

Appendix D. Horseshoe Lake Management

Overview

Horseshoe Lake is part of Lathrop State Park and managed by park staff primarily for habitat for fish and wildlife. It is designated as a wakeless boating water body, and swimming and water toys are not allowed. Hunting by shotgun is allowed in this area. The park manager and area wildlife manager meet at least once a year to discuss management issues.

History of Horseshoe Lake Management

The 574.6 acre parcel of the park that is Horseshoe Lake and its surrounding land was originally purchased with federal wildlife funding mandating the Horseshoe parcel be used specifically for wildlife-based public access such as fishing and hunting. It is because of this funding condition that Horseshoe is designated as a wakeless boating water body, swimming and water toys are not allowed and hunting is allowed on the property.

In 2002, after a federal audit, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) assumed the cash liability of the Horseshoe Lake property and it was no longer under federal restrictions for wildlife-based use. However, Colorado Division of Parks and Recreation (DPOR) and Division of Wildlife (DOW) agreed that Horseshoe Lake should still be managed for wildlife-based public access but managed as part of Lathrop State Park by park staff. An Interagency Agreement for Horseshoe Lake included terms of management including fee structure, required approval for development or concessionaires, regulation enforcement, capital improvements (and required approval), and operations and maintenance costs. The agreement stated that representatives from both agencies (at a minimum, the park manager and area wildlife manager) would meet once per year to discuss any issues.

Definitions and Ownership

For purposes of this agreement, the 574.6 acre parcel that contains both Horseshoe Lake and its surrounding property with boundaries marked by a strand wire fence will be referred to as Horseshoe Lake. The surrounding property includes wetlands, a burn pile, an equestrian/bike trail, Coler Ditch access, carcass dump sites, the dirt road around the lake. The parcel also includes the land west of the maintenance complex that houses the wildlife freezer, wildlife shop/residence, and surrounding land that is not accessible to the public.

The City of Walsenburg owns the Coler Ditch (including maintenance and access to it), the water in Horseshoe Lake, the water line at the south parking area, and the outlet valve structure on the dam. CPW owns the dam and is responsible for its maintenance.

Purpose of this Agreement

When DOW and DPOR merged to become Colorado Parks and Wildlife in 2011, there no longer needed to be an interagency agreement. This appendix to the Lathrop State Park Management Plan is intended to replace the old interagency agreement and should be referred to by both

the park manager and area wildlife manager when making management decisions regarding Horseshoe Lake.

Management Protocols

1. Horseshoe Lake will be managed as state park property with the primary objective to maintain fish and wildlife habitat that will in turn be suitable for wildlife-based recreation such as hunting and fishing. Other management considerations are based on but not limited to: visitor safety, resource protection, facilities maintenance, patrol, CPW regulation/law enforcement, vegetation management, operations budget, and signage.
2. The park manager will consult with the area wildlife manager and region manager (if appropriate) before making any of the following development/recreational decisions:
 - allowing a concessionaire or special use agreement to set up operations on Horseshoe Lake
 - any large capital projects
 - any development that may not be considered wildlife recreation related
3. The area wildlife manager will consult with the park manager and region manager (if appropriate) prior to making management decisions related to:
 - adding or altering facilities, land, signs, fence, dam, boat ramps/docks, and any other piece of the Horseshoe property
 - utilizing or altering park utilities such as water, propane, electric, and trash
 - fishery management

Regulation Enforcement on Horseshoe Lake

1. Regulations for Horseshoe include:

Water regulations to benefit fish and wildlife:

- a. Only wakeless motorized boating is allowed.
- b. Personal watercraft (aka Jetskis) and towing recreational equipment behind motorized boats (i.e. tubes, waterskis, etc) is prohibited.
- c. Non-Motorized boats and stand up paddle boards are allowed per state and federal boating regulations.
- d. Swimming and swim toys are prohibited.

Hunting Regulations

- e. With the exception listed below, all of the land to the west of the cattle guards and fence with hunting boundary signs is open to hunting by bow and arrow and shotguns with pelletized shot (no slugs).

- f. Exception: For safety reasons, there is no hunting over the pond south of Horseshoe, the pond east of Horseshoe between the lakes, or from the boat ramps/docks. No hunting will be allowed from any future fishing piers.
- g. Hunting is allowed from Labor Day through Memorial Day.

Both parks and wildlife officers have jurisdiction to enforce laws on the entire park.

- 3. Park Pass Requirement:
 - a. A park pass is required for each vehicle.
 - b. An individual park pass is required for visitors who walk or bike into the park.
 - c. State Wildlife Area passes are not valid nor required on the Horseshoe Lake parcel.
 - d. Habitat stamps are not required and they do not replace a valid park pass for entry.
- 4. All applicable state parks and wildlife statutes and regulations will be enforced on Horseshoe Lake as a state park (i.e. no camping in an undesignated area, fishing license requirements, etc).

Management of the 3 wetland ponds west of Horseshoe Lake

The ponds are man made and were created when the City used dirt west of Horseshoe Lake to increase the stability of the Horseshoe Dam for more water storage in 1997. The City installed water lines and valves to fill the ponds from the Coler Ditch so the park would receive a benefit of having wetlands after the dirt was removed. Each wetland pond has individual valves to control water levels separately. When ditch water levels are low, the ponds are the lowest priority of water use. When the ponds are full, they are an attractive ecosystem to many wetland species including great blue heron, waterfowl, and amphibians. There is currently no written agreement between the city and CPW that requires the ponds to maintain water in them when the Coler Ditch has enough water to fill them. In 2021, CPW communications with the City of Walsenburg to establish a water agreement which will keep the ponds full when water supply allows.

Other Considerations

- 1. Budget:
 - a. The Horseshoe area will be managed with funding from Lathrop's operational budget and other funding as appropriate with one exception:
 - i. Horseshoe Dam capital costs, maintenance and repair may be requested through the agency's dam section. This includes rodent mitigation, camera and jetting of lines, etc.
- 2. Water agreement with City of Walsenburg

A water use lease is in place with the City of Walsenburg until May 10, 2119. The lease states that:

- The public can access both Horseshoe and Martin Lakes for recreation.
- Walsenburg owns the water in both lakes and controls water levels as needed for other uses by the City.
- Walsenburg agrees to keep both lakes at a minimum pool usable for recreation unless drought conditions exist to where keeping the lakes full is not an option over other needs.

2. Any tax payments on the property are the responsibility of GOCO.