

## **Sweetwater Lake Area Management Questions and Answers:**

*On August 31, 2021 the Forest Service closed on the purchase of the 486-acre Sweetwater Lake area property. The Conservation Fund had purchased the property from a group of private investors a year earlier to hold it for eventual Forest Service purchase. Local governments including counties and towns, commercial entities, non-profit organizations, and individuals alike came together to provide funding and support for this amazing acquisition including.*

*The Forest Service purchased the property to improve public access to Sweetwater Lake, enhance the recreation opportunities historically offered in the Sweetwater Lake area and protect the social and natural characteristics of the area*

### **Where can I find information about Sweetwater Lake Area?**

*Sweetwater Lake information can be found on the Eagle Valley Land Trust website (<https://evlt.org/sweetwater/>). Both the White River National Forest and Colorado Parks and Wildlife webpages will have hotlinks on their respective webpages. We want to provide one central location for up-to-date information about the Sweetwater Lake area.*

### **Long-Term Planning What Sweetwater Lake Area Looks Like into the Future**

#### **Now that Sweetwater Lake Area is public land, what's next?**

*A partnership has been created between the Eagle Valley Land Trust, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and the Forest Service to develop and implement a long-term strategy for recreation and public access at Sweetwater Lake.*

*Some areas will be closed to public access due to wildlife closures or safety concerns. Other areas are under a special use permit with the on-site concessionaire.*

#### **What about the wildlife, cultural, natural, and social values on the site?**

*In addition to the site's value for public recreation the Forest Service recognizes that there are several important values that make this site special and need to be a part of future planning. The recreation planning will focus on those lands already disturbed or developed while conserving the key values at the site.*

#### **Will the public have a chance to weigh in on the planning for the lake and surrounding area? If so, how can I comment?**

*Yes. The public's input is very important and will be gathered throughout the planning process. The first opportunity will be an open discussion centered on a draft proposal developed by the planning team. This invite to make comment to the initial planning proposal will be posted on EVLT's website via <https://evlt.org/sweetwater>.*

*A formal opportunity for comment will occur as part of the required National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Once the NEPA process is initiated, more information on how to comment will be made available.*

#### **Is the site a State Park?**

*Yes! Overall management of the Lake and surrounding area will be overseen by a partnership board made up of CPW, EVLT and the Forest Service staff. CPW is an integral partner in the long-term planning effort for Sweetwater Lake. Long-term management of Sweetwater Lake will continue to be developed over the next year, and the partners are working through each agency's authorities to determine how this can work. CPW will take on much of the day-to-day site management with support from EVLT and the Forest Service.*

#### **Will there be fees for the Sweetwater Lake Area?**

*Yes, several recreational amenities are going to be offered on the site that would not normally be available on undeveloped public lands. User fees will be one of the components needed for the partners to be able to sustain the recreational opportunities provided.*

## **Will there be opportunities for continuing private/commercial operations on the site in the long-term?**

*The partnership will continue to rely on a private operator for many of the historic uses that were provided when the land was private through 2022. The potential for private/commercial opportunities offered on the site beyond 2022 will be evaluated and decided during the long-term planning process.*

## **How can I keep informed on what is happening as the planning process continues?**

*The partners have set up a single point for public information and input on Sweetwater Lake planning that is hosted by the Eagle Valley Land Trust, at <https://evlt.org/sweetwater/>. The Forest Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife and EVLT websites will have hotlinks to the EVLT site.*

## **How long will the transition period last?**

*Transition and redevelopment are expected to take several years. The infrastructure at the Lake is all old and in fair to poor condition. Health and safety items and other necessary infrastructure are most likely to be addressed first. Management at the Lake will continually evolve as individual projects are completed.*

## **Short – Term Management of Sweetwater Lake Area**

### **How is the Lake being managed now that it is Federal land?**

*The partnership group is developing short-term management strategies for the Lake area to allow for increased public access while protecting the site's social, natural, cultural resource values and to prevent the site from unintentionally getting "loved to death" before a long-term strategy can be implemented. The short-term management will evolve as the long-term strategy is implemented over time. See regulations and attached map.*

*Short-term management will be overseen by CPW with assistance from the Forest Service and EVLT. Both Forest Service and State Parks regulations will apply.*

