



# LAKE NIGHTHORSE OPERATIONS PLAN

MARCH 2018



**Durango Parks and  
Recreation  
Department**

## Executive Summary

In anticipation of the opening of Lake Nighthorse to recreation in 2018, there was considerable public interest in the management of operations pertaining to motorized and non-motorized recreational use. 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, a comprehensive public engagement process resulted in the creation of the recommendations for the Lake Nighthorse Operations Plan.

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 Bureau of Reclamation, Animas-La Plata Operation, Maintenance and Replacement Association and the City of Durango. Adaptive management will be employed by the City to ensure the goals of the Lake Nighthorse Operations Plan are consistently achieved with continuously evolving circumstances, recognizing that the opening year 2018 will create the operations baseline for Lake Nighthorse.

## Resource Protection

Resource protection at Lake Nighthorse involves water quality, natural and cultural resources, and invasive species. The 2016 Lake Nighthorse Recreation Plan Environmental Assessment identifies several givens that serve as the guiding principles for protection of resources:

- Boat inspection for aquatic nuisance species by certified inspectors following the Department of Natural Resources standards for bodies of water in Colorado
- Decontamination protocol and infrastructure on-site
- Implementation of boat seals and registration in national database
- Bureau of Reclamation water quality monitoring
- Designated fueling area at the entrance station
- Cultural Resources Sensitivity Training for all employees and contractors
- Bureau of Reclamation archaeological monitoring
- Golden Eagle surveying prior to construction activities
- Restricted public shoreline access to 25 feet above high-water line and in developed recreation areas
- No fires are permitted
- Public education and signage
- Law enforcement
- Adherence to City, State and Federal Laws
- Winter wildlife closure

- Houseboats that are used as a human dwelling; cabin cruisers with full living quarters on board, including plumbing are not permitted
- No boats with open-air-exhaust are permitted
- Adherence to Colorado Parks and Wildlife Fishing Regulations including no live bait
- No fishing at boat ramp where fish spawning occurs

In addition to the givens identified in the Environmental Assessment, the following operational management strategies will be implemented by the City of Durango and Bureau of Reclamation for resource protection:

- In addition to following State standards for inspection of watercraft for aquatic nuisance species, the City will consult with the State on the inspection of non-trailer craft that are high risk and follow recommended procedures
- The City will explore the feasibility of a voluntary cleaning station for watercraft not required by the State for inspection at the entrance station
- Boats with ballasts will be permitted and must adhere to State approved methods for decontamination
- Reclamation will install signs located at the 25' above high-water around the lake to delineate the boundary for public access
- In addition to limiting public access on the shore, Reclamation will monitor cultural resources and evaluate if modified shore access by the public is needed
- Dogs will be permitted, and pet owners will be required to adhere to the City leash law; dog waste dispensers will be provided by the City
- Community volunteer stewards will assist with resources protection
- The City will implement extensive reporting and tracking of recreational users at Lake Nighthorse and utilize data for adaptive management

## Provide Quality Recreational Experiences

There are diverse desires for recreational experiences at Lake Nighthorse and the Operations Plan will build upon the 2016 Lake Nighthorse Recreation Plan Environmental Assessment. The Environmental Assessment identifies several givens that serve as the guiding principles to provide quality recreational experiences:

- There will be multiple uses allowed at Lake Nighthorse including motorized and non-motorized recreation
- Local, State and Federal law enforcement officials will have presence at Lake Nighthorse
- Adherence to City, State and Federal Laws
- There will be three courtesy docks for motorized and non-motorized users
- There will be zoned recreation at Lake Nighthorse
- Restricted public access to 25' above high-water level and in developed recreation areas
- The number of boats at Lake Nighthorse will be limited by available on-site parking
- Boats travel in a counterclockwise direction for towed recreation in the open use area
- There will be qualified Parks and Recreation Department staff on-site during operating hours
- There will be scheduled and posted hours of operation at Lake Nighthorse; day use only

- Lake access from County Road 211 is closed to the public

In addition to the givens identified in the Environmental Assessment, the following operational management strategies will be implemented by the City of Durango and Bureau of Reclamation to provide quality recreational experiences:

- The Operations Plan provides for a designated no motorized craft area near outfall structure; Official boats will have access through the no motorized craft area to the public safety personnel dock
- Motorized personal watercraft (e.g. jet skis) will not be allowed except for special events involving motorized personal watercraft; Closely monitor motorized personal watercraft use requests and the Operations Plan may be adjusted as necessary
- Public access on west CR 211 is 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 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 will determine appropriate local law enforcement presence based upon conditions
- Existing Parks and Recreation Department standards will be followed to address public terms of use and public conduct at Lake Nighthorse
- Third party concessions will be available to enhance the quality of the recreational experience
- The City will regulate type of use with scheduled use to be inclusive as well as provide the most recreational use
- The City will monitor use patterns, share information with the public and encourage recreational users to select preferred times for use of the lake
- The Operations Plan includes Mellow Mondays and Wakeless Wednesdays with no wake restrictions all day for recreational users
- Non-motorized use April 1 to May 14
- The City will provide special events at Lake Nighthorse
- The City will monitor, track and evaluate conditions at Lake Nighthorse on an on-going basis and implement adaptive management; the City will seek customer input on experiences

## Financial Viability

To ensure long-term recreational enjoyment of Lake Nighthorse by area residents and visitors to the region, the 2016 Lake Nighthorse Recreation Plan Environmental Assessment and City of Durango have identified several givens that serve as the 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 Bureau of Reclamation and City of Durango 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
- Lake Nighthorse entrance fees will be implemented and evaluated annually
- The adopted City of Durango 2018 Budget provides funding for the operations of Lake Nighthorse
- The City will implement extensive reporting and tracking of recreational use at Lake Nighthorse
- There will be an economic benefit to the region with opening Lake Nighthorse for recreation

In addition to the givens identified in the Environmental Assessment and by the City of Durango, the following operational management strategies will be implemented by the City and Bureau of Reclamation to provide for the financial viability of Lake Nighthorse:

- The City will implement admission fees in 2018 for Lake Nighthorse and will consider trailer fees based on the results of 2018 operations
- There is pending State legislation to implement fees 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 will be provided to support the financial viability of operations
- Special Use Permits will be provided by the City which may result in limiting public access to the area under permit

## 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

Hours of operation may vary depending on inclement weather. The 2018 hours of operation will be 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:** Seasonal Closure

## Lake Nighthorse Fees

<u>Fee Type</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Annual Vehicle Pass -----	\$70
Multiple Vehicle Annual Pass -----	\$35
Senior Annual Vehicle Pass -----	\$60
Senior Multiple Vehicle Annual Pass ---	\$30
Annual Bike or Walk-in Pass -----	\$20
Daily Vehicle Entry -----	\$ 8
Daily Walk/Bike-in Entry -----	\$ 3

## Lake Nighthorse Recreation Map

