

COLORADO PARKS & WILDLIFE

# Steamboat Lake & Pearl Lake

2023 MANAGEMENT PLAN



BY VICKI SCHNEIDER/CPW

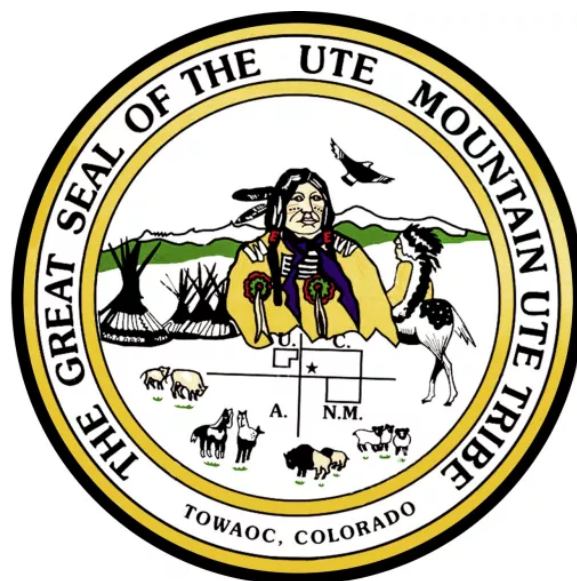
[cpw.state.co.us](http://cpw.state.co.us)



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# Statement of acknowledgement

I want to respectfully acknowledge that Steamboat Lake and Pearl Lake State Parks are located in lands that the Ute Mountain Ute Indians have historically occupied. I pay my respects to elders both past and present.



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# History

Ute Mountain Ute Indians used this land as seasonal hunting grounds. Most game animals hibernate or migrate out of the rugged winter. Routt County Road 129 that leads from Steamboat Springs to Steamboat and Pearl Lakes is an old Indian Trail.

1820s-1840s - European trappers and hunters came to the area for fur trapping and hunting.

1860s - Gold mining begins



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1865 Mining Gold Doyle & Hahn organized Hahns Peak Mining District--first on the Western Slope. 51 men elected Hahn as surveyor/president

1865 Name Geography Aug 27. Hahns Peak named by William A. Doyle

1866 Mining Gold Winter. Doyle, Hahn, Way stayed for winter while others left.

1866 Mining Gold Spring, 1866 arrival of gold prospectors in mass to Hahns Basin



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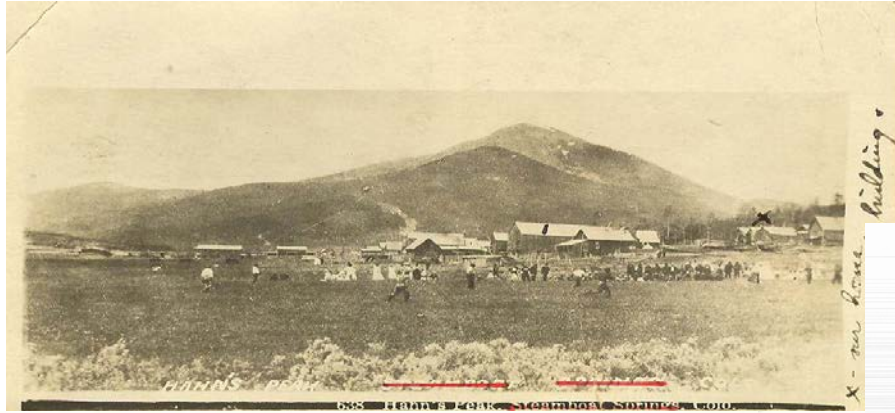
1867 Death Gold Mining Winter April 30, 1867. Joseph Hahn died near Muddy River & Kremmling, CO in 8-10' snow Trying to cross Divide while Doyle went for help

1868 Ute Reservation was established.



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# Homesteaders settle in the area



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# Steamboat Lake and Pearl Lake State Parks Beginning



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# Construction begins - Pearl Lake



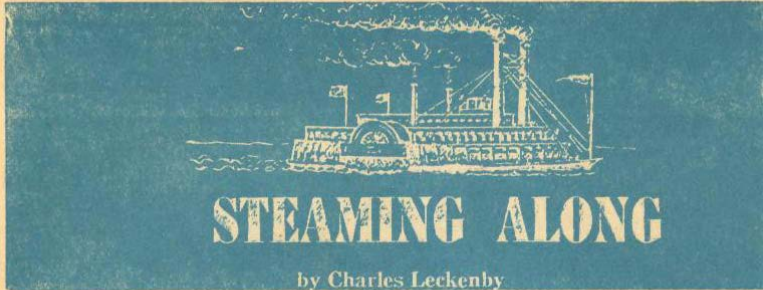
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# Construction Begins - Steamboat Lake



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## See You At The Lake

This Sunday, August 18, Steamboat Lake will be dedicated with many activities planned.

This time will be the realization of a dream that started several years ago when it was felt the Hahns Peak area would be an ideal site for a lake. Bud Hurd, one of Hahns Peak's biggest boosters, used to talk to me all the time about the benefits a lake would bring to this area. Back in 1960 Marvin Elkins headed a Chamber of Commerce committee to see what could be done.

Through the cooperation of the Fish, Game and Parks, Colorado-Ute, Salt River Project and this committee the lake is now a reality.

This issue of the Pilot is printed in blue in recognition of the lake dedication. On page three is a special

page of ads from those people interested in the lake.

On page four is the proposed Fish, Game and Parks master plan for the lake. It is extremely important that this whole area be carefully planned for future development. It is one of the most beautiful in the country and the future growth must be watched to see that all is in keeping with the environment.

There is no private land on the lake shore as the Fish, Game and Parks purchased land back from the water line to control the shore line development.

We all are fortunate in having the lake and should plan to attend the dedication this Sunday.

Governor Love will be on hand for the festivities along with many other Dignitaries.

# Steamboat Lake Dedication



SUNDAY, AUGUST 18, 1968

2:00 p. m.



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# Pearl Lake State Park Today



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# Steamboat Lake State Park Today



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# Outline

Purpose of the Management Plan

Regional planning Context

Park Setting and Resources

Management Zones

Park Enhancements and Opportunities



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# Purpose of the Plan

- Guiding philosophy and planning
- Balancing public enjoyment with Protection of natural resources
- Document resources - conserve and enhance them
- Support Governor Polis' philosophy to build "Colorado for All"
- Fit within the CPW Strategic Plan
  1. Mission
  2. Vision
  3. Strategic Goals



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# Purpose of Plan - continued

- Park Goals
  1. Effectively manage Visitor Use by
    - a. Adapting Management strategies based on visitation trends and resource conditions
    - b. providing opportunities for visitors to learn how to make their visit part of the solution in taking care of the park and its resources.
    - c. meeting the interests of visitors as they change over time.
    - d. communicating the unique aspects of these Parks including what to expect from a remote mountain park to inform trip planning and support enjoyable recreation experiences.
  2. Implement Park plans to guide decision making including the Management Plan and Resource Stewardship, Weed Management and Forestry Management Plans
  3. Promote a respectful culture and team atmosphere for all staff and volunteers.



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# Previous Planning

- Previous Pearl Lake Management Plan (1991)
- Previous Steamboat Lake Management Plan (2000)
- Resource Stewardship Plan (2021)
- Forest Management Plan (2019)
- Noxious Weed Management Plan (2016)



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# Public input process

- Visitor Use Analysis (2021) - Sample from the month of June
  - 155 visitors surveyed 58% were camping with an average stay of 4 days and 42% were day-users with an average stay of 4 hours. Most visitors were from the front range (40%) or Steamboat Springs (35%)
  - Most visitors participated in a variety of activities with the top three being paddlesports (57%) using trails (35%) and fishing 33%)
  - A majority of visitors did not feel that accessing the Parks was congested though some reported to purposefully access the Park early in the day to avoid congestion.
  - Visitors shared improvements they would like to see such as more campground amenities, expanded swim beaches, more fishing access and more bike trails.
- Current Public comment on the draft management plan.



