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Comments:

DRAFT EIS Response

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide the public a natural resource-based recreational and educational experience at Sweetwater Lake that is reflective of the culture and history of the area while managing visitation at the appropriate scale for the long-term viability of the 832 acres surrounding the lake and its resources.

Proposed Action

First of I've never understood why the White River National put such a high priority in acquiring the Sweetwater Lake Property? This property has been proposed in two separate Land Exchanges over the last twenty years one involving Piney Valley Ranch and the White River never put a high priority on this one, the Eagle County and Garfield County Commissions came out against it, local and many of the local citizens also were against it. The slogan in Eagle County was "Stop the Swap" and they did.

The Forest Service doesn't usually do land exchanges or purchases with may facilities on the property? If they do acquire they usually tear down, which they are doing in this situation. The Forest Service doesn't have funds to fund their existing facilities, The White River National Forest has been eliminating facilities over the last 10 year and trying sell many others. They have also been tearing out campgrounds because they can't maintain them, Coffee Pot Springs Campground, White Owl Campground, Supply Basin Campground, Klines Folly Campground, Bison Lake Campground, L.E.D.E Reservoir Campground (Which the Town of Gypsum wanted to build a new one with a Special Use Permit, and they were denied.

So what they want to acquire the Sweetwater Lake property, with a small campground and a ton of Facilities that they couldn't operate, unless they had a partner?

Authorize a 20-year special use permit to Colorado Parks and Wildlife, under the Granger-Thye Act, to implement and maintain improvements described below and manage the area consistent with the purpose and need.

For many years the Forest Service has tried to work with the Colorado Parks to run Yeoman Park and Fulford Cave Campground and have other Special Uses but they were not able to meet some of the FS special use regulations. One being that the Forest Service requires the permittee to co insure the Forest Service and the State is self-insured and could not meet that requirement. Wondering what has changed in the clauses especially the Co-Insurance? What kind of changes did both parties have to change to meet requirements of a Special Use Permit?

After L.E.D.E. Reservoir Campground, South of the Town of Gypsum was removed the Town of Gypsum proposed to rebuild the campground and operate the campground under a Special Use Permit and the White River National Forest said this could not be done.

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is designed to maintain or improve the recreational opportunities that have previously existed at Sweetwater Lake, minimize user conflict and impacts on natural resources, and maximize the experience of multiple user groups. To achieve this, the Proposed Action would distribute different uses across the proposed SUP area into eight distinct zones within the 846-acre Project area. A summary of the Proposed Action zones is provided below.

*Development of a new Sweetwater Lodge within the Sweetwater Lodge Zone. The primary objective of this zone would be to provide visitors with a central, primary location for information and guest services.

I don't understand, if the proposed action is to maintain or improve the recreational opportunities that have previously existed and in came up in all the public input that a restaurant was wanted in never showed up in any alternative. From the first hotel in 1880 that Marks and Root had they had a restaurant and there has been one ever since. I would like an explanation

Why a restaurant has not been considered? Other Resorts around the Flat Tops such as Trappers Lake has a restaurant an operate under a Special Use Permit.

Where did the need for educational experience come from I had not here this at any of the public meetings or comments from the public? The only time I heard this from a Forest Service Staff member mention this was how the Forest Service would mitigate the tearing down of the historic structures they would put up signs to relate this to the public.

*Creation of two Day Use Zones: the North Day Use Zone, located on the northeast shore of the lake, and the South Day Use Zone, located where the existing Forest Service campground is currently situated. The primary objectives of these zones would be to provide lake access for watercraft users and to offer amenities close to the lakeshore for day use visitors.

I think it is a very good idea to have to Day Use area if both areas have a dock to provide boat access to the lake. In the late 90's for early 2000's the Forest Service responded to another National Recreation Initiative and The Forest proposed and designed new Facilities at Sweetwater Lake with a 20-unit campground, including horse camping sites and a new boat to replace the old one. This was all located where the existing campground and day use areas. The only thing they accomplished was tearing out the existing boat dock with plans to replace! . There is still a copy of the Site Plan in the Forest Supervisor's office in Glenwood Springs. They were prepared by the Forest's Landscape Architect and the employee that took the lead in this Plan is the same retired employee that conducted the initial plan for this proposal. hat came up with the initial plan for this proposal. The existing campground was the initial site for the 1st ranger station and campground for Sweetwater Lake. I did not find any mention of the DEIS?

September 12, 1919 - The Eagle Valley Enterprise - GOVERNMENT IMPROVEMENTS AT SWEETWATER LAKE

The U.S. government recreation department is doing a great deal of work in the Rocky Mountain section to make the out of the way places in the mountains accessible to the tourist, and attractive. Following this policy the national forest is making extensive improvements at Sweetwater lake, one of the best fishing resorts in this region.

Four commodious shelter cabins are being erected, a five-room cottage for the use of the resident forest ranger, and a bridge across the outlet of the lake. The cabins will be provided with fire places and be excellent camping places for parties of tourists. Next year the county will build a bridge across the Grand rive near the mouth of Sweetwater creek to connect with the new Trail gulch road now being guilt into Gypsum, so that this lake will be more easily reached than at present.

The state has made an appropriation for a fish hatchery to be built at Sweetwater Lake, also.

The ranger station now located at Burns will be transferred to Sweetwater as soon as the new administrative buildings are completed.

Providing Horse access camping and access to the trails on the South side of the lake would take pressure off of the Flattops Wilderness, unlike the Keep Ditch Trailhead that would provide another parallel access trail to Turret Creek and Johnny Meyers trails and an undefined cut across trail to the Ute Trail.

I don't understand the closing the Sweetwater Lake and surrounding areas to snowmobile use during the winter months when it would be access to ice fishing and access to the South side up toward Sweetwater Cow Camp and the Coburn Rim and the Deep Lake area. This would also eliminate conflicts on parking on the Cow Camp 7W road. This area is within a 5. 4 Area Prescription - Forested Flora and Fauna

*Development of an Administrative Zone containing maintenance facilities, equipment storage, and workforce housing necessary to allow for adequate year-round management and maintenance of the proposed SUP area.

*Creation of a Campground Zone north of Sweetwater Road/County Road 150 containing up to 20 campsites.

