



May 19, 2016

Justyn Liff (via email)
Public Affairs Specialist, Bureau of Reclamation
445 W Gunnison Ave., Suite 221
Grand Junction, CO 81501
Phone: 970 248-0625
Email: jliff@usbr.gov

Mayor
Christina Rinderle

Mayor Pro Tem
Dick White

Councilors
Sweetie Marbury
Dean Brookie
Keith Brant

City Manager
Ron LeBlanc

Subject: Comments on Draft Environmental Assessment - Lake Nighthorse Recreation Plan

To whom it may concern,

Durango has proven very effective at managing recreation for its residents & visitors and in 2012, the City of Durango Parks and Recreation Department received the National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in the Field of Park and Recreation Management. Durango's success in managing recreation for the community has built strong trust & support from its residents.

The Durango Parks and Recreation Department has the expertise to manage recreation at Lake Nighthorse, but it needs community support in order to be effective in this effort. Accordingly, the Parks and Recreation Advisory (PARA) Board provides these comments on the Draft Environmental Assessment (Draft EA) dated March 2016.

The PARA Board consists of residents empowered by the City to review improvements and provide recommendations for any new areas developed for recreation to enhance the natural beauty of the City and provide for the enjoyment, health, and general welfare of its residents. This Board finds that there is strong community backing to open Lake Nighthorse to the public for recreation in a manner consistent with the features outlined in Action Alternative 1- 2011 Recreation Plan and the Proposed Action – 2014 Recreation Plan.

In April 2011 the community developed a comprehensive plan of recreational features at Lake Nighthorse that are outlined in the Draft EA as Action Alternative 1 – 2011 Recreation Plan. The recreational features outlined in this alternative are consistent with the themes in the City of Durango Parks, Open Space, Trails and

May 19, 2016

Page 2

Recreation Master Plan (POST Plan) which was completed in April 2010. The POST Plan established these recreational/organizational themes for the community:

- Trails – Connecting People to Places
- Open Space – Preserve & Care for Special Places
- Parks: Provide Quality Areas for Community Gatherings and Activities
- Recreation: Provide Quality and Diverse Recreation Programs
- Facilities: Provide Quality Facilities for Recreation Activities
- Organizational: Strategic Use of Resources

Furthermore, the Action Alternative I Recreation Plan, the Proposed Action – 2014 Recreation Plan and the City of Durango POST Plan themes correlate well with the Department of Interior mission areas below:

Mission Area 1: Celebrating and Enhancing America's Great Outdoors

- Goal 1: Protect America's Landscapes
- Goal 2: Protect America's Cultural and Heritage Resources
- Goal 3: Enhance Recreation and Visitor Experience
 - Enhance the enjoyment and appreciation of our natural and cultural heritage

Mission Area 2: Strengthening Tribal Nations and Insular Communities

- Goal 1: Meet Our Trust, Treaty, and Other Responsibilities to American Indians
- Goal 2: Improve the Quality of Life in Tribal and Native Communities
- Goal 3: Empower Insular Communities
 - Improve quality of life
 - Create economic opportunity

Mission Area 4: Engaging the Next Generation

- Goal 1: Create new, systemic opportunities for outdoor play
- Goal 2: Provide educational opportunities
- Goal 3: Provide volunteers on public lands

Durango is prepared to manage recreation in a manner that achieves the guiding principles of the Draft EA. The PARA Board therefore requests that the features in Action Alternative I – 2011 Recreation Plan be included in the Record of Decision. Below are a number of reasons supporting our recommendations:

1. Durango wants to 'connect people to places' by creating a welcoming environment for the community at Lake Nighthorse.
2. Americans' interest in nature and nature-based recreation is growing. Of the top outdoor recreational activities, nearly 75% involve viewing, photographing, identifying, visiting, or otherwise observing elements of nature—flowers, trees, water areas & shorelines, natural scenery, birds, other wildlife, nature exhibits, and wilderness (wildlands generally). In recent years, the growth in viewing and photographing plants and natural

scenery has been most rapid closely followed by viewing, photographing, and identifying wildlife and birds. The increase in the observation and study of nature is a very healthy trend that reflects rising and widespread interest in the future of natural resources, conservation, and public lands.