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## Influences on Management:

- The Parks are surrounded by the Routt National Forest
- Distances from towns
- Locations - Not on a major thoroughfare - A visit usually requires planning.
- Increasing visitation
  - Balance quantities of visitor amenities provided
  - changes in visitation patterns
  - visitors new to outdoor recreation
  - more impacts to vegetation
  - full campgrounds are “the new normal”
- Management of other agencies in surrounding areas affect our visitation
- Harsh weather conditions are challenging for infrastructure and facilities



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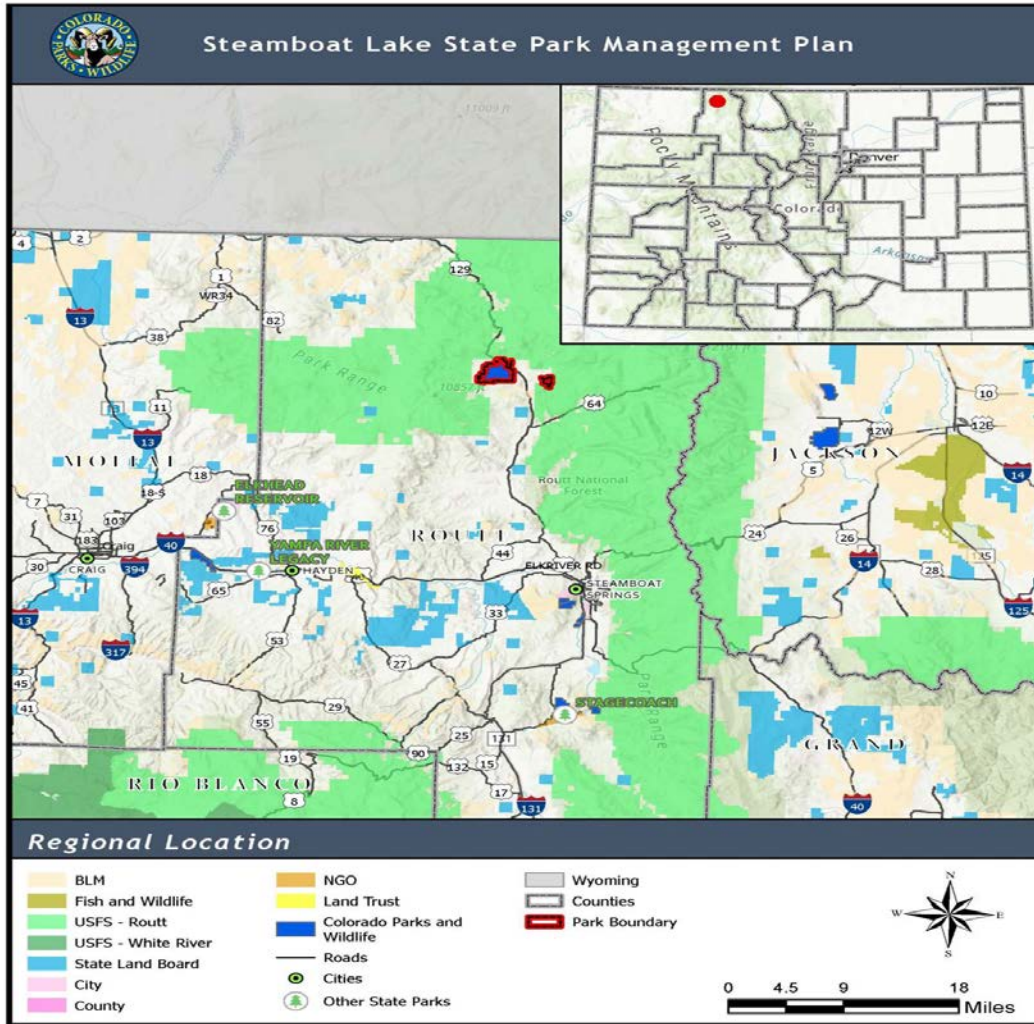
## Management Considerations:

- Steamboat and Pearl are managed as a complex
- Maintaining groomed winter trails is a unique challenge
- Regular law enforcement issues relate to visitor impacts
- Steamboat Lake has six entrances, making visitation numbers a challenge to accurately gather.
- The lakes are a huge draw. There are many outdoor recreation opportunities in Routt County, but water is more unique.
- Visitors prefer the amenities and facilities even when they use off-park recreation opportunities.
- Seasonality - winter and summer are very different.
- CPW owns most of the water in both lakes. Water is used for recreation, habitat the park's domestic water. Major fluctuations do not occur which is extremely valuable. Water and wastewater operations take a lot of staff time and budget and yet are largely unseen by the public.
- Trail management, including social trails is important.
- Natural resources management is important.



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# Regional Planning Context



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- Location
  - Climate
  - Physical Setting
  - Eco-Regional Setting
  
- Adjacent Land
  - Private Land - includes some small subdivisions including Hahns Peak Village and Captain's Cove.
  - Public Land includes National Forest, BLM and State Land Board
  
- Regional Recreation and Tourism
  - Routt Recreation and Conservation Rountable is a community forum that represents stakeholders and agencies
  - Steamboat Chamber of Commerce - "Know Before You Go" campaign



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# Park Setting and Resources

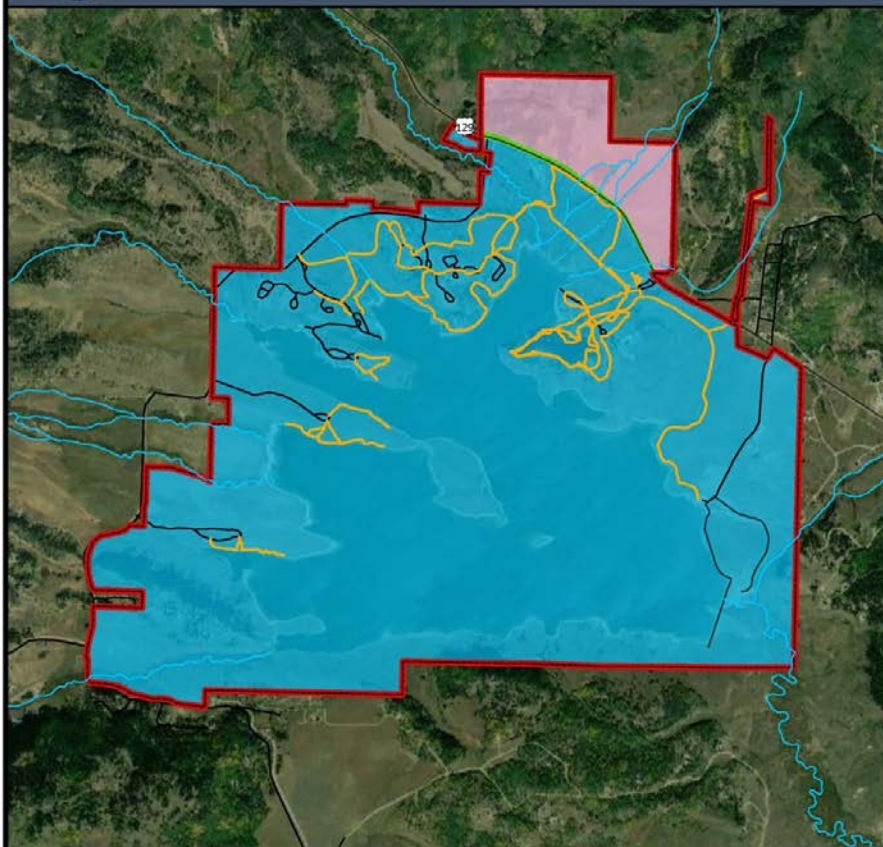
- Park Land Ownership
  - CPW fee-title owns most of both parks. Steamboat Lake is 2820 acres. the State Land Board owns a 162 acre parcel managed as part of the park and is important winter access to the National Forest.
  - Pearl Lake is 300 acres and the southern end of Pearl Lake is owned by US Forest Service. CPW has a permit on these 50 acres to maintain and operate the lake and dam to provide water for fishing and recreation.