The objective of this zone would be to provide three-season developed camping opportunities while concentrating overnight camping away from the lakeshore.

There shouldn't be any development North of County Road 150, neither the Keep Ditch Trailhead, Administrative sites or campsites., with the exception of the area around the Sweetwater Guard Station for the following reasons:

Soil Instability - Geologic Hazards at the Sweetwater Lake Property

December 2023

by Karen Houck, University of Colorado Denver

Landslides and Debris Flows

Landslides and debris flows probably have the greatest potential to affect the Sweetwater Lake property, as the slopes around the park are literally covered with them. They originate mostly in the weak, clay-rich shales of the Belden Formation and the Eagle Valley Evaporite. They have a distinctive hummocky topography that can be easily seen on LiDAR imagery. In the photo below, taken northeast of the dam, the hummocky area above the tan rocks on the left side of the photo is part of a large landslide. Another part of that landslide came to rest in the Sweetwater Creek valley, forming the dam that created Sweetwater Lake.

Landslides are more numerous on the southwest side of the lake because the bedrock in and around it is tilted gently to the northeast. However, there is also a large and concerning complex of landslides and debris flows on the northeast side of the property. In the photo below, it can be seen above and to the left of the dam. Most of the complex consists of landslides, but heavy rainstorms have washed mud out of the landslide deposits and into drainages to produce debris flows. The bright green area of gambol oak above and to the left of the restaurant is a debris fan composed of amalgamated debris flows.

ON-006-01 Colorado Landslide Inventory Map - Sweetwater Lake , CO, USA - Shows all the slopes on the North side of County Road 150 to be extremely hazardous (I've attached the map)

The Keep Ditch would be Hazardous to use as an duplicate trail to access the Flattops Wilderness to the instability of the soils. This ditch has breach numerous times over the years as well as other ditches in the area such as the Sweetwater ditch above the Hill top Trail head. Sections of the ditches have been piped but still continue to fail. You just need to take a looked off the Keep Ditch into Turret Creek and see the debris, including pipe. The public on this ditch could be hazardous.

Second reason for no Development north of the County Road it is it is adjacent to a 5.41 Deer and elk Winter Range Forest Plan Prescription .

Theme being Deer and elk winter ranges are managed to provide adequate amounts of quality forage, cover and solitude for deer, elk and other species.

Human activities are managed so that deer and elk can effectively use the area.

Opportunities to view wildlife are high, especially in the winter; however, such use is not encouraged. All activities should limit disturbance so that deer and elk may use the area during the winter and spring.

Third reason is the danger of wildfires - locating Campsites, trailheads, and at the base of a steep oak brush hill side.

*Construction of a Cabin Zone located immediately west of Sweetwater Lodge and containing up to 12 cabins in a mix of cabins with basic heat and electricity utilities and others with potable water and sewer. The objective of this zone would be to provide year-round opportunities for a primitive, Architectural Barriers Act (ABA)-accessible overnight experience.

*Construction of an Equestrian Zone containing horse trailer parking spaces, an overnight equestrian camping area, an equestrian outfitter/concessionaire facility, and trails. The objective of this zone would be to separate equestrian use from other recreational uses and provide designated access to the Flat Tops Wilderness for both equestrians and hikers/backpackers.

For the same reasons above for the soil instability, this should not be constructed north of the County Road.

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

Impacts to Wilderness Access

The Proposed Action introduces a new trailhead, the Keep Ditch Trailhead, and a new trail, the Keep Ditch Trail,

designed to enhance equestrian and hiking/backpacking access from the Project area to the Flat Tops Wilderness. This new infrastructure would offer new and alternate wilderness access points for visitors, thereby changing existing use patterns. The Keep Ditch Trail, approximately 1.5 miles in length, would follow Keep Ditch and connect to the existing Turret Creek Trail #1832. A connector trail would link the Keep Ditch Trail to the Ute-Sweetwater Trail #2032. This would enhance access to the Flat Tops Wilderness.

The Proposed Action also includes the construction of up to 8 horse trailer parking spaces for overnight and day use, as well as 8 parking spaces for outfitter customers, within the Equestrian Zone. At the Keep Ditch Trailhead, up to 6 parking spaces would be constructed. These new parking facilities are intended to provide improved access to the Flat Tops Wilderness, accommodating more visitors who wish to park in these areas and journey into the wilderness using the connector trails. A fee may be charged for utilizing this parking.

Impacts to Wilderness Characteristics

Alternative 2 is projected to increase visitation, which may negatively affect the wilderness characteristic "has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation." A greater number of visitors to the nearby Flat Tops Wilderness will likely lead to more frequent encounters among users. This effect is expected to be most pronounced at the Wilderness boundary closest to the Project area, where accessibility is improved for day users and those staying overnight in cabins and campgrounds at Sweetwater Lake.

The impacts to solitude under the Proposed Action are anticipated to be more significant compared to Alternative 1. Ultimately, the Proposed Action would preserve an "essentially unmodified" wilderness character, with only a few areas experiencing moderate concentrations of use where natural conditions may be affected by visitor actions. Alternative 2 would remain consistent with Forest Plan direction. While precise predictions of additional wilderness users in the Project area are challenging, estimates suggest that the Proposed Action could result in up to 5 times as many users in the Project area. However, not all of these users would enter the Wilderness itself. Currently, average group encounters are about 1 per day; under the Proposed Action, it is expected that group encounters within the wilderness would remain below Forest Plan standards of 12 parties per day on 80 percent of days.

3.12.4 Cumulative Effects

Recreational improvements within the Project area and in the areas surrounding Flat Tops Wilderness, as well as population increases and the increasing popularity of outdoor recreation, have contributed to, and are expected to continue contributing to, an increase in visitation to the Flat Tops Wilderness. Cumulatively, an increase in visitation to the Flat Tops Wilderness is anticipated to impact opportunities for solitude within the Flat Tops Wilderness. Should management actions become necessary to control visitation to the Flat Tops Wilderness to meet Forest Plan standards, these actions would be considered in a separate, future NEPA analysis.

