

Lake Nighthorse Wakeless Use Public Engagement Combined February 22 & 24, 2021 Meetings Q & A

February 22 Meeting Questions:

Q: How many users would there need to be to make the lake pay for itself?

A: This is a moving target as more amenities are constructed and additional staff are added (e.g. lifeguards at new swim beach), as well as additional revenue as new independent contractors begin to offer programs at Lake Nighthorse.

Q: Is there a problem with cedar gnats that need to be addressed?

Q: Bugs (cedar gnats or no see-um) are a problem in July on the shore, could anything be done to control these bugs?

A: Cedar gnats are a natural, native species in Pinyon/Juniper environments.

Q: Do you count boat guests in your usage?

Q: Is there a better way to get an accurate use number of all users?

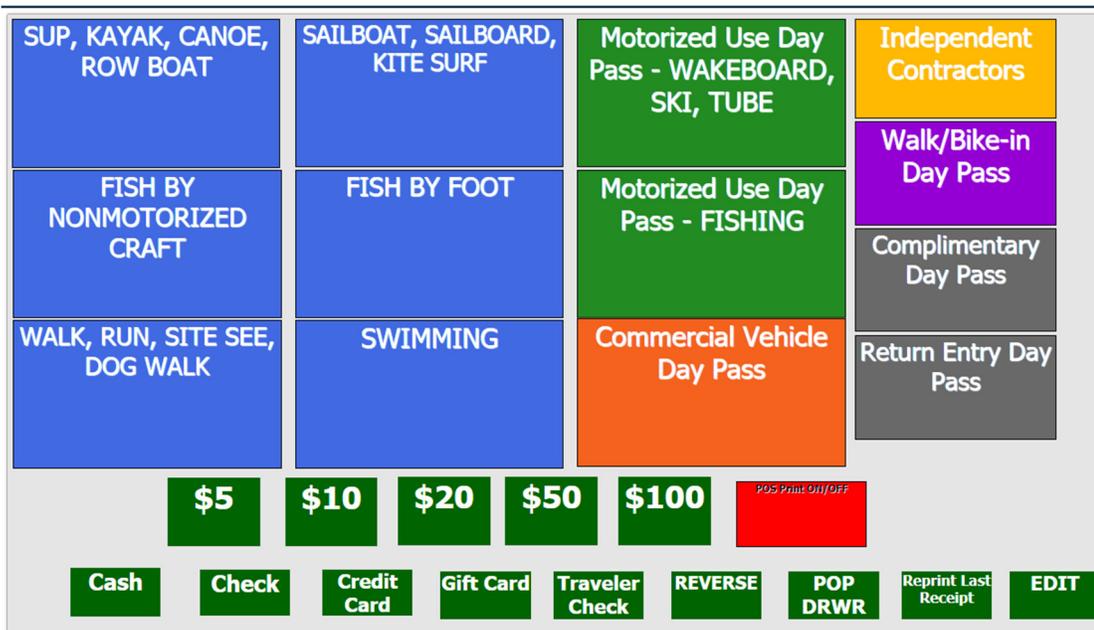
Q: Is the number your using to count wake surfing and skiing counting friends that show up in their own cars?

Q: I come to the lake pulling a boat 2 people in my vehicle, however 4 more come in separate cars, so how is the estimate correct as to 5 percent boat users?

Q: So people in a car with no equipment are counted as what? Walkers? Possible they are motor boat guests.

A: There are three ways lake staff capture the number of recreational users that enter the lake: (1) when selling a day pass, the employee asks what the visitor will be doing and then sells a day pass for that category in the point of sale system (see screen shot below); (2) when “punching” a 5-punch pass entry, the employee asks what the visitor will be doing and the punch is entered in the point of sale system for that category just like day passes; and (3) when a season pass vehicle enters the lake, they stop at the booth and the employee makes a visual observation of what recreational equipment is being brought in (e.g. dogs in back seats, paddle boards in truck beds, trailered boats, etc.).

This information is helpful in understanding recreational use at Lake Nighthorse. It includes a percentage of error in tracking season pass entries when equipment is not visible and a vehicle does not stop to talk to the employee in the booth.



Q: Is the intake pump working again to start adding water to the lake?

A: Yes, the intake pump is working again and will start to fill the lake in May when water levels in the Animas River from runoff increase.

Q: Is there a motorized requirement because of funding that was received?

A: The paved boat ramp at Lake Nighthorse was funded by a grant for motorized recreation prior to the City becoming the recreational manager.

Q: I'd like to canoe on Nighthorse for more of the year. The lake doesn't freeze over and I would sail and row regardless of the temperature or time of year. Is this a possibility?

A: Lake Nighthorse is required by the Federal government to be seasonally closed to public recreation to protect critical winter wildlife habitat.