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# Steamboat Lake State Park Management Plan

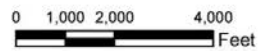


## CPW Parcels

### Owner

- Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- State Land Board
- County

- Streams
- Trails
- Roads
- Park Boundary

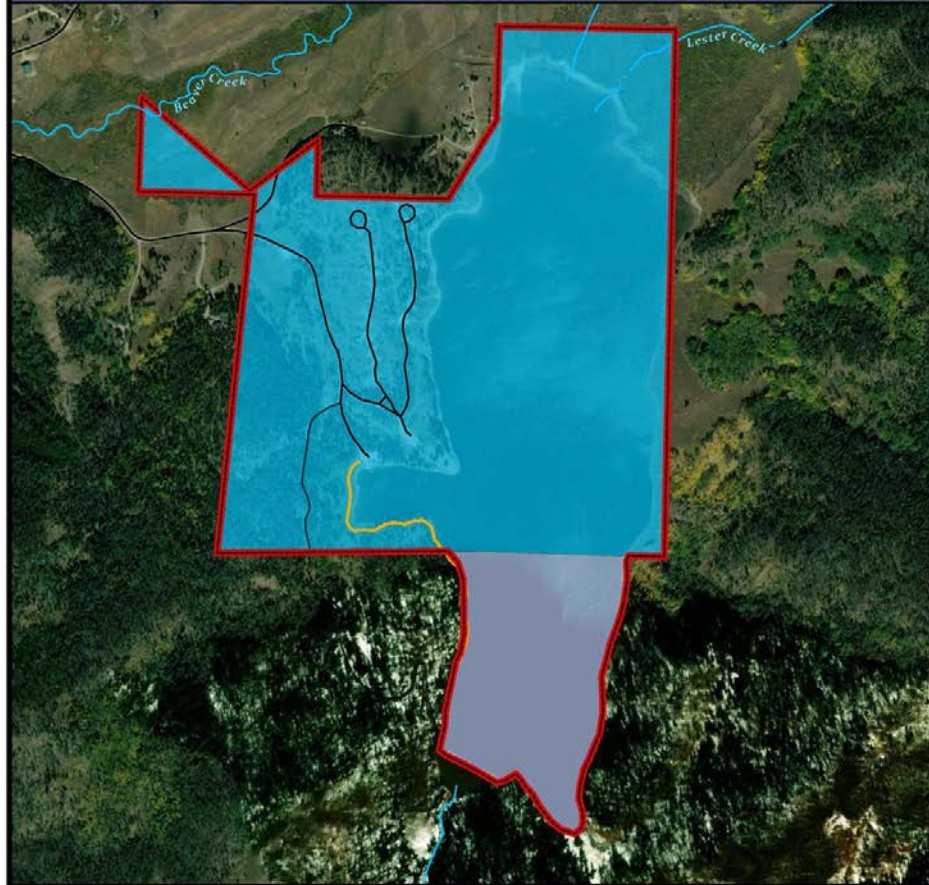


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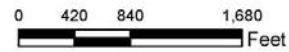


# Pearl Lake State Park Management Plan



## Ownership

- | Owner                       | Trails        |
|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Colorado Parks and Wildlife | Trails        |
| USFS                        | Roads         |
| Streams                     | Park Boundary |



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## Natural Resources -

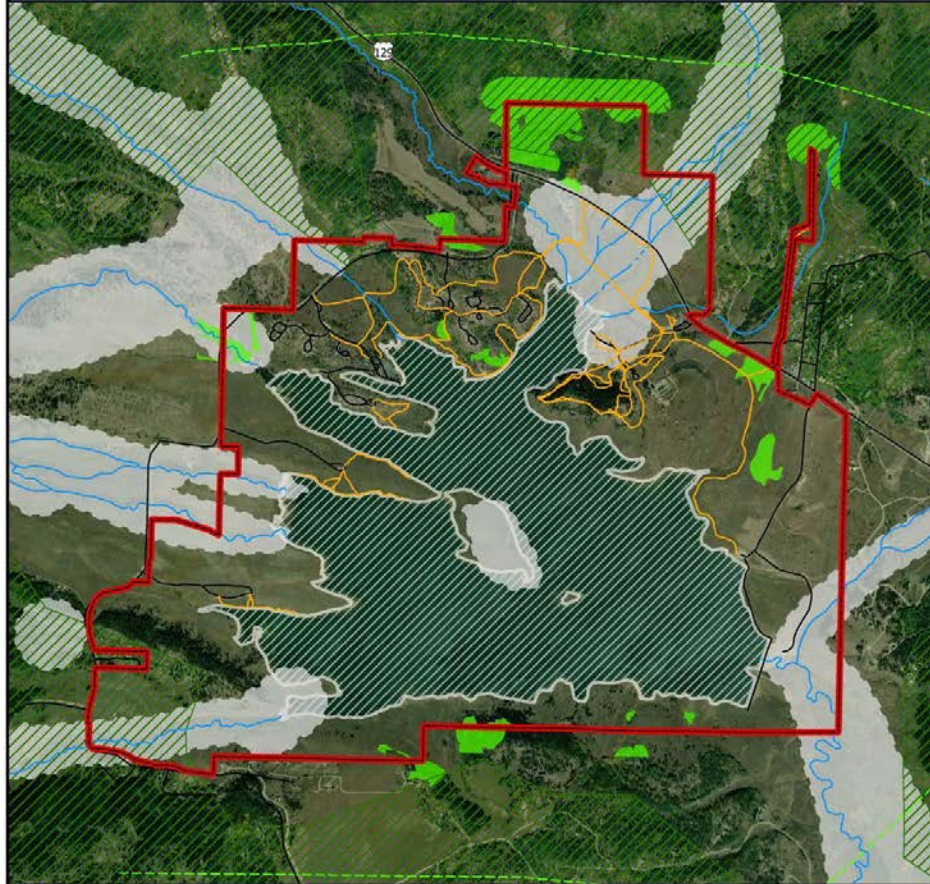
- The lakes mimic a natural lake because of the constant levels
- There is a variety of wildlife habitats including forests, sagebrush shrubland and wetlands. The surrounding National Forest provides large tracts of contiguous habitat for wildlife migration.
- Significant areas include Greater Sandhill Crane Production and White Pelican and Great Blue Heron Forage Areas.
- Mammals include summer use and migration areas for Mule, Elk, Black Bear and Pronghorn.
- There is a wide range of vegetation communities from aspen forests to wetlands.



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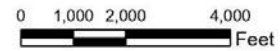


# Steamboat Lake State Park Management Plan



## Significant Features

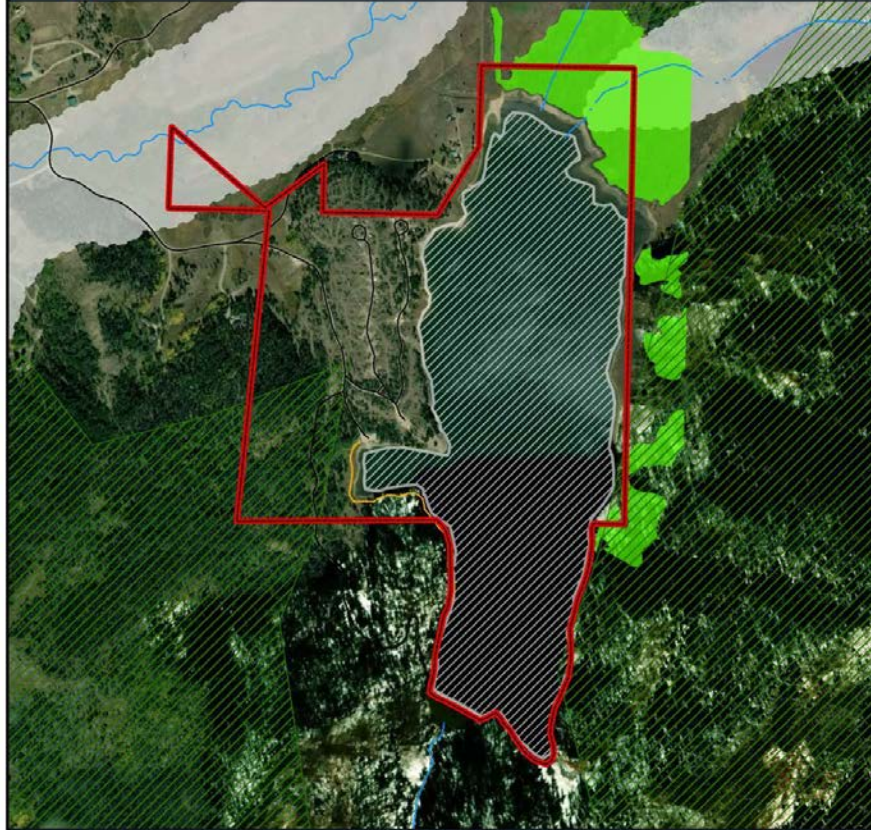
- Park Boundary
- Trails
- Roads
- Streams
- Excellent Vegetation
- Greater Sandhill Crane Production Area
- White Pelican/Great Blue Heron Forage Area
- Boreal Toad Overall Range
- Elk Migration Patterns



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# Pearl Lake State Park Management Plan



