



# LAKE NIGHTHORSE RECREATION AREA 2018 INTERIM REPORT

NOVEMBER 15, 2018



**CITY of  
DURANGO**  
Parks and Recreation  
Department



## Executive Summary

There was tremendous community interest in the anticipated opening of Lake Nighthorse Recreation Area to public recreation in 2018. The inaugural year of operations was eventful and the Durango Parks and Recreation Department implemented adaptive management to ensure recreational experiences were positive and in accordance with the Lake Nighthorse Operations Plan.

Lake Nighthorse opened to the public for recreation with a Kids Fish First special event on March 31, 2018 involving 328 participants. The Lake opened to non-motorized recreational users on Easter Sunday, April 1, 2018 with 734 participants. Motorized recreational use was initiated on May 15, 2018, following the Grand Opening and Dedication Ceremony the previous day. Utilization of Lake Nighthorse Recreation Area was high until the interruption of services began with the reconstruction of the boat ramp parking lot by the Bureau of Reclamation when the boat ramp was closed for 35 days in May and June. The 416 Fire impacted the air quality with smoke filled skies which started on June 1 and was identified as fully contained on July 31. During this period, Lake Nighthorse was closed to all public access for nine days in June when the City closed all open space recreation areas. In order to monitor recreational use of Lake Nighthorse, lake entries were tracked by recreational use and the dominant user groups 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 48,078 participants in 2018.

## 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 implemented the Lake Nighthorse Operations Plan in 2018.

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.

## Resource Protection

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

- Parks and Recreation Department staff completed 3,657 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 599 boats
- Parks and Recreation Department staff issued 1,739 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
- No fires were permitted, however, lightning started one fire within the park that was immediately extinguished
- There was extensive public education and signage implemented
- Law enforcement was routinely provided by the Durango Police Department
- 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 live bait
- No fishing at boat ramp where fish spawning occurs was encouraged with education and signage
- 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
- Four community volunteer stewards assisted with resources protection by contributing 23 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	Total Number
Aquatic Nuisance Species Inspections (Incoming and Outgoing)	3,657
Aquatic Nuisance Species Decontaminations	599
Exit Boat Seals Applied	1,739

## Provide Quality Recreational Experiences

There are diverse desires for recreational experiences at Lake Nighthorse and the 2018 operations built 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
- Three courtesy docks for motorized and non-motorized users were installed by the City
- 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
- The number of boats at Lake Nighthorse were limited by available on-site parking; however no participants were refused due to the lack of available parking
- 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 and there were no special events involving motorized personal watercraft in 2018; 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 based upon conditions; there were three citations issued by the Durango Police Department (2 passenger vehicle, 1 boat without regulation PFDs onboard)

