

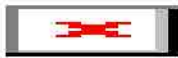
From: Brey - DNR, Jacob
Sent: Fri, 12 Nov 2021 14:46:12 -0700
To: Doak, Richard - FS;Kacie Miller - DNR;Peterson, Paula -FS;Bergen Tjossem;Angela Rubalcaba - DNR;Pierce, Jared - FS
Subject: Sweetwater consideration memo
Attachments: Sweetwater_Lake_Site_Layout_Comments_JThompson_Nov2021.pdf

Hi Team,

Here's some more information/concerns from staff regarding the recreation planning at Sweetwater. I'd suggest we spend some time Monday diving into the issues being brought up, and formulate a plan for how to consider them as we move forward with planning.

Thanks all-have a good weekend!

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TO: Jacob Brey
FROM: Jeff Thompson – Resource Stewardship Program
SUBJECT: Sweetwater Lake – Concept Site Plan Comments

Jacob - Here are some thoughts on the concept site plan based on the currently available information.

I would like for CPW to have the opportunity to apply our park planning processes at Sweetwater Lake. There is fundamental work that would need to be performed at the property scale to ensure a successful and efficient planning and opening of the park.

This would include:

- Identification of agency roles and responsibilities
- Identification of final park boundary
- Performing resource inventory, condition assessment, and conservation planning at the property scale – ideally ahead of recreation planning. (spring/summer 2022)
 - Vegetation community mapping and condition assessment
 - Weed mapping and management plan
 - Rare plant and plant community surveys
 - Breeding bird and raptor surveys (including for conservation status species and their habitats; forest raptors); raptor monitoring of known nests following CPW protocols
 - Herptile surveys
 - Geo/Paleo surveys and Geologic hazards assessment
 - Cultural resource management planning
 - Bat inventory
 - Camera traps and trail counters
 - Draft Resource Stewardship Plan – identification of resources of conservation value at the property scale, sensitivity zoning, resource management prescriptions
- Creation of a Master Plan – including recreation planning
- Creation of a Park Management Plan

Here are some items for consideration that could help us be successful within our partnership with USFS and Eagle County Land Trust.

1. It is my strong recommendation that the maps of facility layout concepts not be released to the public and that they be managed as if they are in draft form until property scale resource inventories and condition assessments are completed. As a team, we are putting the cart before the horse by creating these illustrations ahead of performing property



specific resource inventories and resource condition assessments, vetting recreation opportunities within the team, and then vetting draft concepts through the public planning process.

If these concepts must be shared with the public, my recommendation is to transform them into recreation management zone maps and clearly emphasize that these illustrations are conceptual. Zone maps would allow us the ability to shift locations if regulatory or conservation actions require location changes. The maps in their current form are too specific on what types of recreation use will occur in specific areas. As we move forward in the planning of the property some uses may be deemed inappropriate for certain areas or for the entire property.

Primary concerns are in the illustration of the west side development. We have very little information on what resources exist in this area and what the condition of the resources in this area are.

- Location of trails and the trail system – consider seasonal closures (raptor nesting - reference CPW raptor buffer document; winter ranges – consult with CPW wildlife managers/reference Building Trails with Wildlife in Mind 2020), soil type, potential rock fall hazards
- Identification and location of an equestrian ‘compound’ – is it pre-determined that we will have a major equestrian facility? Horses can irreversibly change vegetation and soil. We will want to have monitoring and an equestrian use management plan in place to help us if we want to host equestrians.
- Identification and location of equestrian day use parking area – is the location appropriate? Site specific resource surveys will help answer this question. Cultural resources, rare plants, rare veg communities, vegetation communities/condition assessment, wildlife with conservation status etc...
- Locating Admin/employee area – is this location appropriate? There is an area already developed on the east half of the property is likely more appropriate for this type of development.
- Identification and location of west-side water access and day use area – there are already two other water access areas identified and it’s a small lake.
 - This area falls within the CPW nest buffers of the bald eagle (400m) and peregrine falcon (800m) nests

Secondary concerns are the illustration of:

- Locating new camper cabins – mostly thinking about cultural resource assessment
- Location of new guest services building – this might be better integrated into a building that serves as an entrance station, visitor center, and guest services building – especially considering the size of the property.
- Location of entrance station – ideally would be placed on the NE corner of the property where the road enters the property vs the interior of the property.
- Conversion of camping sites to day use sites – may be premature to make this change. Might take time to transition away from this traditional use. Other identified camping locations may not be appropriate for development.