## Significant Features

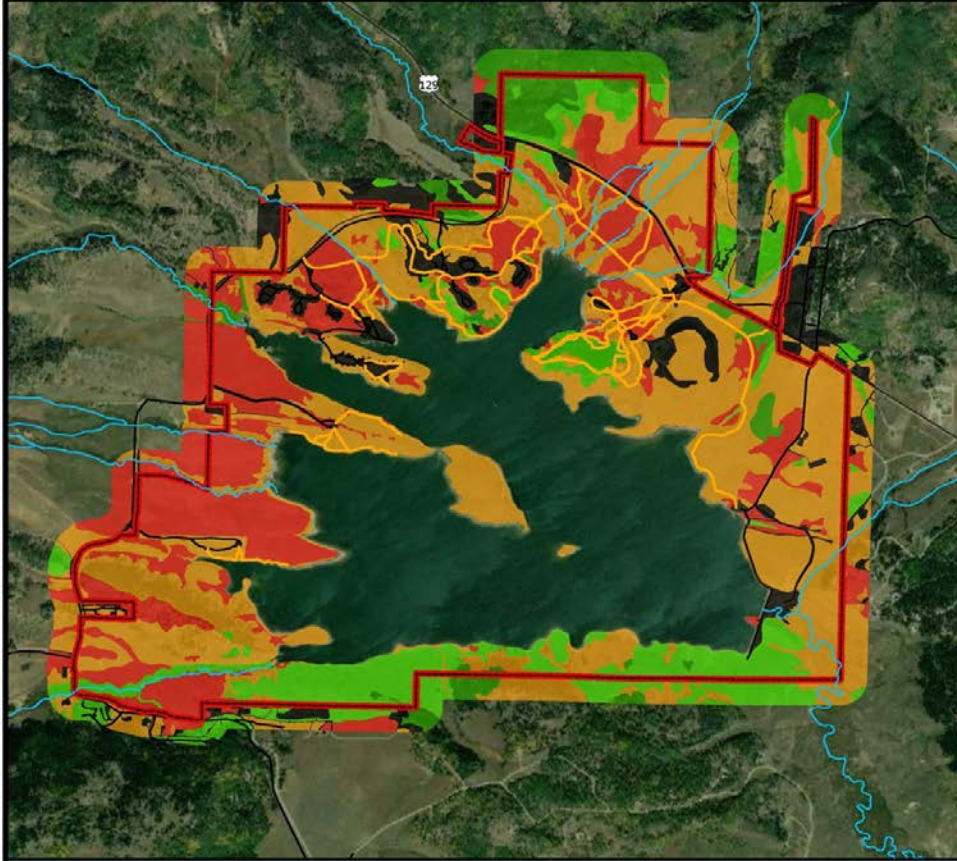
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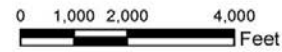


# Steamboat Lake State Park Management Plan



## Vegetation Condition

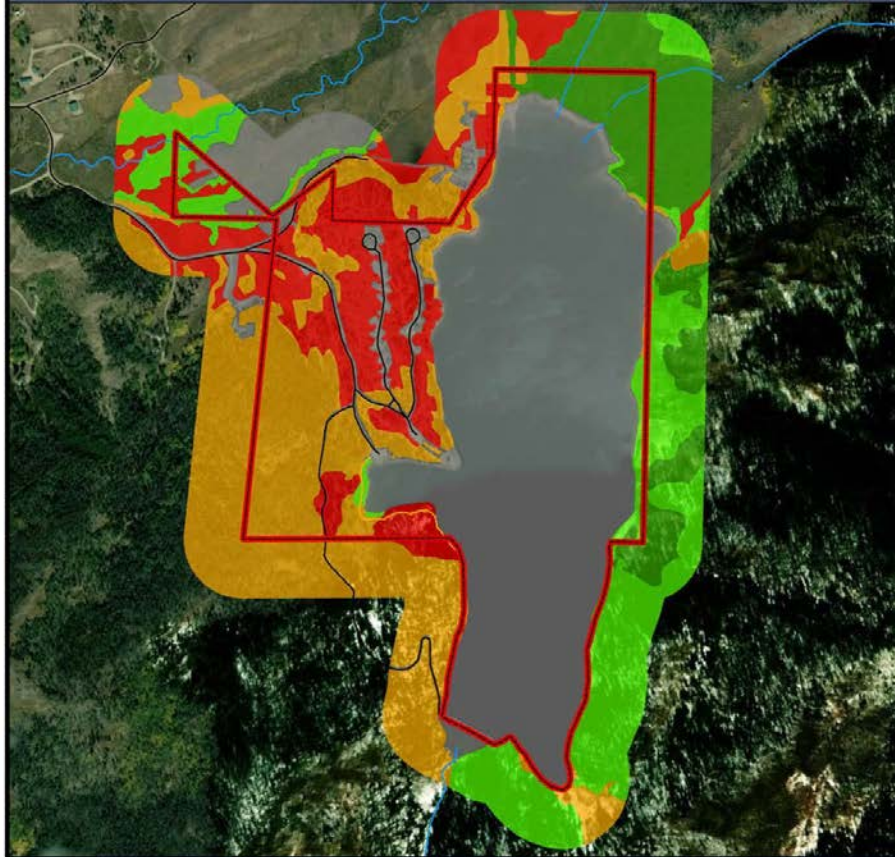
- |           |               |
|-----------|---------------|
| Excellent | Streams       |
| Good      | Trails        |
| Fair      | Roads         |
| Poor      | Park Boundary |
| Developed |               |



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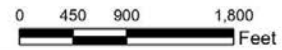


# Pearl Lake State Park Management Plan



## Vegetation Condition

CONDITION	
Unevaluated	Park Boundary
Excellent	Trails
Good	Streams
Fair	Roads
Poor	



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# Threats to Natural Resources

- Non-native and noxious weeds
- Degradation of wetland, riparian and water habitats.
- Degradation of forest habitat
- Unmanaged cattle grazing
- Aquatic Nuisance Species
- Increasing visitation
- Wildfire
- Development
- Climate change



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## Cultural Resources

- The Resource Stewardship Plan contains detailed information and resources on the history of the area and what is now the Park.
- Very few archeological artifacts have been recovered. This area was mostly used as hunting grounds for nomadic groups rather than settlements.
- As mining declined in the early 20th century, ranching became a primary industry with cattle and later sheep. Grazing rights were contested between cattle and sheep ranchers during the “sheep and cattle wars” John Kelly Heart and his wife Pearl were sheep ranchers where Pearl Lake now is located.
- Remaining sites include a saw mill site, the Quealy Cabin and the Wheeler Homestead area. Most of the Wheeler homestead was burned and inundated by Steamboat Lake.

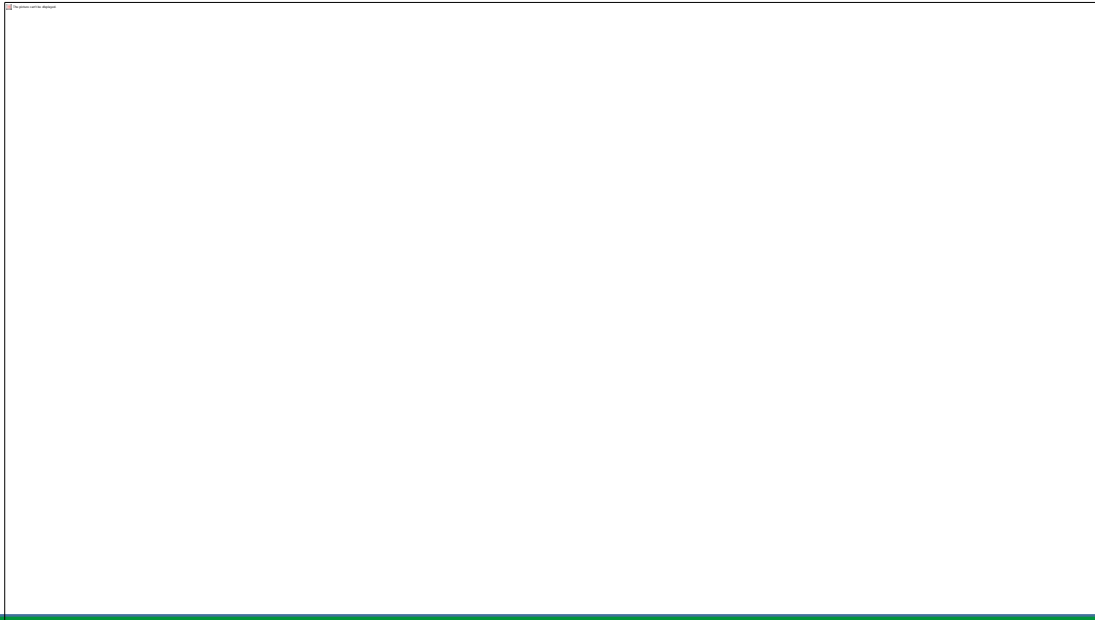


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# Recreation Resources

- Trails
- Camping
- Boating
- Angling
- Winter recreation
- Hunting
- Interpretation and Environmental Education



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# Operations and Maintenance

