



Parks and Recreation Department



Lake Nighthorse Recreation Area 2019 Season Report

December 31, 2019

Executive Summary

The second year of Lake Nighthorse Recreation Area being open to public recreation was a very successful year for the Durango community. Total visitation increased by 32% over 2018 and cost recovery reached 85.5% due in part to an increase in programs and activities offered by local businesses as contracted services at Lake Nighthorse. The Durango Parks and Recreation Department continued to implement adaptive management, ensuring public recreational experiences were enjoyable and in accordance with the Lake Nighthorse Operations Plan.

The City of Durango hosted another Kids Fish First special event to kick off the 2019 season for public recreation at Lake Nighthorse on March 30, 2019 involving 58 participants. The Lake opened to non-motorized recreational users on Sunday, March 31, 2019 with 88 participants and then on May 15, 2019, motorized recreational use was initiated. Parks and Recreation Department staff continue to monitor recreational use of Lake Nighthorse by tracking lake entries by recreational use. The dominant user groups for 2019 remain the same as was tracked in 2018, which included the following from highest to lowest use: (1) stand up paddleboard, kayak, or canoe; (2) walk, run, or dog walk; (3) shoreline fishing by foot; (4) swimming; (5) motorized fishing; (6) motorized wakeboard, ski, or tube; (7) fishing from non-motorized watercrafts; (8) sailing. The recreation area season concluded on November 14 with a total estimated number of 63,735 participants in 2019.

Operations Plan

Using the foundation of the Lake Nighthorse Recreation Plan Final Environmental Assessment and Finding of No New Significant Impact issued in December 2016 by the U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Reclamation Western Colorado Area Office, the Parks and Recreation Department continued implementation of the Lake Nighthorse Operations Plan in 2019.

Three overarching goals were identified as a priority for the operations of Lake Nighthorse:

- Resource Protection
- Provide Quality Recreational Experiences
- Financial Viability

Ongoing operations of Lake Nighthorse involves a collaborative partnership with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Animas-La Plata Operation, Maintenance and Replacement Association, and the City of Durango. Adaptive management was employed by the City to ensure the goals of the Lake Nighthorse Operations Plan were consistently achieved with continuously evolving circumstances, recognizing that the opening year 2018 created the operations baseline for Lake Nighthorse. Examples of adaptive management implemented in 2019 include installing a courtesy dock ladder for safe and comfortable access to open water for swimming as well as allowing ADA fishing access until construction of a formal ADA fishing amenity was complete. The entrance gate closed as well as exit boat inspections and watercraft launches ceased 30 minutes prior to daily closure. NO WAKE rules were lifted for Holiday Mondays. Inflatable field was installed in the No Motorized Craft zone to provide free drop-in recreational opportunities. No Parking signs were removed and replaced with Loading Zone signage at the crusher fine trail accessing the Overflow Parking Lot courtesy dock as well as at the 4Corners Riversports concessions location. Lastly, spring hours of operation were expanded to include Fridays along with Saturdays and

Sundays from April 5 to April 28 and evening hours were extended to 7 p.m. during the month of September.

Resource Protection

Resource protection at Lake Nighthorse involves water quality, natural and cultural resources, and invasive species.