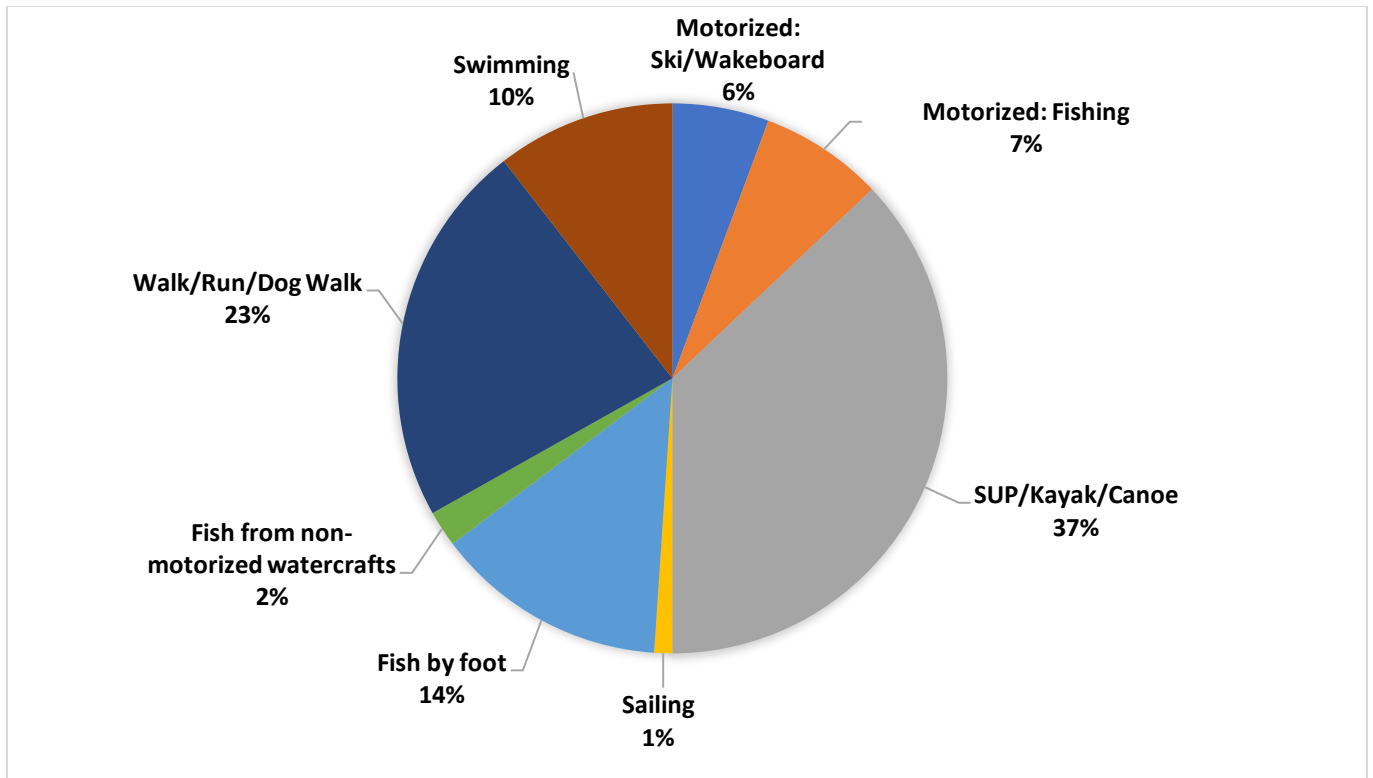
- Existing Parks and Recreation Department standards were followed to address public terms of use and public conduct at Lake Nighthorse
- Third party concessions were available to enhance the quality of the recreational experience; a total of two independent contractors provided recreation services to the community in 2018
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stocked a total of 240,818 fish (brown trout, rainbow trout and Kokanee salmon) in 2018
- 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 2018 recreation schedule included Mellow Mondays and Wakeless Wednesdays with the restriction of no wakes all day for recreational users
- Non-motorized use April 1 to May 14 was provided on weekends (Saturday and Sunday) only due to construction activities during the week
- The City hosted two special events and authorized 12 third-party educational programs and special activities at Lake Nighthorse in 2018
- 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	Total Number
2018 Lake Nighthorse Users	48,078
Season Pass Holder Entries	14,107
Day Use Admissions	33,328
Programs Participants	221
Free Special Events Participants	643
Concession Boat Rentals	1,562
Durango Police Citations	3



### Recreation by Use Categories



### Financial Viability

To ensure long-term recreational enjoyment of Lake Nighthorse by area residents and visitors to the region, the 2018 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 share 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; \$285,000 in grant funds were utilized from Colorado Parks and Wildlife Motorboat Colorado Program for the construction of the overflow parking lot
- The City has dedicated sales tax funds for park capital improvements; \$1,201,998 was invested in Lake Nighthorse capital improvements for the overflow parking lot, crusher fine connector trail, chip seal of Lake Nighthorse Road, four courtesy docks, signage, buoys, boat inspection area shade structure, entrance area stairs, and wave attenuation system at the boat ramp
- Lake Nighthorse entrance fees were implemented and will be evaluated annually
- The City of Durango 2019 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 is State legislation implementing fees in 2019 associated with an Aquatic Nuisance Species Stamp for motorized boats
- 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	Total Number
Expenses (January 1 – November 14, 2018)	\$364,812
Revenues for the Season	\$194,662
City Operational Subsidy	\$85,075
Bureau of Reclamation Operational Subsidy	\$85,075
Cost Recovery	76.7%
Capital Improvements	\$1,201,998

### 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 2018 hours of operation were as follows:

- **April 1 – May 14:** Saturday and Sunday ONLY 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 6 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, however, the boat ramp was closed for construction May 15 through 18 and May 29 through June 28 for a total of 35 days. The entire Lake Nighthorse Recreation Area was closed June 13 through 21 for a total of nine days due to the impacts from the 416 Fire.

## Lake Nighthorse 2018 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