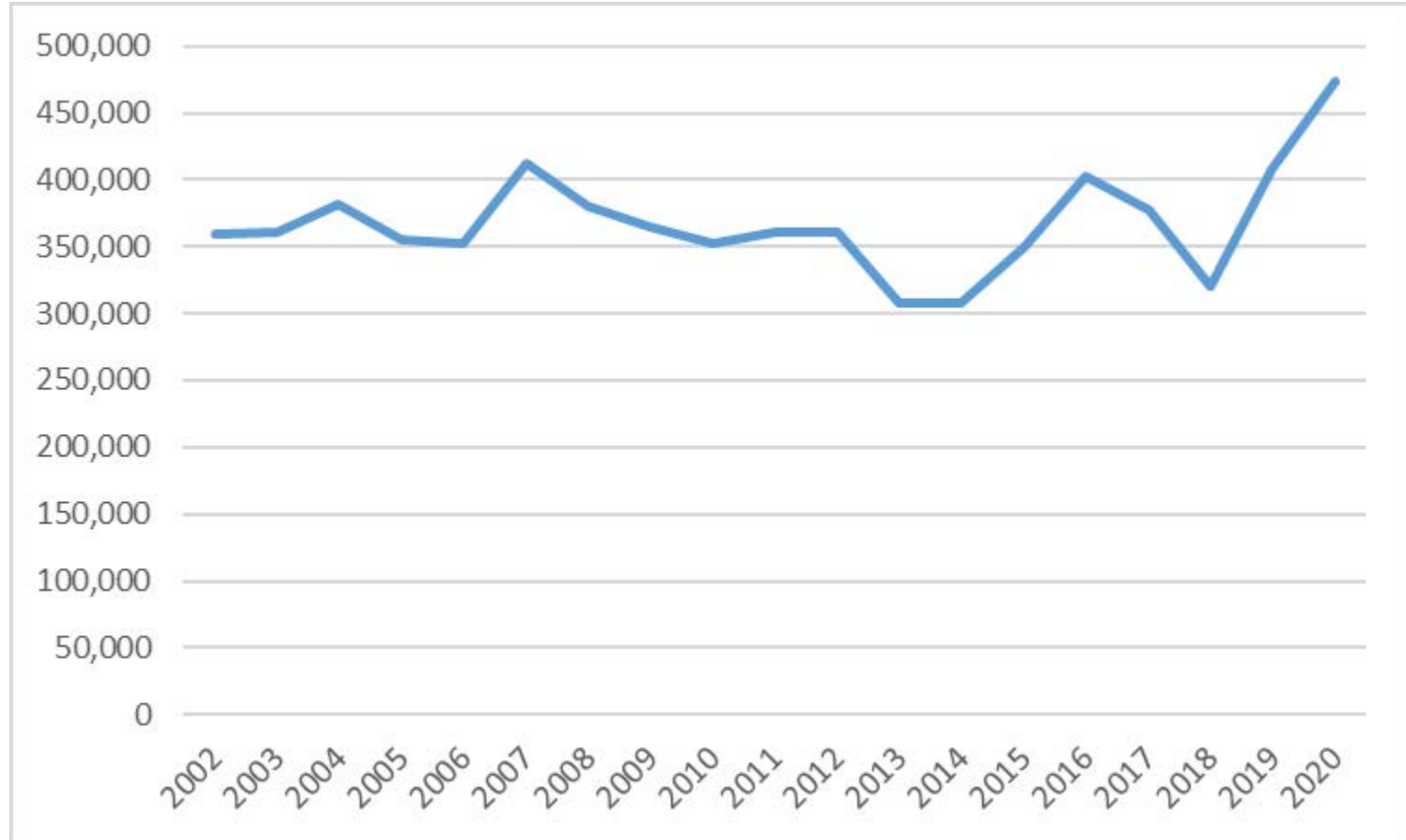
## Water Systems

- The storage capacity for Steamboat Lake is 26364 acre feet. CPW owns 21364 of the stored water and is responsible for the operations of the dam
- Water is released from Steamboat Lake to maintain flows in Willow Creek.
- The Colorado Ute Electric Association also called the Tri-State Utility Company has a perpetual right to the other 5000 acre feet.
- The Park has a lease agreement with the Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District to allow 360 acre feet annually for augmentation.
- The lake is also the source for domestic water within the Park. approximately 2.5 millions of gallons are produced each year



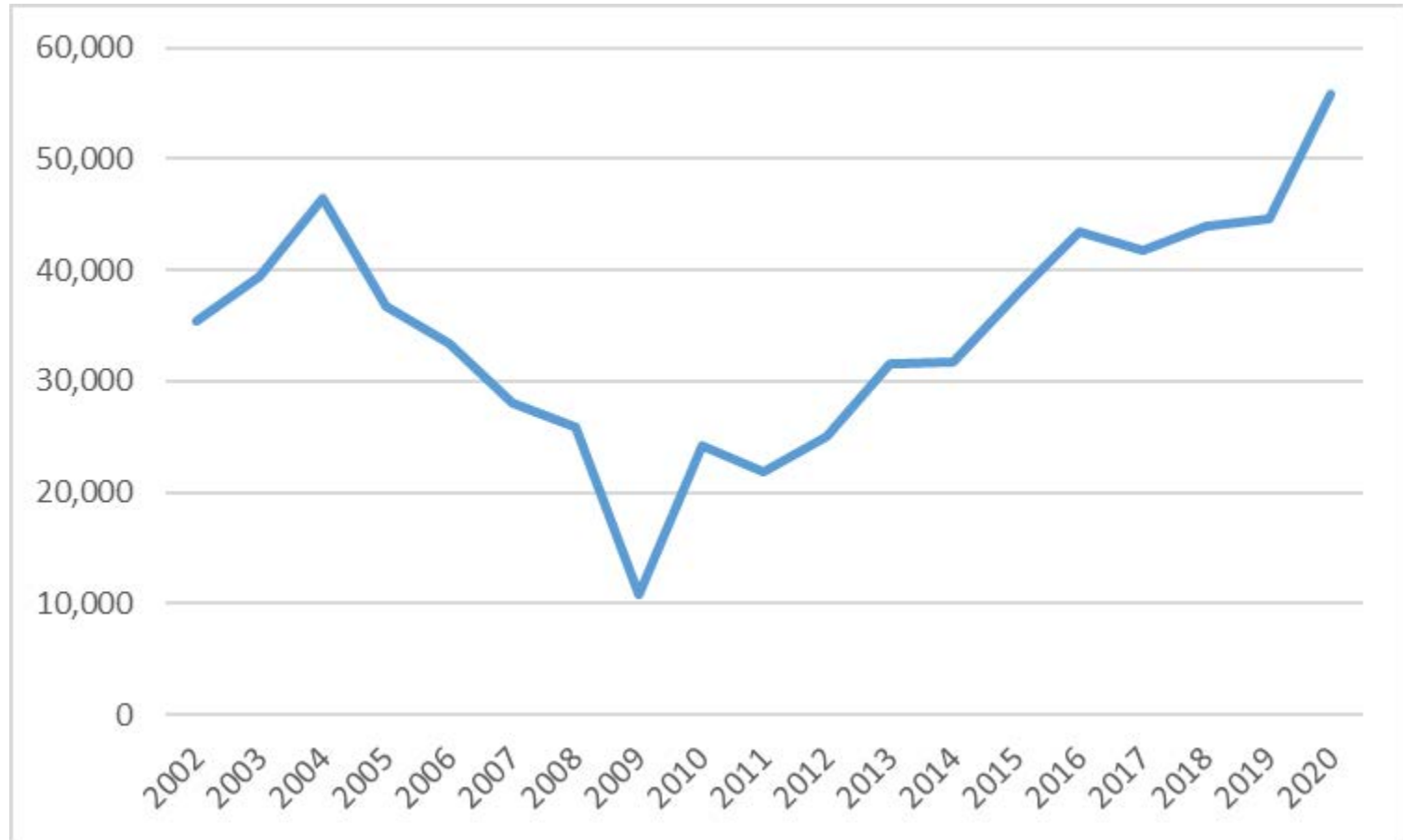
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# Visitation - Steamboat Lake



