. My properties are located in the Sweetwater area, and I have lived in and experienced the realities of this corridor for nearly three decades. I submit these comments based on that direct, long-term, lived experience.

I support Alternative 3 - the primitive recreation alternative with limited facilities and limited staffing, managed by the Forest Service without a long-term Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) partnership. I do not support Alternatives 2 or 4, which would turn management over to CPW under a 20-year special use permit and would substantially increase visitation and infrastructure. The reasons for my position are explained below. In short: the Sweetwater corridor already has too many governmental jurisdictions involved - two counties, the Forest Service, and county-level emergency services - and adding CPW as yet another layer of administration would compound delays, bureaucratic friction, and implementation problems. What is needed is not more agencies and more development. What is needed is better management of access, communication with visitors before they arrive, and enforcement of the rules that already exist.

1. Support for Alternative 3 and Opposition to Adding CPW

Two counties are already involved in the Sweetwater area - Garfield County and Eagle County - along with the White River National Forest. That is enough layers of government. Adding Colorado Parks and Wildlife as a fourth managing agency under Alternatives 2 or 4 would add another layer of administration, another set of decision-makers, another budget cycle, another set of policies and procedures, and another point of potential delay. In my experience, the more agencies involved, the slower and less responsive the management becomes. When something goes wrong at Sweetwater - a trespass, a stranded visitor, a shooting violation, a medical emergency - the last thing the situation needs is a multi-agency coordination meeting to determine who is responsible.

Public Comment - Sweetwater Lake Draft EIS

Alternative 3 keeps management with the Forest Service, provides a primitive recreation experience with limited facilities and limited staffing, and does not add a new agency. This is the right approach. It is the least disruptive alternative for the surrounding community and private landowners. But Alternative 3, as described in the DEIS, is incomplete. It does not address the public safety and access management problems that are already occurring at current visitation levels. I urge the Forest Service to adopt Alternative 3 as the selected alternative, with the additions and mitigations described below.

2. A Reservation System Modeled on Hanging Lake

My central recommendation is that the Forest Service implement a mandatory reservation and permit system for Sweetwater Lake, modeled on the highly successful system already in place for Hanging Lake in Garfield County. The Hanging Lake reservation system - operated by the City of Glenwood Springs in conjunction with the Forest Service - requires visitors to book a timed-entry permit online in advance, at a per-person fee, with permits checked on arrival. Only permit holders are allowed to park. The system has worked remarkably well from a public standpoint: it

manages congestion, protects natural resources, improves the visitor experience, and provides a direct communication channel to every visitor before they arrive.

Critically, the reservation infrastructure already exists and is already funded. It does not need to be built from scratch. The same online reservation platform and operational model used for Hanging Lake could be adapted for Sweetwater Lake with minimal additional investment. This is not a speculative proposal - it is a proven system operating in the same county, on the same national forest, for the same type of recreation access problem.

A reservation system for Sweetwater Lake would solve multiple problems simultaneously:

1. Upfront visitor communication. At the time of reservation, every visitor would receive written information about the conditions at Sweetwater Lake: no cell service for approximately 40 miles, no internet, unimproved roads, the risk of becoming stranded, the lack of emergency communication, and the need to be self-sufficient. This is the single most effective way to reach people before they are in the corridor and before they are in trouble. A reservation confirmation email and a permit terms-and-conditions sign-off for day use or overnight use would ensure that visitors have been formally notified and have acknowledged the risks.

2. Controlling access to unimproved roads. A reservation system would cut down on people driving unimproved roads with campers, boats, trailers, and other vehicles that are not appropriate for the corridor, only to be turned away when they arrive. Under the Hanging Lake model, vehicles over 25 feet are not permitted. A similar restriction at Sweetwater - communicated at the time of reservation, before the visitor drives 40 miles with no cell service - would prevent dangerous and frustrating situations for both visitors and residents.

3. Managing visitation volume. A reservation system would allow the Forest Service to cap daily visitation at a level the corridor can safely support - consistent with Alternative 3

Public Comment - Sweetwater Lake Draft EIS

- without relying on staff to turn people away in person after they have already driven the corridor.

4. Creating a record of who is in the area. In an emergency, the reservation system would provide a record of who has a permit for that day, which could assist search and rescue or law enforcement. It would also create accountability for visitors who trespass on private property, violate hunting or fishing regulations, or cause damage.

5. Funding on-site management and enforcement. As the Hanging Lake model demonstrates, permit fees can fund trail supervisors, maintenance, staffing, communications, and enforcement. Under Alternative 3, where staffing is limited, a reservation fee structure could provide the revenue needed for a seasonal ranger or host, signage, and law enforcement patrols without requiring a full CPW management operation.

3. Emergency Response and Inter-County Coordination

The Sweetwater area straddles the Garfield County and Eagle County line. In my personal experience over many years, emergency response coordination between the two counties is inconsistent at best and dangerously inadequate at worst. Response times are long. Jurisdictional uncertainty between Garfield and Eagle County emergency services can delay or confuse the

dispatch of law enforcement, medical, or fire resources. When a visitor has an accident, a medical emergency, or a mechanical breakdown in this corridor, the reality is that help may be a very long time coming - and the visitor may not be able to call for help at all.

The DEIS must analyze the incremental demand that each alternative would place on Garfield County and Eagle County emergency response systems - including sheriff, EMS, search and rescue, and fire - and must identify whether those agencies have the capacity to absorb that demand. I have seen no evidence in the DEIS that this analysis has been performed. A reservation system, as described above, would help by controlling the number of people in the corridor and by ensuring they have been warned of the risks before they arrive. But it does not replace the need for a formal emergency response plan.