3. Cultural resources, including historic buildings, sites and museums, can contribute to the overall functioning of society by helping individual ethnic groups embrace their cultural identities, and by helping residents understand and appreciate our states' diversity. These historic sites help visitors immerse themselves in other cultures and create places for sharing ethnic food, events, languages and traditions.
4. Outdoor recreation plays a significant role in American lives. It provides physical challenges and well-being, helps develop lifelong skills, provokes interest and inquiry, inspires wonder and awe of the natural world, and often provides an alternative to daily routines. Recreation contributes greatly to the physical, mental, and spiritual health of individuals, bonds family and friends, and instills pride in natural and cultural heritage.
5. Studies document the overall health benefits, both physical and mental and demonstrate how physical activity helps to control obesity, boost the immune system, diminish the risk of disease and increase life expectancy. Like improvements to our physical well-being, many studies show that participation in recreational activities is an important contributor to mental health and quality of life. Parks, trails and historical sites provide excellent inducements to physical activity and our scenic views and waterways encourage active visitation. Parks and recreation can also aid in reducing depression, relieving stress, improving self-esteem and personal growth.
6. Studies also outline the social benefits of recreation, such as strengthening communities, promoting social bonds and supporting youth. Participating in recreation activities helps develop our youth, improve their education and deters them from negative behaviors.
7. Recreation opportunities and parks are essential for strengthening and maintaining a healthy community. Proximity to parks and recreation facilities leads to safer, cleaner neighborhoods, volunteerism, stewardship and creates a livelier community atmosphere. Social bonds are improved when families recreate together and when seniors and individuals with disabilities are actively engaged in recreation activities. Recreation and park facilities help promote social bonds by uniting families, encouraging cultural sensitivity, and developing social consciousness among our youth.
8. Landscapes in the West are often associated with the sense of place of people who live there, people who wish they lived there, and people who go there for outdoor recreation. Part of sense of place and place meaning is wrapped into the symbolism of these landscapes, especially the symbolism of parks, monuments, forests, lakes and wildlife areas. In this increasingly

fast-paced world, park and recreation lands, facilities and programs provide the opportunity for something we desire most - the chance to take a breath and to relax - to refresh our mind, body and spirit. The aggregate impact of these health and social benefits makes parks and recreation one of the most cost-effective public services available to decision makers.

9. Public policy implications with this growing interest in nature-based recreation include:
 - a) Communities can convert public interest in nature into active support of and engagement in conservation of natural landscapes and water resources.
 - b) Outdoor activities can contribute to better physical conditioning, as well as better emotional health. There is an opportunity to use interest in nature as a means of stimulating greater physical activity. Trails and wildlife observation sites can be designed to require some physical effort while still accommodating participants with disabilities.

More than half of recreational visits to Lake Nighthorse are expected from people who live within 50 miles of the recreation site. Accordingly the primary population served by Lake Nighthorse will be La Plata County residents. Some relevant population numbers for La Plata County and Lake Nighthorse:

- a) La Plata County has population of 53,284 with Durango population of 17,557 (2013); Native Americans making up ~1000 Native Americans at FLC each semester & ~5% of City residents
- b) Southern Ute Tribe has La Plata County population of 695 and overall population of 9,592 (2000 census)
- c) Ute Mountain Ute tribe has overall 2,060 enrolled members across Montezuma County, La Plata County, and San Juan County (2000 census)

Durango is supremely qualified to manage a broad recreational venue at Lake Nighthorse. Our community has a high level of cultural awareness and well-established sense of stewardship. In order to be successful managing recreation at Lake Nighthorse, Durango requires a recreational plan that inspires community support. Action Alternative 1 and the Proposed Action most closely aligns with the communities stated interest and the PARA Board would like to ensure the specific recommendations below are permitted within the Record of Decision:

1. Ensure the Action Alternative 1 recreational features are included in the decision in order to make Lake Nighthorse an attractive site for healthy community & family connections.
2. Commit to the planned implementation, depending on the availability of funds, of the following key elements in the final decision:

May 19, 2016

Page 5

- a) Swim Beach
 - b) Day Use & Picnic Area
 - c) Natural & Hard Surface Trail(s)
 - d) Trailhead(s)
 - e) Informational Displays
 - f) Campground(s)
 - g) Non-motorized Boat Launch
 - h) Breakwater(s) (as required)
3. Develop interpretive displays that recognize and appreciate the place value that American Indians associate with the Lake Nighthorse region
 4. Reevaluate motorized use, especially related to noise, wakes and speed limits to encourage and inspire appreciation of nature based activity at Lake Nighthorse.
 5. Explore winter season human powered recreation (hiking, cross country skiing, etc.) in order to support year round health and fitness
 6. Establish Multi-Modal hard-surface trail access between the Animas River Trail to the Lake Nighthorse Recreational Footprint to encourage community health and fitness in travelling to and from Lake Nighthorse.

The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Draft Environmental Assessment – Lake Nighthorse Recreation Plan. The Board would appreciate a response to the comments in this letter and the response can be sent to rec@durangogov.org

Sincerely,

Melissa Youssef, Vice Chair
City of Durango Parks and Recreation Advisory Board

Cc: Durango City Council