3.12 Wilderness

The following wilderness analysis summarizes the Wilderness Technical Memorandum prepared for this Project.¹⁵³ Definitions of short- and long-term effects are provided at the beginning of this chapter. Refer to the memorandum for more information regarding the regulatory framework, methods, and other analysis findings.

The Project area is proximate to the Flat Tops Wilderness, a congressionally designated wilderness area. The Project area does not overlap the Flat Tops Wilderness, but does overlap Sweetwater Road/County Road 150, which is the only road providing public access to the Hilltop Trailhead. The Hilltop Trailhead is located outside of the Project area and is a public access point to the Flat Tops Wilderness (Figure 3-19). Project actions have the potential to indirectly impact the Flat Tops Wilderness by altering access and visitation to the wilderness, which may alter its wilderness characteristics.

3.12.2 Direct and Indirect Environmental Consequences

As the Flat Tops Wilderness and the Project area do not overlap, no direct effects from the Project would occur to the Flat Tops Wilderness. However, some indirect effects may occur to the wilderness characteristics of the Flat

Tops Wilderness due to increased visitation to the Project area and enhanced access to the Flat Tops Wilderness.

*Construction of an Equestrian Zone containing horse trailer parking spaces, an overnight equestrian camping area, an equestrian outfitter/concessionaire facility, and trails. The objective of this zone would be to separate equestrian use from other recreational uses and provide designated access to the Flat Tops Wilderness for both equestrians and hikers/backpackers.

*Creation of an Interpretive/Education Zone on the lakeshore with interpretive signage and restored/preserved existing buildings. The objective of this zone would be to educate visitors on the unique history and background of the area, including the use of the area by the Ute people, geology, paleontology, natural resources, and other historic uses.

*Designation of an Environmentally Sensitive Area Zone containing an extensive wetland complex from Sweetwater Creek to the lake inlet and cliff bands along the southwestern shore of the lake.

Other improvements to the Project area would include: development of a cave management plan for Sweetwater Cave; improvement of lake access and use; creation of hiking and equestrian trails; upgrades to the Keep Ditch irrigation system; removal of nine existing structures; and implementation of various resource protection measures. Broader strategies for managing recreation impacts would be addressed through a separate Visitor Use Management Plan (VUMP). The VUMP would establish thresholds and indicators for managing resource impacts and visitor experience. Adaptive management strategies would be triggered if those thresholds are exceeded.

The Proposed Action would include a forest-wide Forest Plan amendment to designate the entire 846-acre proposed SUP area, including the approximately 433 acres of newly acquired private land and the 413 acres of existing NFS lands, as a new MA. The new MA 8.22 - State or Local Government Managed Developed Recreation Areas would provide management direction for recreation areas that are located on NFS lands but managed in collaboration with a state or local government entity. For this Project, the state entity would be CPW. Proposed Action developments are shown in Figure 2-2.

Forest Plan

Guideline 2-38

5. Manage recreation use to stay within an area's capacity as determined by a forest-wide capacity analysis. Site-specific capacity analysis will be completed when the forest wide analysis does not meet management needs.

No where is the A Demonstration of Carrying Capacity Determination on the Eagle Ranger District, The Flat tops wilderness Area, White river Nation Forest October 1984 mentioned in this the Draft EIS to determine the impacts on each Compartment. This document was to be used to determine capacity in all the Compartments in the Flattops.

3.3 Heritage

3.3.1 Scope of the Analysis

The following heritage analysis summarizes the Class III Cultural Resource Inventory of the Sweetwater Lake Recreation Management and Development Project in Garfield County, Colorado (hereinafter referred to as the Heritage Report).^{15,16} The Area of Potential Effect (APE) for the heritage analysis is the 846-acre Project area. A field survey of the APE was conducted in September 2025. Of the 846-acre APE, 330 acres were surveyed at the Class III level, 250 acres were inventoried at the Class II level, and 266 acres were excluded.

Sweetwater Lake Property History

Following the issuance of land patents in the 1890s, the Sweetwater Lake property quickly transitioned from a remote outpost to a prominent regional destination for hunting and fishing, after various patent owners-built structures and promoted recreational activities in the area. Throughout the early 20th century, the site evolved through various iterations of commercial resorts and dude ranches, supported by the development of wagon and

automobile roads to improve public and agricultural access. Despite periodic setbacks, including a contentious period of restricted private access in the 1920s, a long history of various private landowners, and a major fire in 1955 that destroyed the original lodge, the property was repeatedly revitalized through facility modernizations and land consolidations. Sometime after 1955, the property was parceled out and sold to various landowners. The properties were repurchased by Frederick Anderson during the 1960s, who consolidated the area into the Sweetwater Lake Resort.¹⁷

17 Services In 1975, the resort was purchased by Adrienne Brink, who owned the property until the Forest Service acquired it in 2021.

This description of Sweetwater Lake's 136 -year history is an incomplete and poorly researched account Sweetwater Lake.

May 25, 1889 - The Rocky Mountain Sun

Messrs. E. B. Dempsey and C. Frederick will run an eating place at Sweetwater lake this season. The boys have ft good two-story log building to commence operations in.

From the First white men who ever winter on its bank were John Root, Hi Marks and Tom Coburn, three hardy trappers and hunters who came from Pueblo County in search of hides and furs. (Rocky Mountain News Sept 8, 1890)

August 5, 1896

July 18, 1902 - The Herald Democrat

Sweetwater Summer Resort

Located on the Sweetwater, Garfield .County, Colorado. This resort ls 20 miles by stage from Gypsum. Colo., on the D. & R. G. This is one of the finest hunting and fishing regions in the west. Mountain trout, deer. elk. grouse and ducks in abundance. The Sweetwater Lake is one mile long by one-half mile wide, and the fishing is grand. Fine boating, first-class hotel accommodations. Rates \$2 per day. I have my own stage line. Post office address, Gypsum, Colo. Geo D. Machin. manager.

June 5, 1910, The Herald Democrat Advertisement

SWEETWATER LAKE HOTEL

Sweetwater lake is one of The famous fishing places of the state. Hotel accommodations excellent; rates by day, week or month very reasonable. Particulars address FRANK. VAN PELT, Prop'r .Address Sweetwater Lake Hotel, GYPSUM, Colo.