- Parks and Recreation Department staff completed 4,642 boat inspections for aquatic nuisance species by certified inspectors following the Department of Natural Resources standards for bodies of water in Colorado
- Decontamination protocol with infrastructure on-site was completed on 677 boats
- Parks and Recreation Department staff removed 1,756 boat seals during incoming boat inspections, of which 1,441 were returning Lake Nighthorse boat seals
- Parks and Recreation Department staff issued 2,322 exit inspection boat seals with documentation in the national database
- Bureau of Reclamation and Colorado Parks and Wildlife conducted water quality monitoring
- There was a designated fueling area at the entrance station
- Cultural Resources Sensitivity Training was provided to all employees and contractors
- Bureau of Reclamation conducted archaeological monitoring
- Golden Eagle surveying was implemented prior to construction activities
- City staff restricted public shoreline access to 25 feet above high-water line and in developed recreation areas with the assistance of signage installed by Reclamation
- Smoking, all types of grilling and fires were not permitted
- There was extensive public education implemented and additional signage installed at the boat ramp parking area, overflow parking area and watercraft inspection and decontamination station
- Law enforcement was routinely provided by the Durango Police Department, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and La Plata County Sheriff
- Adherence to City, State and Federal Laws
- Winter wildlife closure was in effect January 1 – March 31 and November 15 – December 31
- Houseboats that are used as a human dwelling; cabin cruisers with full living quarters on board, including plumbing were not permitted
- No boats with open-air-exhaust were permitted
- Adherence to Colorado Parks and Wildlife Fishing Regulations including no aquatic live bait
- In addition to following State standards for inspection of watercraft for aquatic nuisance species, the City consulted with the State on the inspection of non-trailer craft that are high risk and followed recommended procedures
- Boats with ballasts were permitted and adhered to State approved methods for decontamination
- Reclamation monitored cultural resources and project infrastructure and the City modified shore access by the public as needed
- Dogs were permitted, and pet owners were required to adhere to the City leash law; dog waste dispensers were provided by the City

- Two community volunteer stewards assisted with resources protection by contributing 15 hours of service at the lake, and one community volunteer assisted with administrative tasks for Lake Nighthorse operations by contributing 12 hours of service
- The City implemented extensive reporting and tracking of recreational users at Lake Nighthorse and utilized data for adaptive management

Resource Protection Summary

Resource Protection Description	2018 Total Number	2019 Total Number
Aquatic Nuisance Species Inspections (Incoming and Outgoing)	3,657	4,642
Aquatic Nuisance Species Decontaminations	599	677
Incoming Boat Seals Removed	1,410	1,756
Incoming Boat Seals on returning Lake Nighthorse boats	1,162	1,441
Exit Boat Seals Applied	1,739	2,322

Provide Quality Recreational Experiences

2019 operations continued to address the diverse desires for recreational experiences at Lake Nighthorse as well as continue to build upon the 2016 Lake Nighthorse Recreation Plan Environmental Assessment.

- There were multiple uses allowed at Lake Nighthorse including motorized and non-motorized recreation
- Local, State and Federal law enforcement officials had a presence at Lake Nighthorse
- Adherence to City, State and Federal Laws
- An additional courtesy dock for motorized and non-motorized users was installed by the City raising the total number to four courtesy docks
- Zoned recreation at Lake Nighthorse was implemented with buoys, signage and education
- Restricted public access to 25' above high-water level and in developed recreation areas
- Boats travelled in a counterclockwise direction for towed recreation in the open use area
- Qualified Parks and Recreation Department staff were on-site during operating hours
- There was scheduled and posted hours of operation at Lake Nighthorse; day use only
- There was a designated no motorized craft area near the paddle craft rental and overflow parking area; Official boats had access through the no motorized craft area to the public safety personnel dock
- Motorized personal watercraft (e.g. jet skis) were not allowed; Parks and Recreation Department staff closely monitored motorized personal watercraft use requests and the Operations Plan may be adjusted as necessary in the future
- Public access on west CR 211 was not permitted due to concerns identified by the Animas-La Plata Operation, Maintenance and Replacement Association, opposition from adjacent neighbors, use of the winter wildlife area would require Colorado Parks and Wildlife

concurrence, and additional infrastructure would be required for resource protection and day use fee collection