Q: Is "Wakeless" code for "No motorized boats" or are we considering the fact that waves are overwhelmingly created by wind not boats?

A: "Wakeless" does not mean no motor boats but rather that motor boats should not cause a wake during wakeless periods.

Q: While the lake is low now, can we work on getting some of the dead trees and brush cleared out of the beach areas before the water starts filling it up again May 1?

A: The disturbance of soil at Lake Nighthorse must be authorized by the Bureau of Reclamation. The City has received approval to remove vegetation, and completed this task at the swim beach.

Q: How many cfs will the pump draw from the river?

A: The Animas-La Plata Operations, Maintenance and Replacement (ALPOM&R) Association manages the pumping of water from the Animas River into Lake Nighthorse. The amount of water pumped is dependent upon pumping capacity, flow rates in the Animas River, and meeting the by-pass requirements.

Q: Is opening up an entrance to western shore possible?

A: There are many complex reasons why this is not supported by the Bureau of Reclamation, ALPOM&R Association, and the City.

Q: Have you considered that since the number of paddleboards don't increase on Mon, and Wed that no wake days don't help?

A: The City is aware of visitation by day for the three seasons Lake Nighthorse has been open to public recreation illustrates that usage on Monday through Thursday is very similar during the week.

Q: What is the daily % breakdown for ski boat use?

A: This information has not been calculated.

Q: The original plan included an extensive network of trails and camping and else. Do we have reason to believe the original financial forecast for managing Lake Nighthorse as a "state park like" facility holds bearing with a City led operations plan which is only a fraction of the original plan?

A: Recreational plans for Lake Nighthorse included many amenities. These concepts were assessed by the Bureau of Reclamation during their federally required NEPA process. Not all conceptual amenities were determined to be allowable by Reclamation without impacting natural resources at Lake Nighthorse.

Q: The new parking spaces at the swim beach are very short - longer vehicles(trucks) stick out into the street. Can this be corrected?

Q: Can we make the parking larger?

Q: Are there any plans to address the parking shortage?

A: Topography, cultural resources, and water drainage effect the extent to which surfaces may be altered at Lake Nighthorse. Parking spaces throughout the facility have been designed to accommodate the majority of vehicle types within the restraints of a given parking area.

Q: The original plan recognized the loss of three to four miles of the Old Spanish National Historic Trail. However, to date, the Bureau of Reclamation has not mitigated for the loss of these resources. How does the Bureau of Reclamation plan to address this loss either "on-site" or "off-site."

A: Please direct this question to the Bureau of Reclamation.

Q: Can the hours the lake is open be extended in the summer? For those working, and have non-wake days during the week day, it is difficult to take off work and recreate when the lake closes at 4 p.m.?

A: Operating hours of Lake Nighthorse are largely based on operating expenses and cost recovery. The City is tracking revenues versus expenses over the course of the operating season, and uses this information annually to set the hours of operation.

Q: Is there any plan for public information (signage) on launch etiquette? There are a lot of people who tie-up the launch. Its dangerous backing in a 22 foot boat when there are people tying down paddle boards right in the launch, when this could be done in the parking area.

Q: Is there a way to educate folks on Launching vs Staging (tying knots, filling coolers, arranging dogs, etc.) many are not aware about being on the launch ramp; some leave their stuff blocking access.

A: The City has added permanent Loading/Unloading Only signs, temporary sandwich boards, designated staff shifts, and scheduled volunteer shifts at the boat ramp.

Q: Can a bike/walking path (dirt is OK) be constructed around the lake?

A: The City is the recreational manager of 25 feet above water around the lake. Terrain restricts the possibility of a trail around the lake, as does the federal closure of the dam and the public access closure at the outfall structure. Reclamation and ALPOM&R Association do not support additional trails.

Q: Stats show 85% approval of current operations. What necessitated this community discussion?

A: Survey responses received by the Department and community comments regarding the Monday/Wednesday wakeless schedule prompted the initiation of this public engagement process.

Q: Reducing anyone's user days seems to exclude use. Does this seem to comply with City policy for other resources?

A: The City is following public engagement best management practices and is seeking community input on inclusive use of Lake Nighthorse.

Q: The vehicle and trailer parking only is a needed item. Now enforcement of the "Vehicle and Trailer Parking Only" is needed. Will trailer parking only be enforced?

A: Yes, City staff have installed trailer only parking signs on the east side of the boat ramp parking lot. City staff have also designed parking notices to place on windshields to help with public education and added an educational flyer in season pass envelopes.

Q: Paddlers account for 50% of the users but only get 28% of the days to exercise their sport. Wakeless zones are not the same as wakeless days. The noise and wakes travel through the wakeless zones. Boats stir up mud and chopped vegetation. Can we get restrictions on the number or speed of motorboats to reduce noise pollution, wakes, and disturbance of the lake surface?