January 1, 1910 The Hearald Demoncrat,

The hotel is run by Tom Chipman, a pioneer of the county since "82, and he supplies the traveler with an excellent bed and three well-cooked meals daily, with all the fresh eggs, butter, milk and cream that one can desire. He is ably assisted in conducting the hotel by Mrs. Davenport, who is an excellent cook and takes delight in making the guest feel at home from the time they jump from the wagon until they leave. The charges are very reasonable. Those who want sport should go to Sweetwater lake.

August 4, 1911, Eagle County Blade Aug 4, 1911 Impressions of Sweetwater Lake -The accommodations at the hotel are of the best, no running water in your room but a good clean, comfortable bed, and plenty to eat and well-cooked which is a sportsman desire. Two weeks of jolly sport was enjoyed by the small party: many photographs were taken, as without them we could not forget the wonderful place and the good time.

January 19, 1912 - The Eagle Valley Enterprise

Sweetwater

The Sweetwater skating rink is in fine shape. It is five miles long, but the trouble is it is right on top of the wagon road. The ranchmen think all that is necessary to keep their horses sharp shod but several have failed to connect up to date. So far there have been several horses crippled and more cut and scarred up by breaking through the ice. Now the Sweetwater horses look like old veteran war horses. If the farmers would put skates on their horses they might get along better. We understand the honorable board of county commissioners are contemplating a visit to Sweetwater. _Better bring along your skates and a good appetite_, for we are all good feeders as long as the hay and porkers hold out.

The first Ranger Station and Campground September 12, 1919 (The Eagle Valley Enterprise)

The visit of Arthur Carhart Recreation Engineer to Sweetwater Lake (the same year he visited Trappers Lake) and wrote to the Regional Forester. My 28, 1919, "Perhaps three-fifths of the lake shore is owned privately. But we can preserve an area where the public can go to the lake, beach, canon, waterfall, fishing and cave without having to cross privately owned land.it is my opinion that we should reserve that area we hold on the banks of the lake against all comers and that if the whole block in which this situation is necessary as part of the ranger station so that there never can be a question but that we are really protectors and conservers of our natural resources in trusted to our care,..."

The 1st Ranger Station was built where the existing campground is located and when the new Ranger Station was built in its existing location, the original station was moved to the private land and the owners used it as one of the cabin rentals.

May 20, 1920 The Avalanche- Echo

RILAND-SWEETWATER

Paul Gregg, of the Denver Post, who purchased three ranches near Sweetwater lake last fall came in Thursday to work on it

August 5, 1922 - ARTHUR H. CARHART - Cattle grazing in the forests, mining within the boundaries, timber cutting for permanent production and good utilization of water power are unquestioned resources of a community that is near them in the National Forests. The obligation of the Forest Service to see that these are properly developed and fully utilized is recognized by both the Service and the local communities. Recreation is just as much a resource in a community as any of these mentioned. It is in fact one of the most important industries of many communities in the National Forest sections of Colorado. Up to the present time, there has not been the attention given to this activity that it merits. It is not handled by either communities or the Forest Service on a basis which is comparable with the other industries that depend on forest territory.

May 21, 1926- The Eagle Valley Enterprise -

Diamond Jack Antery [Alterie] and associates, for the past two years connected with the Moonlight Ranch near Denver, last week completed the purchase of the Paul Gregg holdings at Sweetwater Lake. Mr. Antery [Alterie] contemplates the erection of a seven thousand dollar hotel at this picturesque resort and his bid will be for big game rather than the small fry. He plans to make the place attractive to millionaires.

November 3, 1939 - The Eagle Valley Enterprise

At the lake the Chockies have purchased the old ranger cabin at the foot of the lake, and Sunday finished moving it onto their own land, and during the winter will fit it up as a camp cabin for next summer's business. The Forest service has established a modern camp site at the foot of the lake on the former ranger station administration site.

April 21, 1955 - The Eagle Valley Enterprise

Sweetwater Lake Lodge, destroyed last week by fire, had its origin about 50 years ago, with a two-room log cabin built atop the knoll overlooking beautiful Sweetwater Lake

The first lodge at the lake was built at the lower end of the lake by two men identified to the writer only as the Baer Brothers from Leadville., who later sold to Sawyer and Buck, St. Louis bankers, who decided to build on *top of the knoll. A two room log building was decided upon and a contract was let to Monroe Stout, Gene Keep and John Root.

The eastern bankers made their home at the lake during the summer then sold to the LNT Cattle Co- and John Green took over as manager.

Other familiar names connected with Sweetwater Hotel either in owner status or that of manager are Jap Anderson, Mr. Langford, Bill Galpin.

Probably among the best remembered owners is Paul Gregg, late Denver Post artist, who employed that famous old chef- Mike Calvick. Gregg sold to Diamond Jack Alterie-a Chicago gunman, then later took the hotel tack and John Green returned to operate the fishing and hunting lodge. Following Green' were Mr. and Mrs. Gene Keep and Ed Godat, then Mr. and Mrs. Joe Chockie.

Mrs Gregg later sold to Mr. and Mrs Henry Hartz, who in turn sold to Mr. and Mrs John Collins of Glenwood Mr- and Mrs Phil King of Midland, Tex- bought the property about two years ago' and are the present owners.

The fire, of undetermined origin, destroyed the main lodge and a small cabin in back. Seven cabins along the lake were not touched by the fire.

November 7, 1963 - SWEETER LAKE LODGE SOLD

Sweetwater Lake Lodge and property has been sold by Mr. and. Mrs. Phil King to a group of Denver and Dallas, Tex. business men. It is understood the operation will continue as in the past.

June 7, 1984 p The Eagle Valley Enterprise

Sweetwater Lake Reopens

Jim and Adriane Brink have leased Sweetwater Lake Resort and have opened the cabins and boats for business. The restaurant and horse rides should begin shortly. The Brinks are from Kansas, but have been guides and outfitters in Colorado for ten years. Jim will continue his outfitting business with the lake as a home base. They have two children, Aura, 16 months, and Cy, 2 1/2 years. They say that the fishing has been good and there was quite a crowd up there Memorial Day weekend. Some of their employees include Sam Carr, his daughter Ida Case from Kansas, Sherry Peterson from Missouri, Merrilee Hohnholz from Laramie River, Jo Hotle from Iowa, John Hinkle from Kentucky and Linda from Eagle. Adriane's parents, Morton and Pat Gradis from Glenwood Springs are also helping. The community is certainly pleased to see the lake open again and we wish the Brinks much success.