### **How is the Sweetwater Lake Area being managed now that it is Federal land?**

*AJBrink Outfitters had been operating the concessions on the private land for the past 36 years prior to the Forest Service acquisition under a series of one-year private agreements and has held a 10-year outfitting-guide permit on the adjacent national forest lands. The Forest Service has issued AJBrink Outfitters a short-term permit as the onsite manager of the formerly private lands while the long-term site planning is taking place.*

*The permittee is authorized to operate the site in a similar manner to how it has been managed previously with adjustments to allow for increased public access.*

### **What activities are currently allowed at Sweetwater Lake Area and in the near future?**

*AJ Brink Outfitters will be authorized to continue to provide guided horse rides, outfitted hunting, some cabin rentals, lake access, horse camping, boat rentals, and other day use activities.*

*The Forest Service campground and the existing trails system will continue to be open and managed.*

*Use on the existing Forest Service system trails will continue to follow the Forest's 2011 Travel Management Plan direction which allows for hiking and horse use.*

*New activities not previously allowed on national forest lands, or on the private lands, will not be allowed in the short term. See attached regulation sheet and map.*

### **Will all the cabins be available to rent?**

*Nearly all cabins need repairs to address health and safety concerns. The partners are working with AJ Brink Outfitters to prioritize which of the existing facilities make the most sense to bring up to public safety standards so they may be repaired and made available for rental.*

### **Will the restaurant be open in 2022?**

*The restaurant building has been closed to the public for 6 years due to safety concerns on the part of the previous private landowners. The partners have similar concerns including asbestos removal and a leaking roof. The partners will work with AJBrink to evaluate the value of repair verses replacement. This evaluation has not yet taken place.*

### **Will the existing Sweetwater Campground be open in 2022?**

*The Sweetwater Lake Campground will be operated during the 2022 season. It operates mid to late May through September 30, 2022 depending on weather conditions.*

### **Where can I camp in the newly acquired National Forest lands such as the large pastures north of the county road?**

*Increased camping opportunities at Sweetwater Lake are being considered in the long-term planning process. While that process is in place, camping remains available in the Forest Service's Sweetwater Lake Campground. For those with horses, AJ Brink Outfitters is authorized to provide camping with stock near the horse corrals. Camping is currently prohibited in other areas, see regulations and map.*

### **How will the public be able to access the Sweetwater Lake Area in 2022?**

#### **Lake Access**

*Public watercraft launch access will continue from the east side of the Lake from the campground area and from the boat launch below the restaurant on the north side of the Lake. There will be a route so visitors can load/unload watercraft, turn-round and park in the designated area. The partners are hoping to have a new accessible dock installed prior to the 2022 summer season at the north shore site.*

*Parking for launching and day use on the north shore will be in designated parking areas only and may be limited.*

*Watercraft launching from other locations will not be allowed.*

#### **Fishing**

*The lake will continue to be accessible for fishing from the water, a portion of the south shore and the north shore. A human entry closure is in place along the west end and portions of the south shore of the lake to protect the riparian and raptor habitats. (see regulations and map)*

*Additional access and fishing points will be considered during the planning process.*

*Boating will be limited to non-motorized watercraft with a maximum 5hp electric motors, no gasoline motors are permitted.*

### **Can I discharge a firearm or use a bow or other similar equipment in the newly acquired lands?**

*No. The lands the Forest Service purchased to the north and northwest of Sweetwater Lake are largely developed and have been managed for recreational day and overnight uses. These lands have also been managed as a horse complex for the past 100 years. Staff and livestock are commonly within in this area and visitation from the public is expected to increase greatly in this area for hiking, wildlife viewing and other purposes.*

*General Forest Service safety regulations prohibit discharging a firearm or other similar implement in, or within 150 yards of, a developed or occupied area, across a body of water or in any manner or place whereby any person or property is exposed to injury or damage because of such discharge.*

*This general safety prohibition applies to the lake itself and most of the national forest lands including the recent 486-acre acquisition and some surrounding areas. (see regulations and attached map).*

**Are there any areas closed to public entry?**

*Yes, protecting wildlife and riparian habitats along the lake's shoreline and cliff bands are important. Ospreys, bald eagles and peregrine falcons frequently reside in the riparian and cliff habitat. People may not enter the following areas: the wetlands at the west end of the lake, the south shoreline and upper cliff bands to protect these species habitats.*

*The north rock outcropping adjacent to the lake is closed to human entry as well. Other temporary closures may be necessary as redevelopment takes place or situations are discovered. See regulations and map.*