A: This public engagement process includes receiving input on suggested management of wakeless use at Lake Nighthorse.

Q: If we are doing statistics, what is the average age of the people who want more no wake days?

A: This statistic is not being calculated.

Q: Has there been conflict between boaters and paddlers? What is the catalyst for these discussions? Are we trying to fix a problem that doesn't exist?

A: This public engagement process was brought on by the City's promise to have adaptive management of Lake Nighthorse Recreation Area to help understand the communities needs and desires.

Q: Why did we exclude jet skis?

A: Extensive public engagement was conducted prior to opening the lake in 2018. The Bureau of Reclamation issued in December 2016 the Lake Nighthorse Recreation Plan Final Environmental Assessment and Finding of No New Significant Impact Report. Above air exhaust boats, including jet skis, are currently prohibited.

Q: Release of water, will it affect level of Lake?

A: Lake Nighthorse is a drinking water reservoir. Water levels will fluctuate when water is drawn for the purpose of distributing drinking water to the owners of the water rights. It is estimated that lake level could fluctuate by a few feet each year.

Q: What are the plans for future shaded picnic areas?

A: Extensive landscaping, including trees and irrigation systems, has been installed at the swim beach to provide shade throughout the beach area. There are no additional constructed shade structures planned for 2021. The City will be adding 10 more picnic tables in the beginning of the 2021 season.

Q: Has the City considered adjusting the docks further to water fluctuations?

A: The courtesy docks purchased for Lake Nighthorse were specifically selected for adjustment. Water levels are abnormally low due to repair of the intake structure. Adjustment of docks will continue in 2021 when the water level is raised.

Q: Is there a plan to connect Lake Nighthorse by trail to the Animas River Trail?

A: The City has consulted with Reclamation and Colorado Parks and Wildlife regarding a natural surface trail connection to the Animas River Trail. Because of restrictions associated with the Bodo State Wildlife Area, crossing this area is not a viable option. Options nearer the County Road 210 are being researched.

Q: Is there a paddleboard launch at swim beach?

A: Yes, the north end of the new swim beach will allow paddleboarders to launch their craft into the no motorized zone easily.

February 24 Meeting Questions:

Q: Can we have input from staff experience from 2020 (Busiest year yet)?

A: Lake staff contributed to the presentations at the February 22 and February 24 meetings in order to share details of lake operations.

Q: Will lake staff be asked for their input in this decision making process?

A: Yes, lake staff are very involved in this process.

Q: Will additional parking near swim beach be paved?

A: The existing gravel parking lot at the swim beach will be paved in 2024.

Q: Could there be an educational certification process for users or training process to be considerate or safe?

A: Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) oversees water safety rules and regulations for public waterbodies in the State of Colorado. CPW brochures on boating safety are available at the Lake Nighthorse entrance booth and at CPW offices, as well as online. Boater safety classes are available through third party providers as well.

Q: What is the cost of the floating play structure?

A: The Wubit play structure total cost will be \$126,603.

Q: The pipeline/pumphouse access point?

A: The City manages recreation on 25 feet above water around the lake. The pumphouse on the north shore of Lake Nighthorse is owned and operated by the La Plata West Water Authority. Like the dam and the outfall structure, this area is closed to the public for safety and to protect drinking water infrastructure from potential damage.

Q: Has any water been removed from Lake Nighthorse to Lake Durango?

A: Yes, however, please direct this question to La Plata West Water Authority.

Q: What is the reason for elimination of jet skis for noise?

A: Extensive public engagement was conducted prior to opening the lake in 2018. The Bureau of Reclamation issued in December 2016 the Lake Nighthorse Recreation Plan Final Environmental Assessment and Finding of No New Significant Impact Report. Above air exhaust boats, including jet skis, are currently prohibited.

Q: Is there a budget for opening for longer days?

A: Reviewing day pass sales for June, July and August 2019 when opening one hour earlier and staying open one hour later, entrance pass sales during those longer hours generated \$216 (total of 27 vehicles). The total cost of City staff for those same months and hours for the 2021 season would be \$8,188. The City will continue to evaluate the feasibility of extending hours of operation in 2021 in response to public input.

Q: How close have we been coming to 100% cost-recovery?

A: Cost recovery in 2018 was 74%, and in 2019 it was 85.5%. Finances for 2020 have not been completed yet but will be published in the Lake Nighthorse 2020 Season Report when available.

Q: Have there been discussions to better organize the fees? Such as annual boat stickers like other lakes and per user fees for each paddler/walker etc. these would bring in big bucks

Q: Do we have different fees for different uses?

A: The City annually researches the fee structure of Colorado State Parks, regional recreational areas, and other municipally managed waterbodies in the State of Colorado. Recreational management of Durango recreational facilities shows that increasing fees does not guarantee increased revenue. Lake Nighthorse fees will continue to be based on budgetary planning and consistency with similar facilities.