June 21, 1984 The Eagle Valley Enterprise

Restaurant Opens

The restaurant al the Sweetwater Lake Resort is open for business! They serve breakfast, lunch and dinner seven days per week. Their hours are 7 a.tn. to 8 p.m. The Brinks have applied for a liquor license. Dinners include steaks, hamburgers. trout and daily specials Adriane reports fishing is good al the Lake.

Survey Inventory Results

The 2025 cultural inventory for the Project resulted in the recordation of eighteen cultural resources, including 4 previously recorded sites, 7 newly recorded sites, and 7 isolated finds. Of these sites and isolated finds, Site 5GF6090 (Sweetwater Lake Historical District), Site 5GF5734 (Historical Sweetwater Lake Resort), and Segment 5GF6091.1 (Historic Sweetwater Road) are recommended as eligible for inclusion into the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and are described in greater detail below.¹⁸ Sites and finds not recommended as eligible for inclusion in the NRHP are not discussed in detail in this Draft EIS.

Sweetwater Lake Historical District (Site 5GF6090)

Site 5GF6090 (Sweetwater Lake Historical District) is a newly established historical district around the previously recorded historical Sweetwater Lake Resort within the northwest-southeast oriented valley that contains Sweetwater Lake. The property encompasses 488 acres and is located entirely on NFS land. The built environment of the district includes constructed buildings, structures, and features. Extensive vegetation clearing is also evident around the resort area (Site 5GF5734), which was completed to make space for the buildings, features, and structures of the resort. There are also several pastures on the northeastern side of the lake, and several recreational foot and horseback trails for guest use. Modern landscaping at the site includes the construction of a dam in 2004 at the outlet of Sweetwater Creek to keep the lake filled for recreational and irrigation purposes.

The property has been moderately impacted by recreation use of the area, as well as continued maintenance and updates to the Sweetwater Lake Resort area and the campground on the southeastern end of the lake. The district is recommended as eligible for inclusion in the NRHP under Criterion A and C.

Historical Sweetwater Lake Resort (Site 5GF5734)

Site 5GF5734 (Historical Sweetwater Lake Resort) has been previously recorded and is located along the northeastern side of Sweetwater Lake. Historic Sweetwater Road (Segment 5GF6091.1) crosses through the northern portion of the site, and several maintained dirt roads run through the middle of the site between the various buildings. The site is recommended as contributing to Sweetwater Lake Historical District's eligibility for inclusion in the NRHP.

Historic Sweetwater Road (Segment 5GF6091.1)

Segment 5GF6091.1 (Historic Sweetwater Road) is a newly recorded segment of Sweetwater Road along the northern side of Sweetwater Lake at the bottom of a northwest-southeast-trending valley between Sweetwater Lake and W Mountain. The road is regularly maintained, graded, and appears to be frequently used by both vehicles and horses. This segment is recommended as eligible for inclusion in the NRHP under Criterion C.

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

Sweetwater Lake Historical District (Site 5GF6090)

As discussed previously, the Sweetwater Lake Historic District is recommended as eligible for inclusion in the NRHP under Criterion A and C. Under the Proposed Action, the district would undergo a comprehensive renovation. This would involve the removal or disturbance of several contributing elements including: 10 buildings [building 1 (Barn), buildings 5-11 (Hartz, Miller, Clayton, Yellow House, Motel, Lodge, and Boat House), and building 13 (Hilltop)], 13 features, 1 structure, and 1 artifact concentration within the resort area (Site 5GF5734), as well as portions of Keep Ditch (Site 5GF2934).

Removal of the 10 buildings would result in an adverse impact to the district. Because the Proposed Action would not avoid these structures, this alternative incorporates measures to minimize the loss of historic integrity of the district. These measures include the installation of interpretive and educational displays, as well as the offering of educational opportunities through the lodge classroom space and ranger-led classes. Mitigation must also be developed through the WRNF's ongoing Section 106 consultation process with the SHPO to comply with NHPA requirements, and this mitigation may include, but not be limited to, developing an architectural and historical narrative, measured drawings, and photographs in an archivally stable format. Any mitigation developed as part of the Section 106 process would be disclosed in a future FEIS and/or ROD, if appropriate.

Historical Sweetwater Lake Resort (Site 5GF5734)

As discussed previously, Historical Sweetwater Lake Resort (Site 5GF5734) is recommended as contributing to the District's eligibility for inclusion into the NRHP. Under the Proposed Action, the site would undergo a

comprehensive renovation categorized by the following development zones:

*Development of the Sweetwater Lodge Zone would include construction of a new lodge and parking lot, which would require demolition of building 2 (Williams Bunkhouse) within the site.

*Development of the Day Use Zone would require removal of buildings 8-11 (Yellow House, Motel, Lodge, and Boat House) and potentially features 11-15 (clothesline, brick grill, retaining wall, bridge, and hitching post).

*Development of the Interpretive/Education Zone would require that building 5 (Hartz) be removed, but building 3 (Westlake) and 4 (Gregg) would be preserved.

*Development of the Administrative Zone would require building 13 (Hilltop) to be removed. Additional ground disturbing activities within the Administrative Zone also have the potential to displace and damage the general artifact scatter.

The Proposed Action would include the creation of a new Keep Ditch Trail with the objective of alleviating pressure on the existing Hilltop Trailhead (which accesses NFS Trails 1832, 1854, and 2042), located to the northwest at the end of Sweetwater Road/County Road 150 and outside of the proposed SUP area. This new trail would serve as an additional access point to existing NFS trails for backpackers and equestrian users, as well as to allow for shorter on-site rides and hikes. Parking for up to 6 vehicles would be constructed at the new Keep Ditch trailhead located in the Equestrian zone southwest of the proposed barn/stable, and these 6 spaces would be in addition to the up to 8 horse trailer parking spaces noted above. The new trail would be approximately 1.5 miles long and would follow Keep Ditch to near its confluence with Turret Creek, at which point it could tie in with the existing NFS trail network.