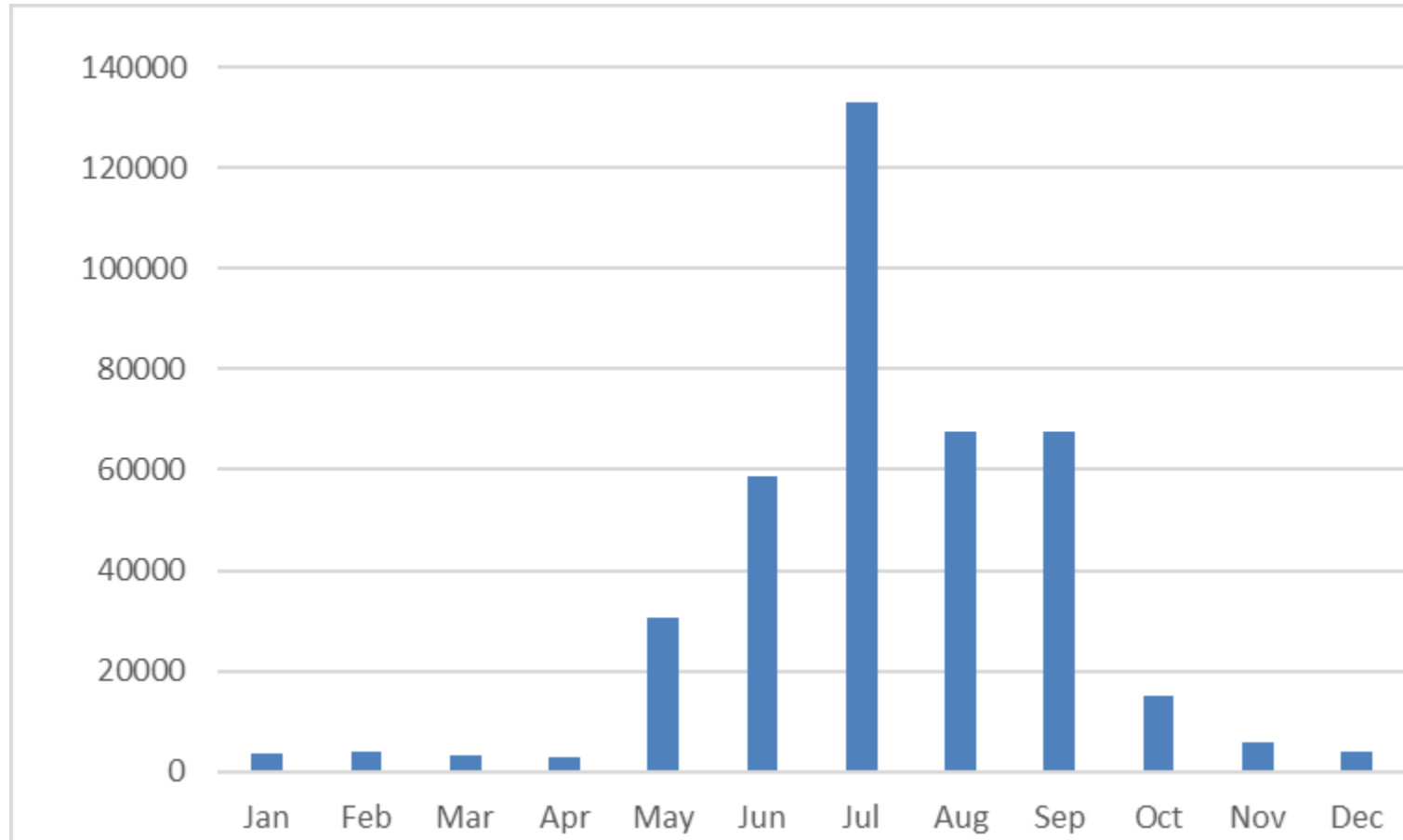
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# Visitation - Pearl Lake



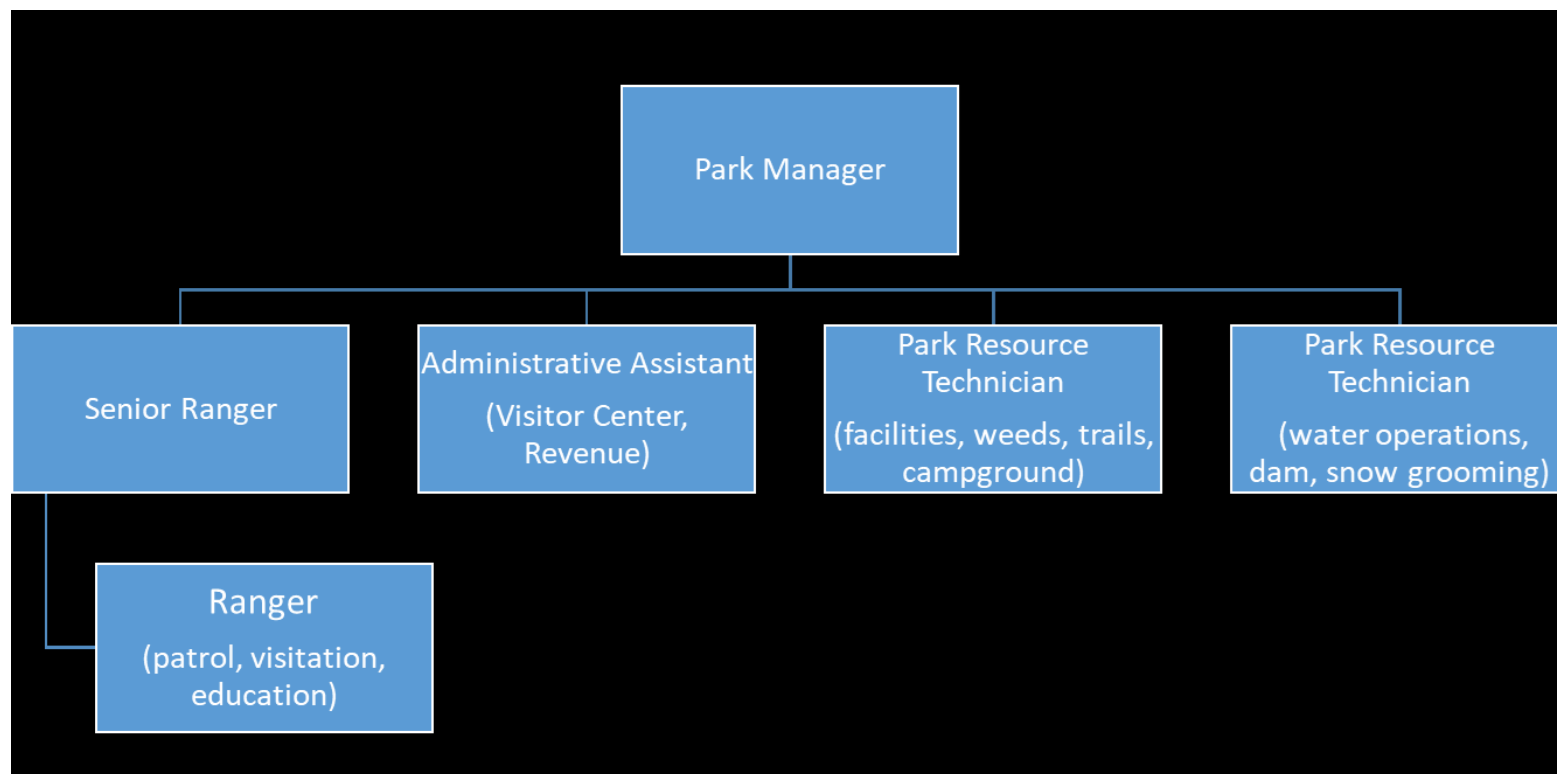
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# Visitation Timing



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# Park Staffing



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# Park Budgets

Pearl Lake General Operating FY 20-21

\$19,984

Steamboat Lake General Operating FY 20-21

\$360,341



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# Management Zones

Zone Classifications: Each Zone Classification includes an assessment of Visitor Experience, Recreation Opportunities, Potential Facilities and Management Focus

- Development - Campgrounds, Visitor Center, Parking
- Passive Recreation - Day use
- Natural - Areas with known resources in good condition
- Protection - wetlands, sensitive species, areas with sensitive resources,



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# Management Zone Considerations

- Geologic and vegetation sensitivity
- Winter recreation use patterns
- The area owned by DOW (pre-merger) is managed with the same philosophy.
- Ecosensitivity ratings