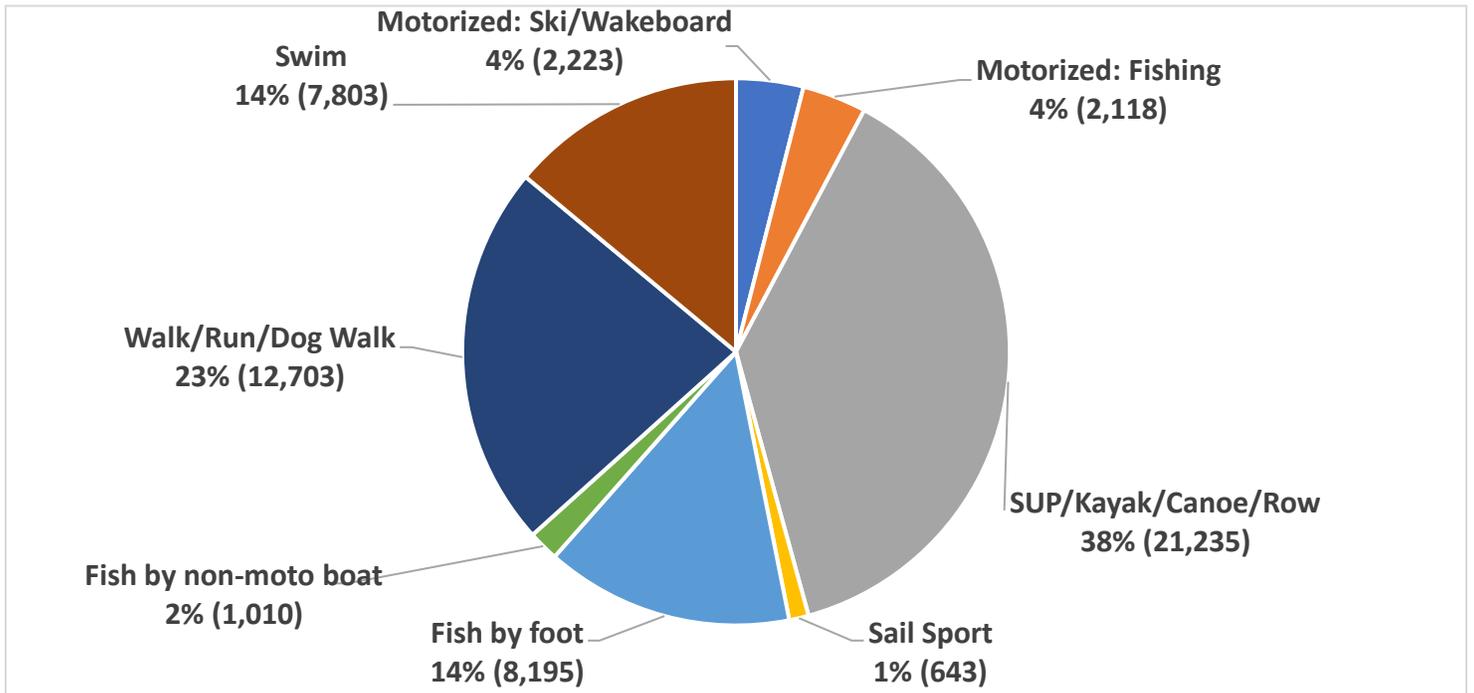
- The City will continue to explore volunteer or concessionaire opportunities to provide a shuttle service for paddlers to the west no wake zone
- There are limited designated trails due to concerns identified by the Animas-La Plata Operation, Maintenance and Replacement Association for resource protection
- The Durango Police Department and Sheriff's Office determined appropriate local law enforcement presence and extra patrolling based upon conditions; there were five verbal warnings and zero citations issued by the Durango Police Department
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife issued four citations regarding fishing licenses and one regarding aquatic nuisance species boat inspections
- Existing Parks and Recreation Department standards were followed to address public terms of use and public conduct at Lake Nighthorse
- Third party concessions were available to enhance the quality of the recreational experience by providing programs and activities such as sailing or paddling lessons, guided fly fishing, and wake surfing opportunities; a total of seven local business operated as independent contractors at Lake Nighthorse in 2019 (in 2018 there were two)
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stocked a total of 186,228 fish (brown trout, rainbow trout and Kokanee salmon) in 2019
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife hosted three days of Kokanee Salmon giveaways during which an estimated 4,000 salmon were given to a total estimate of 250 participants
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife conducted 5 Kokanee Salmon spawn takes for a total of 699,126 green eggs
- The City regulated type of use with scheduled use to be inclusive as well as provide the most recreational use
- The City monitored use patterns, shared information with the public and encouraged recreational users to select preferred times for use of the lake
- The 2019 recreation schedule included Mellow Mondays and Wakeless Wednesdays with the restriction of no wakes all day for recreational users, except Holidays
- Non-motorized use April 5 to April 28 was provided on Friday, Saturday and Sunday only due to inclement spring weather and low visitation during the week
- Evening hours were extended until 7 p.m. during the month of September
- Inflatable field was installed in the No Motorized Craft zone to allow for free drop-in recreational opportunities
- The City hosted three special events and authorized 9 third-party educational programs and special activities at Lake Nighthorse in 2019
- The City will continue to monitor, track and evaluate conditions at Lake Nighthorse on an on-going basis and implement adaptive management; the City will continue to seek customer input on experiences