Another proposed connector trail would be constructed connecting the proposed Keep Ditch Trail to the existing Ute-Sweetwater Trail approximately 1 mile to the east. For more information regarding the Keep Ditch to Ute-Sweetwater Connector Trail, refer to the Other Improvements section below.

irrigation

The Keep Ditch currently provides irrigation water to the proposed SUP area from its diversion to the north at Turret Creek. The ditch has experienced several failures, resulting in minor flooding and erosion in several locations along its course. The ditch conveys water approximately 1.25 miles from its headgate at Turret Creek before its first turnout at the upper pasture (i.e., the existing Third Pasture). Four pastures, totaling approximately 46 acres, are currently irrigated within the proposed SUP area by Keep Ditch: Third Pasture, Second Pasture, Nursery Pasture, and Hospital Pasture. Surface and shallow subsurface water runoff from these irrigated pastures flows southwest and downgradient to Sweetwater Road/County Road 150, where it then pools on the road or flows along roadside ditches to culverts that convey the water under the road and toward the lake.

The Proposed Action would convert the Keep Ditch from an open ditch to an irrigation pipeline to improve safety for hikers along the proposed Keep Ditch Trail, reduce irrigation maintenance needs, and prevent failures that could cause flooding and erosion. I

Structure Removal

Under the Proposed Action, 9 existing structures within the proposed SUP area would be removed: the existing lodge/restaurant, existing motel, Yellow House, Clayton Cabin, Brown Cabin/Miller House, Williams Bunkhouse/Caretaker Cabin, Hilltop Cabin, Hartz Cabin, and existing barn. A detailed assessment of each building is documented in the Inspection Report completed by Rocky Mountain Property Inspections, LLC in 2022, available in the project record maintained at the WRNF EHCRD Station.8 A list of these structures and synopsis of the inspection report findings is provided below in Table 2-1. Upon abatement of asbestos-containing materials, the remaining building materials would be demolished and disposed of off-site. Building footprints would be regraded to natural contours and revegetated with a native seed mix when not within an area proposed for site improvements.

CHAPTER 2340 - PRIVATELY PROVIDED RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

2340.3 - Policy

1. Issuance of Authorizations to State, County, or Municipal Agencies for Recreational Improvements.
 - a. Issue special use authorizations for State, County, or Municipal agencies to develop or manage recreational improvements on National Forest System lands for:
 - (1) Lands that over a long period should be dedicated to that purpose, or
 - (2) Lands that could logically be conveyed to State or local governments through land-exchange procedures without detriment to National Forest System administration or programs.
 - b. In either case, National Forest System lands eligible for such use should meet at least two of the following conditions. The lands must be:
 - (1) Tracts adjacent to exterior National Forest System boundaries.
 - (2) Small tracts associated with adjacent, larger tracts managed by other agencies or privately owned that are not suitable for acquisition for National Forest System purposes.
 - (3) Tracts adjacent to lands owned by the agency proposing or applying for the authorization and needed to complete a unit for development as a park or recreation area.
 - c. Although it would be preferable to adhere to the conditions in the preceding paragraphs 1 through 1b(3) for target range authorizations, target ranges may have specific needs for special site conditions, safety zones, and sound buffers that cannot be achieved along exterior boundaries, on small tracts, or adjacent to other privately owned lands. Therefore, consider special use proposals and applications for target ranges not meeting these criteria on a site-specific, case-by-case basis.
2. Denial of Proposals by State, County, or Municipal Agencies for Recreational Improvements. Deny special use permit proposals by State and local agencies proposing to develop parks or recreational areas that do not qualify under the provisions in the preceding paragraphs 1(1)c, except in unusual circumstances or when the authorization is clearly in the public interest. Obtain review and advice of the Chief before approving permits based on these exceptions. Review by the Chief is not required for roadside rest and picnic developments by county or State agencies if no suitable private land or other agency land is available for such purposes.

Redesigning the current site to promote recreational opportunities compatible with capacity, historic us, resources and the surrounding area. The proposed site design would minimize impact to wildlife and natural resources by utilizing those area and lands that have been previously disturbed and would include the following actions.

2341.2 - Planning for Changes in Development and/or Use

When it appears necessary to change development and/or use of an established site, conduct needs assessments and studies, preferably as part of the forest planning process, and, if appropriate, prepare and approve updated site development plans.

Developing sites in the upper pastures which have not been previously disturbed and adjacent to a 5A -Big game winter range is not appropriate and totally against Forest Service Policy.

I don't know if the Forest Service has contacted the Colorado Geological Survey Colorado Landslide Inventory ON-006-01, specifically Sweetwater Lake. The area around Sweetwater Lake has very high potential for Landslides, particularly the area north of the County Road.

When the Forest Service was designing the campground trailhead, parking lots back in the 90's they had planned to put some facilities up around the Ranger Station and a mudslide came of the mountain and put about 2 feet of mud all around the Ranger Station. Forest Service Soil Scientist evaluated the area and say we shouldn't put a public recreation facilities any where near the Ranger Station.

The Forest Service should look at any of the ditches on that hillside, everyone of them, Keep ditch, Turret Creek ditch and Sweetwater ditch have slide off the mountain.

Potentially restoring retained buildings to the historic character of their 1920 to 1940 construction if feasible

I think this is an excellent idea and should be limited to the number of existing buildings and if they can't be restored than a new building should replace the building in a historic construction similar to other building around

the Flat Tops such as Budes and Trappers Lake.

Developing new campground with 15-20 primitive or semi-primitive sites in are known as the lower pasture. Definition of Primitive Opportunity for isolation from man-made sights, sounds, and management controls in an unmodified natural environment. Only facilities essential for resource protection are available. A high degree of challenge and risk are present. Visitors use outdoor skills and have minimal contact with other users or groups. Motorized use is prohibited.

Definition of ROS Semi-primitive motorized Some opportunity for isolation from man-made sights, sounds, and management controls in a predominantly unmodified environment. Opportunity to have a high degree of interaction with the natural environment, to have moderate challenge and risk and to use outdoor skills. Concentration of visitors is low, but evidence of other area users is present. On-site managerial controls are subtle. Facilities are provided for resource protection and the safety of users. Motorized use is permitted. This would eliminate the addition of water hookup and electricity at the sites.