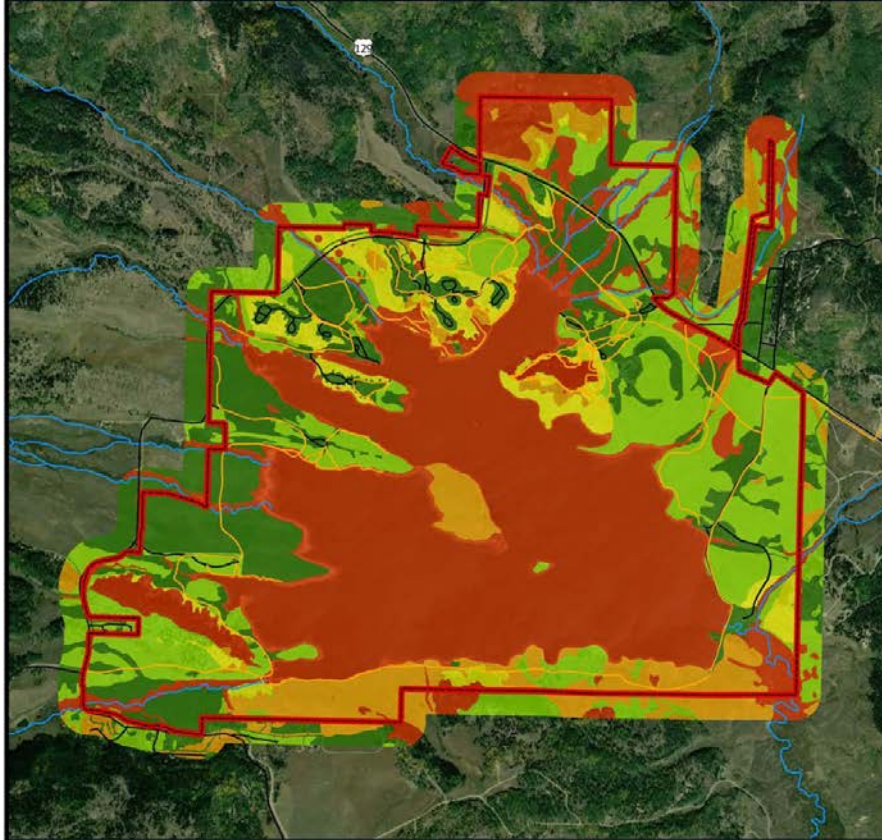
	Acres	Percentage
<b>Steamboat Lake</b>		
Development	122	7%
Passive Recreation	309	17%
Natural	896	50%
Protection	479	27%
<i>Total</i>	<i>1806</i>	<i>100%</i>
<b>Pearl Lake</b>		
Development	24	19%
Natural	85	66%
Protection	20	16%
<i>Total</i>	<i>129</i>	<i>100%</i>



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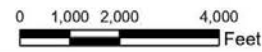


# Steamboat Lake State Park Management Plan



## Eco-Sensitivity

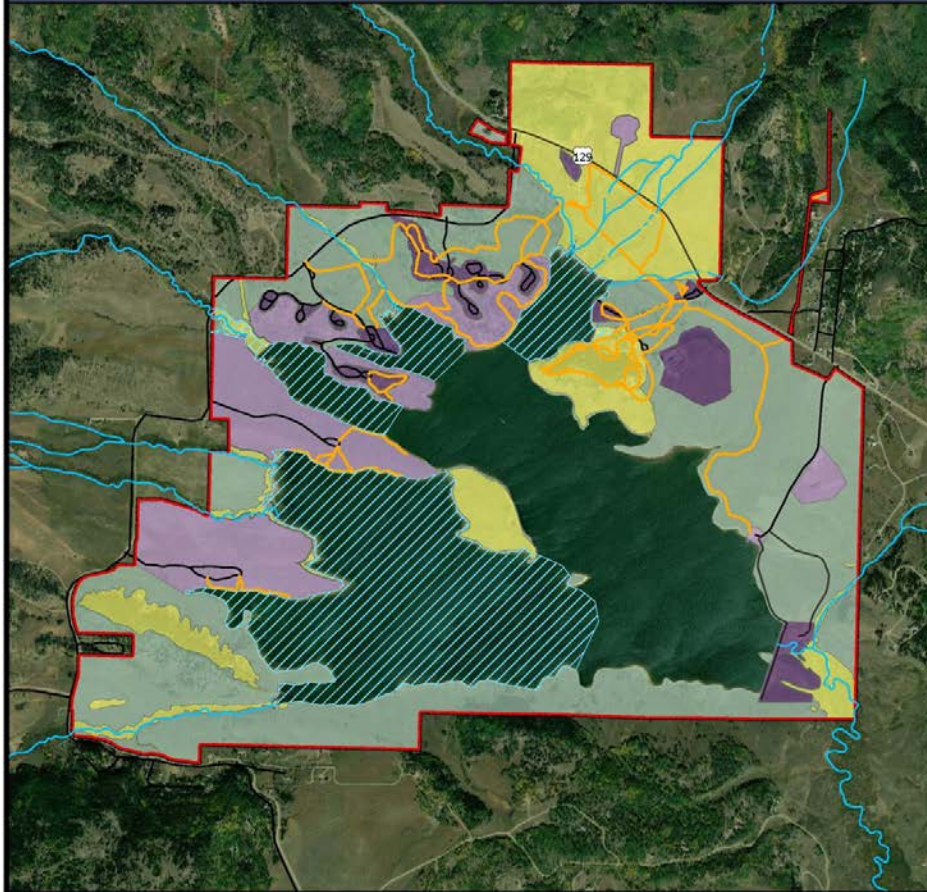
- |               |                                |
|---------------|--------------------------------|
| Park Boundary | Sensitivity Level: High        |
| Trails        | Sensitivity Level: Medium High |
| Roads         | Sensitivity Level: Medium      |
| Streams       | Sensitivity Level: Medium Low  |
|               | Sensitivity Level: Low         |



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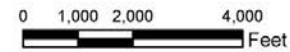


# Steamboat Lake State Park Management Plan



## Management Zones

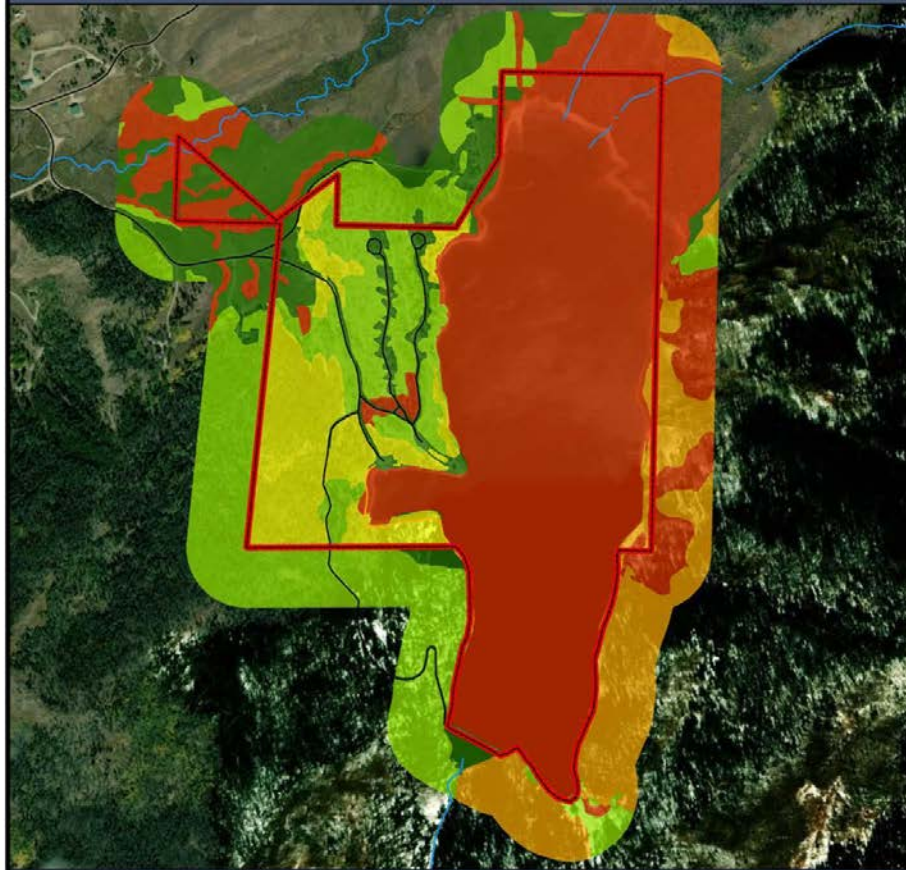
- |                    |               |
|--------------------|---------------|
| Protected          | No Wake Zone  |
| Natural            | Streams       |
| Passive Recreation | Trails        |
| Developed          | Roads         |
|                    | Park Boundary |



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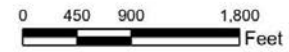