4. No Cell Service and No Internet: A Public Safety Crisis

There is no cell service and no internet connectivity for approximately 40 miles through the Sweetwater corridor. A sign on the road warns travelers: "No cell service available next 40 miles." In my experience, the vast majority of visitors do not understand what this means. It does not compute in their minds that their phone maps will stop working, that they will not be able to call 911, that they will not be able to call for a tow truck, and that no digital directions will be available. They have never experienced a place where their phone simply does not work. They arrive unprepared.

This is why the reservation system described in Section 2 is so important. The reservation confirmation - with its explicit written warnings and required sign-off - is the mechanism for reaching people before they are in the corridor and before they are in trouble. No amount of

Public Comment - Sweetwater Lake Draft EIS

signage on the road itself is sufficient, because by the time visitors see a "no cell service" sign, they are already committed. The reservation system reaches them days or weeks earlier, at home, when they can still prepare.

5. The Burden Shifted Onto Private Residents

Because there is no cell service and no internet, and because visitors are unprepared for that reality, stranded and distressed travelers routinely arrive at my private doorstep - and the doorsteps of my neighbors - seeking help. We have had people arrive at all hours asking to use our private internet connection and cell service. We have had people arrive seeking emergency communication because they could not reach 911. We have had people arrive with mechanical breakdowns, lost and disoriented, with no maps and no ability to call for assistance.

This creates a deeply unfair and at times frightening situation for private residents. It is not the responsibility of private homeowners to provide 24-hour, 365-day internet and cell connectivity for the public. It is not the responsibility of a generous private party to serve as an emergency communication relay for visitors to public lands. Yet that is exactly what is happening now, at current visitation levels. Some of these encounters are frightening. Strangers arriving at a private residence - sometimes at night, sometimes in distress, sometimes agitated - is not a comfortable or safe experience. Trespassing onto private property to seek help is itself a violation, even when the intent is benign.

A reservation system would directly reduce these encounters by ensuring that visitors arrive prepared, by limiting the number of visitors to a level the corridor can support, and by providing an on-site point of contact so that stranded visitors have somewhere to go other than a private residence. The DEIS must analyze this impact on adjacent private landowners and must not treat it as an externality to be ignored.

6. Trespass, Hunting, Fishing, and Shooting Violations on Private Property

We have personally dealt with numerous incidents of trespass and illegal activity on our private

property, including: people shooting on private property; people shooting ducks on private property; people fishing on private property without permission; hunting infractions on private land; and domestic disputes that spill over from public land onto adjacent private property. These are not isolated incidents. They are recurring problems that we have dealt with personally and repeatedly over many years.

A reservation system would help address these problems by creating a record of who is permitted to be in the area, by providing a communication channel for rules and boundaries (including private property boundaries), and by generating fee revenue for law enforcement patrols. The DEIS must analyze whether the proposed alternatives would increase the frequency of trespass, illegal shooting, illegal fishing, and hunting violations on adjacent private lands, and must require enforcement capacity proportional to projected visitation.

Public Comment - Sweetwater Lake Draft EIS

7. Summary of Recommendations

In summary, I respectfully recommend the following:

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. Select Alternative 3. Adopt the primitive recreation alternative with limited facilities and limited staffing, managed by the Forest Service. Do not add Colorado Parks and Wildlife as a fourth layer of government administration.

Implement a mandatory reservation and permit system. Model it on the proven Hanging Lake system already operating in Garfield County. Require timed-entry permits for all day and overnight use, with a per-person fee, checked on arrival. Use the existing reservation infrastructure - it is already available and funded.

Require visitor sign-off on conditions and risks. At the time of reservation, require every visitor to acknowledge in writing - as a condition of receiving a permit - that there is no cell service for approximately 40 miles, no internet, unimproved roads, limited emergency response, and that they must be self-sufficient for navigation, mechanical issues, and emergencies. This is the most effective way to reach people before they are in the corridor.

Restrict inappropriate vehicles. Communicate vehicle restrictions at the time of reservation - before visitors drive the corridor - so that people with campers, boats, trailers, and oversized vehicles are not turned away after driving 40 miles with no cell service.

Develop a joint emergency response plan. A formal, jointly signed emergency response and coordination plan between Garfield County and Eagle County sheriff, EMS, fire, and search and rescue agencies must be developed before any management plan is finalized. The plan must specify jurisdictional responsibility, dispatch protocols, and target response times.

Fund private-property protection and enforcement. Use reservation fee revenue to fund clear private-property boundary signage, public education about respecting private land, and dedicated law enforcement patrols to address trespass, illegal shooting, illegal fishing, and hunting violations.

Establish adaptive management triggers. Set measurable thresholds - incident counts, trespass complaints, stranded-visitor encounters at private residences, response times - that, if exceeded, trigger mandatory corrective action or visitation cap adjustments.

Public Comment - Sweetwater Lake Draft EIS

I appreciate the opportunity to comment. The Sweetwater area is my home and has been for nearly 30 years. I want responsible, well-managed recreation that protects public safety, respects private property, and does not shift the costs and burdens of public visitation onto the private residents who live here. Alternative 3, combined with a reservation system modeled on Hanging

Lake, is the path that best achieves those goals without adding unnecessary layers of government. I urge the Forest Service to revise the DEIS to incorporate these recommendations before issuing a Record of Decision.