This is a good idea but in a bad location these campsites should be in the site of the current campground and not in the lower pasture which has not been disturbed and is adjacent to a the 5A prescription. There should be no development north of the county road. In the late 1990's under direction of the Great American Outdoors the Forest Service designed a 20 unit campground in the location of the existing campground and included horse facilities as well as vehicle camping.

Eric Martin was the Landscape architect on the White River National Forest that designed these facilities and copies of plans are in the Supervisors Office in Glenwood Springs.

Putting the campground in the lower pasture will result in a long distance for campers to travel to get to lake and the majority will probably drive and use the parking in the day use area.

Converting the existing nine-site Forest Service campground to day- use picnic sites.

Existing Forest Service campground should not be converted to day- use facilities but should be replaced with the 20 unit campground that was designed back in the 90's that the design is already done.

Placing a developed campsite at the base of a very steep brush covered hill side that has a history of wildfires does not seem to be a good idea.

Constructing 8 to 12 new cabins to provide an overnight recreation opportunity similar to that which historically existed in the vicinity. These cabins would be constructed with materials and architecture design to provide a "rustic" western character similar to the styles of other cabins and lodges in the Flat tops area of Colorado.

Only new cabins that should be constructed are those need to replace cabins that cannot be restored. These cabins should be constructed with materials and architecture design to provide a "rustic" western character similar to the styles of other cabins and lodges in the Flat tops area of Colorado. 4-5 restored cabins and 8-12 new cabins for a totals of 17 cabin- This would amount to 12 more than Sylvan Lake State Park if you figure 5 per cabin you already have 85 people at one time and possible 25 vehicles.

Construct equestrian facilities in the "middle pasture." Proposed facilities would include barn and stable operation, 4 to 7 overnight equestrian camping sites, and extra day-use parking for equestrian user. This are could also provide overnight parking and access to the surrounding Flat tops wilderness Area. This location is previously disturbed (how was this area previously disturbed) and propose for equestrian facilities to minimize the impact to the natural resources, while separating use between equestrians and other visitors.

The barn and stable operations need to stay in its current (which is already disturbed) and not into the "middle pasture" which is not previously disturbed. Would like an explanation why the Forest Service states that this location is previously disturbed area? The 4 to 7 overnight equestrian camping sites should be located in the current campground and where designed into the 90's design. Extra day-use parking for equestrian users should be located where the current Trailhead is across the Ranger Station.

Evaluated establishing day-use hiking and equestrian trails on the northeast side of the lake. These trails would provide loop trails and connections between the existing Ute Trail. To the new equestrian area and the Keep Ditch Trail. These trails could provide an additional access to the Flat Tops Wilderness Area other than the existing Hilltop trailhead north of the project area. Evaluate establishing trails to a new overlook on the southwest side of the lake to provide an addition scenic overlook of the lake. Evaluate additional trails within the project area to highlight the historical significance of the site and its buildings as part of an interpretive trail system or provide other recreational opportunities.

This is the second proposal to provide additional access to the Flat Tops Wilderness the other being in the proposal to move the equestrian facilities into the "middle pasture" all closer to the wilderness. In all the meetings I have attended not once has the Forest Service or Colorado state have mentioned impacts to the Flat tops Wilderness. I would like to see some analysis of these impacts and how it relates to the Capacity Studies for each compartment. Moving the trailhead to the existing trails and providing a connect to the trail system on southside of the lake would provide a better opportunity and no impact to the Flat Tops Wilderness.

Creating several new access points to the lake, likely near the existing Forest Service campground and the northeastern shore, and improving the current access point and boat dock.

Excellent idea my first suggestion would be to replace the dock at the existing Campground that the Forest Service tore out prematurely back in the 90's with the promise to replace it when all the money came for the America Great Outdoors, which never came. There a design the Eagle / Holy Cross office for this boat dock. Constructing a new lodge building with administrative, educational, and interpretive spaces to enhance the visitor experience through its amenities and services. This new lodge building may offer small-scale food service capabilities such as a small coffee and pie shop or limited prepackage food offerings that would align with Forest Service policies (would like to see what these policies are) for providing food service on National Forest System lands while not necessitating an increase in wastewater accommodation. The construction of a group picnic site with a possible food truck or mobile kitchen parking will also be explored in this area for small events or day-to-day operations.

Construction a new lodge building should be constructed with materials and architecture design to provide a "rustic" western character similar to the styles of other cabins and lodges in the Flat Tops area such as Budes and Trappers Lake of Colorado

I would like to see what these Forest Service policies are for providing food service on National Forest System lands that limit them offer small-scale food service capabilities such as a small coffee and pie shop or limited prepackage food offerings. Budes and Trappers Lake Lodges offer full dining services.

2343.4 - Restaurants, Cafes, and Other Food Services

1. Authorize Concessioners to provide food services at dining rooms, coffee shops, lunch counters, and temporary, quick-lunch counters that are a part of a resort operation.
2. Authorize Concessioners to provide restaurant, cafe, or other food service facilities as separate enterprises only where there is an overriding public need for such facilities.
3. Disapprove applications to sell prepared or packaged food in Forest Service campgrounds and picnic grounds.

Closing the wetlands and the historic pasture in the wetlands north of the lake to human entry because of their importance to wildlife.

This area has been accessed by fishermen from the county road with permission forever, wondering what impacts have caused the closing to human entry? I agree it should not be used as a pasture. Like to have this address by the FS hydrologist. What wildlife would be impacted and what seasons?

Creating maintenance facilities, equipment storage, and personnel housing appropriate for site for site management and maintenance.

It would be interesting to compare the impacts to the upper pastures that this proposal is planning to the impacts that the private land proposal to the upper pasture? Which I believe was a golf course.

The proposed action may require amending the forest plan. The project areas currently bounding the newly purchase property includes Management Area 5.41 - Deer and Elk Winter Range to the north and Management Area 5.4 - forested flora and Fauna Habitats to the south. Land acquisitions to the National Forest System generally adopt the adjacent management area prescription. The proposed action will be evaluated for forest plan consistency to determine the need for a plan amendment which could require modifications to some plan components or to the plan content.