Q: Could there be an additional fee to decontaminate boats?

A: Lake Nighthorse is a certified Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) Watercraft Inspection Station and operates under State regulations and guidelines. Additional decontamination fees are not supported by CPW. Boat owners are charged fees to register their boats annually and these fees contribute to the State watercraft inspection and decontamination program.

Q: Could the fees be raised at the lake? Especially on the season passes to pay for extended hours of the day.

A: In 2021 the fees have been increased from 2020 and will be as follows:

Park Entrance Pass Options	Price
Day Pass Vehicle Entrance	\$10
Day Pass Walk/Bike Entrance	\$4
Commercial Vehicle Day Pass	\$25
Season Pass Vehicle (1st for Household)	\$80
Season Pass Multiple Vehicle (Same Household)	\$40
Season Pass Vehicle Senior * (1st for Household)	\$70
Season Pass Multiple Vehicle Senior* (Same Household)	\$35
Season Pass Walk/Bike	\$25
5-Punch Pass Vehicle	\$40
5-Punch Pass Vehicle Senior*	\$30
5-Punch Pass Walk/Bike	\$15

* Senior - 62 years and over

Q: Is the Bureau of Reclamation staff participating in the discussion this evening?

A: Yes, Ethan Scott and Matt Dayer from Bureau of Reclamation were in attendance for the Lake Nighthorse public engagement meeting.

Q: What data is available about how much actual economic impact has been realized vs. the original projection by the consultants?

A: The Parks and Recreation Department is undergoing an economic impact study which includes Lake Nighthorse. It is anticipated that the report will be released later this year.

Q: How many people represent the graph?

A: 93,302

Q: How many complaints were submitted against motorboats?

A: This number was not calculated.

Q: How much is the budget shortfall annually? Are the budget shortfalls including the \$3.5 million in improvements or, is that separate?

A: In 2018, the operational subsidy for Lake Nighthorse Recreation Area was \$211,274.90. In 2019, the subsidy was \$104,530.47. Since 2018, the City has invested \$2,389,719 in capital improvements which is separate from the operating subsidy.

Q: Do the statistics take into consideration that certain types of uses are restricted to certain days? Meaning, if motorized boats only account for 5% of use, does that consider that they aren't able to use the lake on the wakeless days?

A: No. Visitor use by recreational type is a general representation captured to assist in understanding use at Lake Nighthorse. It is not the sole metric being used to make management decisions.

Q: Is a trolling motor allowed in no motor areas?

A: No, the nonmotorized section of the lake is designated for all watercraft without any kind of motor. Only safety personnel boats are allowed to use motors in this area.

Q: How will the user days be weighted (e.g., the largest group of users are paddlers -- how will this group be weighted relative to the decision making process).

A: The City is not “weighing” user days in this decision making process. This is a public engagement process to hear from the public on how the City can best meet the needs of all users.

Q: Is this meeting intended to determine if additional wakeless days will be added or has that already been determined and are the Boaters just being placated?

A: This is a public engagement process to hear from the public on how the City can best meet the needs of all users. A final decision has not been made.

Q: How do the boats impact the contamination of the water quality? Does this impact the water that is sent to the folks that need it for drinking/use?

Q: Do we know what the water quality issues impacts are for motorized use + people using the lake as a toilet?

A: Water quality sampling is conducted by the State of Colorado and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Prior to opening Lake Nighthorse to public recreation, the Bureau of Reclamation conducted their federally required NEPA process to determine allowable uses. This Environmental Assessment determined that some boats are allowable. Not all boats are allowed as a result of this EA, such as houseboats with plumbing.

Q: Will hours for usage return to 2019 hours for 2021? In 2020 the limited hours made it almost impossible for use after work in the evening.

A: Hours of operation during the 2020 season were a direct result of COVID-19. Pending San Juan Basin Public Health restrictions for the 2021 season, the City plans to return to Hours of Operation in line with those of 2019.

Q: Who is monitoring the use / keeping alcohol use in check? Who is ensuring smokers are not breaking the rules by throwing “live” cigarettes into the brush! If truly “adaptive” why not adapt?

A: Drinking and smoking are both prohibited at Lake Nighthorse Recreation Area. Lake Nighthorse staff, Durango Police Department, La Plata Sheriff, and Bureau of Reclamation law enforcement patrol their respective jurisdictions at Lake Nighthorse Recreation Area.

Q: Is anyone concerned about the tribal concerns about using the lake area which is considered sacred?

Q: Is the lake considered sacred by any tribe?

A: Lake Nighthorse is located in Ridges Basin which has a rich cultural history. Reclamation has produced educational signs that are located at the boat ramp parking lot, the swim beach parking lot, and at the Tribute Garden where lake visitors can learn more on this topic.