- Identifying the exact location of snow plow turnaround – May be able to impact less under disturbed area if it is placed with other road/parking infrastructure. Cultural resources?
2. Natural and cultural resource inventory, condition assessment, and conservation status assessment: This piggy backs on previous comments. The CPW park planning process is begun by performing a resource analysis ahead of beginning recreation planning. This allows us to change course on rec planning, if resources dictate, ahead of any resource challenges/barriers or public expectations.

Recreation planning - resource management - property management challenges that we know of that have regulatory and/or conservation actions include:

- a. nesting bald eagles – nest buffer 400m; no surface occupancy from Dec 1 through July 31
 - b. nesting peregrine falcons - nest buffer 800m; no surface occupancy from March 15 through July 31
 - c. Cultural site at the cave. There is a legal obligation to protect this site. Discussion is needed around gating the cave and using guided tours to preserve the integrity of the site.
 - i. A white paper on the topic states that this is one of two sites of its kind in CO and that the site has been degrading over the last 50 years due to visitation (touching the walls and graffiti).
 - ii. Tribal consultation can take time. Hopefully the USFS can put resources to this component of the planning since CPW does not have a cultural resource lead.
 - d. The potential of other cultural site management issues should be investigated
 - e. A GIS analysis in the CODEX GIS tool and identified the possibility of two rare plants – Harrington’s beardtongue and a stickleaf. Due diligence would include a site specific survey for these plants. It could take efforts in different years due to precip/local conditions.
 - f. Elk (winter?) range – someone in CPW with more knowledge of this situation should be consulted with.
 - g. Wetlands area – 404 permitting and the habitat value of high quality wetlands makes me want to put more thought into the idea to development recreation around this area.
3. Within the framework of how CPW plans parks and opens new parks, it is premature to identify rec uses and infrastructure before the inventory and condition assessment work previously discussed. The specificity included on the layout creates a precedent that we may not want to or be able to follow. More resource information is recommended before drawing polygons on a map. Recommend a pivot to zoning prior to sharing with the public.
- a. Apply CPW raptor nest buffers.
 - b. The equestrian community can sometimes be very present in planning processes and often have resources/well funded. This occurred when we opened Cheyenne Mountain, where the equestrian community was very present and facility design

was altered in consideration of their input and future use (and post development, their use of the park is very low). We will want to be sure we can follow through with plans for this recreation opportunity if we illustrate it on a map.

4. Visitation Pressure – implication of announcing the property as a state park. When the park goes onto CPW maps and the website visitation at Sweetwater is sure to change and increase – likely immediately and drastically. I am interested to see what 2022 brings. Cameras and trail counters could help to monitor the visitation until management actions are considered.

Having a clear understanding of the acreage that will form the final boundary of the state park is an important first step. Understanding the resources that exist at the property, where they are located on the property, their condition, conservation status, and identifying regulatory obligations that we have to the local resources would set us up for a clearer path towards success. Identifying the roles each agency plays in the planning and management will also be very helpful.

Sorry for the repetition of some of these points. As with Fishers Peak, I assume that we are operating under less than ideal timelines. At Fishers Peak, resource work was performed in parallel to park planning. This can happen at Sweetwater if necessary. Flexibility will help the success of the process. I am all in on making the collaboration, planning process, and Sweetwater Lake State Park a successful effort. Matt Schulz and I have worked on the opening of Cheyenne Mtn, Staunton, and Fishers Peak State Parks, as well as worked on the recreation, resource, and management planning of numerous other state parks including parks on federal properties. We will work with what resources exist under the timelines and do the best job possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to share comments.