If Land acquisitions to the National Forest System generally adopt the adjacent management area prescription why is the Forest Service proposing the developed of areas north of the County Road in the pastures which are adjacent to Management Area 5.41 - Deer and elk Winter Range!!!! I think it definitely require amending the Forest Plan !

History

Arthur Carhart a US Forest Service Official (Recreation Engineer) was one of the first to realize the importance conservation and became a nationally recognized authority on conservation practice. In 1919, Carhart surveyed a road in the White River National Forest, near Trappers Lake for the Forest Service. Upon completion of the survey, he decided that the land should be preserved as wilderness.

That same year Carhart wrote a letter to the Regional Forester - Mr. Stahl in regard to Sweetwater Lake after reviewing the Lake for a new Ranger Station and Campground.

"Recreation is recognized as a major use of the forest. Preservation is the first great care that comes with this activity. For unless we preserve natural scenic beauty and make it accessible to the public we will be in a position where we will have nothing to offer."

September 12, 1919 - The Eagle Valley Enterprise - GOVERNMENT IMPROVEMENTS AT SWEETWATER LAKE

The U.S. government recreation department is doing a great deal of work in the Rocky Mountain section to make the out of the way places in the mountains accessible to the tourist, and attractive. Following this policy the national forest is making extensive improvements at Sweetwater lake, one of the best fishing resorts in this region.

Four commodious shelter cabins are being erected, a five-room cottage for the use of the resident forest ranger, and a bridge across the outlet of the lake. The cabins will be provided with fire places and be excellent camping places for parties of tourists. Next year the county will build a bridge across the Grand river near the mouth of Sweetwater creek to connect with the new Trail gulch road now being built into Gypsum, so that this lake will be more easily reached than at present.

The state has made an appropriation for a fish hatchery to be built at Sweetwater Lake, also.

The ranger station now located at Burns will be transferred to Sweetwater as soon as the new administrative buildings are completed.

*Development of the area should start on limited bases. In the mid-nineties the Forest Service planned on an expansion of the developed recreation facilities at Sweetwater Lake under a new Recreation Initiative. Plans were to increase the size of the existing Campground to a 20 unit campground (100 People at one time) with horse-camping facilities. The camping facilities were brought off the lake shore and tiered up behind the existing facilities. There are copies of these plans in the White River National Landscape Architects Flat Files in the Glenwood Office. (Designed by Eric Martin).

Also designed trailhead facilities for horseback users, where the existing TH is located below with some facilities around the guard station.

A Hiker trailhead was proposed below the McComber place where existing horse users currently park and moving the existing parking at the Hilltop to this location. This would restrict vehicle off a very dangerous part of the road and lessen the conflicts with private land owner at the trailhead. The Hilltop TH has very limited space and Forest Service nor does the County maintain this section on a regular bases.

*Development of this area will have a high impact on the Flattops wilderness. Currently the Flat tops wilderness is one of the lowest used wildernesses in Colorado and developing easier access and better facilities will impact it greatly!

*I don't feel developing any facilities on the north side of the County road would be of any benefit due the loss of pasture for the horse outfitter, who cannot maintain this operation without the pasture. The pastures good be irrigated and grazed in the summer season for horse and left for the wildlife after mid- September.

Also the soils reports show that this whole side of the valley from the Guard Station all the way up to Wet Sweetwater has very unstable soils. This area has a history of mud slides. When the FS proposed putting developed facilities in this area the soils reports the area was too big a hazard.

*There is also an opportunity for snowmobile access into the Onion Ridge which is currently accessed from the area below Sweetwater Cow Camp. There is an existing road that goes out of the campground up to the Cow Camp and this would be a better Trailhead than along the cow Camp road.

Application for Land and Water Conservation Funds

CULTURAL: Acquiring this property will allow the USFS to partner with the Southern Ute Indian Tribe of Colorado, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe of Colorado, and Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation on several unique interpretive opportunities to include: the history of the Nuche (Ute people) and their use of the area, as well as providing input on the future restoration and management of the well-known Sweetwater Cave. Acquiring the property will allow interpretation of the unique history of Sweetwater such as the early Forest Service Outpost, tales of former resident Chicago Mobster-Diamond Jack, and the history of backcountry guides such as AJ Brink Outfitters.

EXPANDED PUBLIC RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES: The project will preserve the scenic integrity of the Sweetwater Lake area. Currently, the Forest Service owns a small portion of the lake and shoreline with a nine-unit campground. This purchase will allow for updating and expanding to accommodate more visitors. Six trails accessible from or near the property including the Ute Trail #2031, #2032, Cross Creek Trail #1855, Turret Creek Trail #1832, Sweetwater Trail #1854, and Shingle Peak Trail #2042. It will provide new access for variety of boating, fishing, hunting, watching wildlife, picnicking, camping, biking, hiking, horseback riding, and snowmobiling. Motorized access to and through the property will be maintained along the County Road 150. **RESILIENCY NOT FRAGMENTATION.** Keeping these lands in open space will contribute to climate change resiliency by preventing fragmentation and potential development. Consolidating ownership of these lands will facilitate animal movement and secure migration patterns, improving the ability of wildlife to adapt to climate change. The current owners had plans for a large-scale housing development, golf course, and water bottling facility. If not acquired by the United States, future owners could propose similar developments. This project will protect significant aquatic habitat, including the 77-acre lake and approximately 49 acres of wetlands and streams. Protection of this property allows for connected habitat across the Forest and the nearby Flat Tops Wilderness.

Proposal/Tract Location (Forced Ranking):

The tract is a private inholding within the White River National Forest. The Forest Plan management areas for this property include deer and elk winter range, forested flora and fauna, and is within one mile of the boundary of the Flat Tops Primitive Wilderness Area. The property is located within a network of Colorado Inventoried Roadless Areas and is surrounded by the "Sweetwater A" Colorado Inventoried Roadless Area.

The lake and surrounding property has been the heart of the Sweetwater Community for over a century. It has been a gathering place for ranchers, retirees, young families and workers. Their homes are located far apart on the Sweetwater Creek, on a nearby county road, and along the Colorado River. It has been an opportunity for connection and interaction.