# Pearl Lake State Park Management Plan



## Eco-Sensitivity

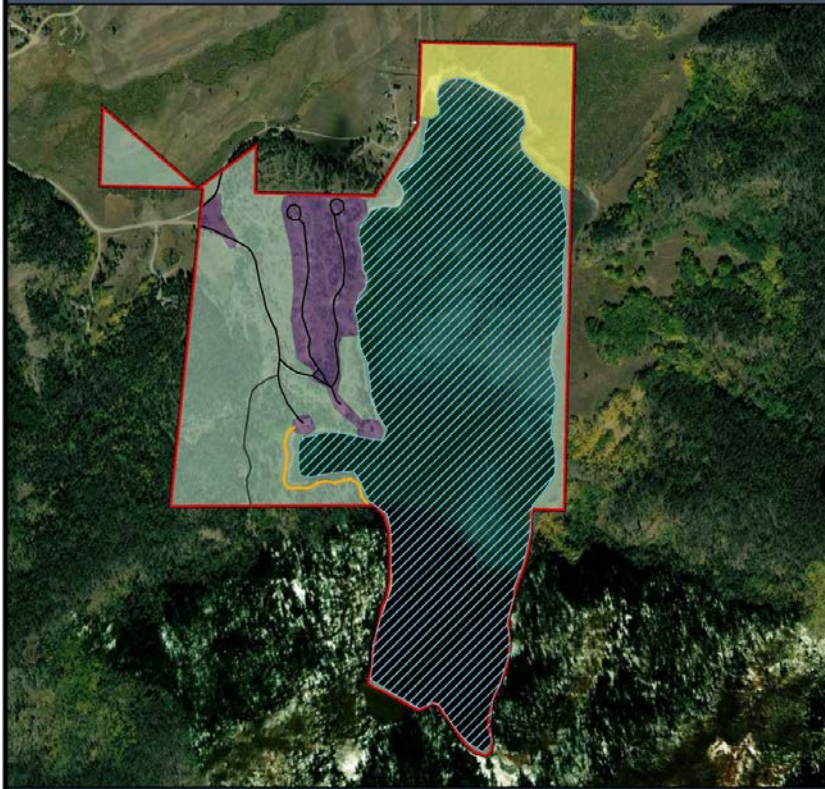
- |               |                          |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| Park Boundary | <b>Sensitivity Level</b> |
| Trails        | High                     |
| Roads         | Medium High              |
| Streams       | Medium                   |
|               | Medium Low               |
|               | Low                      |



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# Pearl Lake State Park Management Plan



## Management Zones

- |           |               |
|-----------|---------------|
| Developed | No Wake Zone  |
| Natural   | Trails        |
| Protected | Roads         |
|           | Park Boundary |



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# Park Enhancement Opportunities and Initiatives

Priorities that will guide decision making

- Maintaining the natural character of the Parks and provide quality outdoor experiences for visitors
- Support existing critical operations is priority over adding additional responsibilities
- Building knowledge of our visitation to provide a greater understanding of visitors interests and needs and be able to communicate better.
- Education and interpretation is critical to developing stewards of our parks and an informed citizenry that engages in CPW's mission. Staff must be creative to provide opportunities with limited resources.



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# Enhancement Opportunities

1. Major rehabilitation or improvements to existing facilities or infrastructure.
1. New facilities and infrastructure
1. Natural resource rehabilitation and restoration
1. Management initiative critical to the long-term operational success of the Parks.



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# Prioritization

- High priority actions (H) are considered extremely important to maintaining the quality of recreation experience and protecting natural resources in the Park. These actions are central to preserving, maintaining, and enhancing park resources and the visitor experience. Many of these projects will be implemented in the next few years or are part of ongoing maintenance.
- Medium priority actions (M) are considered important, but not urgent, and meet a combination of other resource goals and objectives. Many of these projects are generally part of a framework for the next 10 years.
- Low priority actions (L) are considered important, but not critical. Low priority actions do not need to be completed in the immediate future.



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## Existing Facilities and Infrastructure

### Historic Structures:

All standing historic structures in the Park lack structural integrity and should be viewed from a distance in order to protect the resource as well as the safety of Park visitors. Recreational impacts are mostly preventable through fencing, interpretation/signage, periodic monitoring by Park volunteers or staff, and outreach to Park visitors. The Resource Stewardship Plan has recommendations for monitoring and minimizing impacts to these structures.

- o Placer cabin is used for some programming and investments have been made to stabilize this structure. There is electricity and it could be used for winter equipment rentals and/or as a warming hut (L).

- o Qualey cabin needs stabilization to keep it from further deterioration (M).

- o The sawmill site has no development or summer use but winter trails pass by there and it could be part of trail access for Mill Creek hunting and fishing (L).



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## Campgrounds:

Remeasure the maximum size of RVs per site and update as needed on the reservations website (M). Campers must fit what is provided, if users arrive with incorrect RV sizes, CPW will not cut trees or vegetation to fit them nor will the sites be enlarged.

Replace/upgrade fire pits (M).

Replace border timbers that are old and rotting (L).

Finish tiles at Yarrow Loop (M) where there is an ephemeral wetland on the hill (which floods fire pits in the first 3 weeks of camping season). Seasonal closures are also put in place as needed.

Add poles to campsites for shade/hammock hanging (L).

Add water conservation signage to timed showers (M) in camper services buildings.



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Marina/Swim Beach area:

The Marina needs maintenance and improvement to the site (M).

The vault restroom is functional but needs to be upgraded (M). This is heavily used year-round.

Strategies to assist with crowding and traffic flow require staff resources for successful implementation, and include:

- o In 2021, Placer Cove will be used for hand-launched vessels only and a swim beach added to disperse water recreation(H).

- o Line roadways with buck & rail to limit parking out of designated areas (M).

- o Improving the trailer parking opportunities (H)

- o Disperse swimmers by designating all wakeless zones for “swimming at your own risk.” This aligns with shifting park system culture to allow swimming in more areas and require visitors to be safe and responsible. (M)



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## Upgrade water systems with the following needs:

- Evaluate the distribution system and add valves so the whole system is not shut down when an isolated incident occurs
- Add a standby generator at the potable water treatment facility—this will allow a backup to be able to generate and distribute water when there are power outages originating off the Park
- Address joint issues with sprinkler system (e.g., degrading and coming apart) at the wastewater treatment facility (H)
- Monitor ability to meet water demands of the Park (M).



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Reduce inappropriate waste in system via the RV dump station (M).

- Reduce use waste of treated water: for example, RVs fill past needs for their visit and then dump excess before leaving the Park—this also impacts the dump station, which can leave a muddy mess in the gravel);
- See “education” under section 4. Management Initiatives below. Key messages for this issue include: take only what you need; if you need to dump excess water at the end of your visit, help with dust control on the roads (i.e., dump on gravel road as drive out)
- Consider charging for water after allowing a certain amount as part of a camping reservation and/or gating the area to control use

May take future technology for this to be effective and not further strain staff resources

- Add another dump site at Placer Cove to reduce congestion and degradation (L)



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# Pearl Lake

- Address overflow parking along road to campground by adding no parking signs/barriers (H). This road was built to accommodate the numbers of campers not additional day users. Fencing is easier to add at Pearl Lake State Park since the area is not plowed, however, there is limited space to place barriers.
- Add buck and rail from lower lot to restroom to direct visitors to steps and established trails—and discourage use of social trails (L).
- Resurface the road to include a crown and reduce sedimentation in the lake from road runoff (M).



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# Pearl - continued

Improve communications regarding trip planning and what visitors should do if the Park is full (M).

- Improve signage at the County Road 129 turn off. Include a variable digital sign to indicate when the Park is full.

Design and install a bigger, less cluttered sign.

- Add a sign at the entrance to current standards/logos and move iron ranger to get service (if possible)
- Direct visitors to Steamboat Lake areas that are less busy
- Consider day use reservations
- Use social media, website, and other emerging technology

Continue existing collaboration with CPW dam engineers and Division of Water Resources regarding collection infrastructure via compromised piping (H).



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# New Facilities and Infrastructure

- Tombstone Trail as a “Quiet Area” (L)
- Camper Services Building at Sunrise Vista (H)
- SLB Parcel (H)
- Sage Flats day-use area (M)
- Rainbow Ridge and Meadow Point - improve fishing access (M)
- Pearl Lake - Trail expansion (L)
- Natural Resources Rehabilitation (H)
  - Implement Resource Stewardship Plan
  - Surveys and monitoring
  - Noxious Weed Plan
- Manage informal Trails (M)
- Forest Management (M)
- Raptor monitoring and nest habitat (L)
- Dark skies designation (L)
- Range Management Plan (M)
- Water quality monitoring (beyond existing) (L)



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# Management Initiatives

- Increase personnel capacity (H)
  - Identify need in a 5 year staffing plan
  - Increase individual and volunteer groups
- Improve understanding of visitation trends and visitor use (M)
- Reduce winter recreation trails management challenges (M)
- Continue to offer Education, Interpretation and Outreach opportunities
  - Use Statewide opportunities
  - Train volunteers and temporary staff on messaging
  - reduce the use of signs and add art.



LIVE LIFE  
OUTSIDE

# Thank you!



LIVE LIFE  
OUTSIDE