Quality Recreation Experience Summary

Quality Recreation Experience Description	2018 Total Number	2019 Total Number
Lake Nighthorse Users	48,078	63,735
Season Pass Holder Entries	14,107	19,533
Day Use Admissions	33,328	33,780
5-Punch Pass Holder Entries	n/a	2,793
Programs Participants	221	343
Free Special Events Participants	643	365
Concession Boat Rentals	1,562	2,944
Durango Police Citations	3	0



Recreation by Use Categories



Financial Viability

To ensure long-term recreational enjoyment of Lake Nighthorse by area residents and visitors to the region, the 2019 operations implemented the following guiding principles for financial viability:

- The Lease Agreement between the United States and City of Durango for the Administration of the Recreation Area at Lake Nighthorse was executed in January 2017
- The Cost Share Agreement between the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and City of Durango was executed in September 2018 to formalize the plan to equally shares the cost of capital improvements and operational deficits at Lake Nighthorse
- The City will continue to seek and secure grant funding for capital improvements at Lake Nighthorse
- The City has dedicated sales tax funds for park capital improvements; \$281,432 was invested in Lake Nighthorse capital improvements for the ADA fishing dock, picnic facilities, and water well at the entrance station
- Lake Nighthorse entrance fees were implemented and will be evaluated annually
- The City of Durango 2020 Budget provides funding for the continued operations of Lake Nighthorse
- The City implemented extensive reporting and tracking of recreational use at Lake Nighthorse
- There is an economic benefit to the region with opening Lake Nighthorse for recreation
- There was State legislation implementing fees in 2019 associated with an Aquatic Nuisance Species Stamp for motorized boats that will continue for 2020
- The goal is to continue to keep fees for City Parks and Recreation services affordable, and scholarships are available
- Third party concessions and independent contracts will continue to be provided to support the financial viability of operations
- Special Use Permits will continue to be provided by the City which may result in limiting public access to the area under permit

Financial Viability Summary

Financial Viability Description	2018 Total Number	2019 Total Number
Expenses (January 1 – December 31)	\$405,936.95	\$359,889.44
Revenues for the Season	\$194,662.05	\$255,358.97
City Operational Subsidy	\$105,637.45	\$52,265.23
Bureau of Reclamation Operational Subsidy	\$105,637.45	\$52,265.24
Cost Recovery	74%	85.5%
Capital Improvements	\$1,207,903.70	\$281,431.70

Lake Nighthorse Recreation Schedule

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Mellow Monday No Wake	Multi-use	Wakeless Wednesday No Wake	Multi-use	Multi-use	Multi-use	Multi-use

The 2019 hours of operation were as follows:

- March 31: Opening Day 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- April 5 – April 28: Friday, Saturday and Sunday ONLY from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- May 1 – May 14: Daily from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- May 15 – May 31: Daily from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- June 1 – September 3: Daily from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- September 4 – September 30: Daily from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- October 1 – November 14: Daily from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- November 15 – March 31: Winter Wildlife Closure

The hours of operation did not vary due to inclement weather. The entrance gate closed as well as exit boat inspections and watercraft launches ceased 30 minutes prior to daily closure.

Lake Nighthorse 2019 Fees

<u>Fee Type</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Season Vehicle Pass	\$70
Multiple Vehicle Season Pass	\$35
Senior Season Vehicle Pass	\$60
Senior Multiple Vehicle Season Pass ...	\$30
Season Bike or Walk-in Pass	\$20
Daily Vehicle Entry	\$ 8
Daily Walk/Bike-in Entry	\$ 3
Vehicle 5 Punch Pass	\$30
Senior Vehicle 5 Punch Pass	\$25
Walk/Bike 5 Punch Pass	\$10

Lake Nighthorse Recreation Area Map

LAKE NIGHTHORSE RECREATION AREA

