

What a spring we had! Summer continues to deliver severe weather.

This year's rainy weather brought the volume in Bear Creek Reservoir to 5,478 acre feet on May 19, up from a normal volume of 2,000 acre feet. If you visited the park then, you know what that looked like. Imagine the site if another 10,000 or 20,000 acre feet of water storage is approved. A second spike flooded several trails and facilities again in June. Here's a link to the USACE Bear Creek Dam page where you can learn more about the dam and how it is operated: <https://www.nwo.usace.army.mil/Missions/Dam-and-Lake-Projects/Tri-Lakes-Projects/Bear-Creek-Dam/>.

Bear Creek Reservoir's temporary storage of flood waters not only protected homes in Lakewood's greenbelt, but it also helped protect property and infrastructure along the South Platte in Denver and beyond. Cherry Creek, Chatfield and Bear Creek Reservoirs are managed in a coordinated manner to provide flood protection to Denver metro area.

The question on everybody's mind is, how much will flood risk increase if some of the reservoir's capacity is reallocated from flood control to water storage.

Your opinion matters! If you haven't submitted a comment into the Feasibility Study, or if you've thought of something else to say, please do so now. Visit <https://savebearcreeklakepark.org/take-action/> for tips and talking points.

Besides flood risk of an expanded reservoir, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is also evaluating social, recreational and environmental impacts. Below are comments I received from USACE in response to questions about the Feasibility Study:

“Public opinion has tremendous value for evaluating effects of implementing an alternative on all resources such as vegetation, water quality, recreation, public safety, environmental justice, climate change, Other Social Effects (OSE), etc. We avoid impacts to the maximum extent possible and if unavoidable impacts are identified then mitigation is required. We can calculate physical impacts to vegetation, water quality, wetlands, etc., **but we need the public's opinions to take into consideration values on “softer” or more difficult to quantify resources, such as those that affect the social, mental and physical health of a community. The public has and will continue to be included in the decision making process as the study moves forward.**”

Regarding how the Study will consider environmental, recreational and social well-being impacts, USACE responded:

“Other Social Effects (OSE) are being evaluated in the feasibility study and include life safety impacts, environmental justice impacts, and social vulnerability. Environmental Quality is also being evaluated in the feasibility study. These categories are not represented using dollar values and are not included in the benefit-cost ratio (see

Engineering Regulation 1105-2-100, Appendix D & E). Recreation impacts are being evaluated in this study and will be included in the benefit-cost ratio.”

USACE is required to select plans that maximize NED, or National Economic Development. I inquired into how the environmental and social benefits fit into the NED framework. USACE responded:

“The requirement to recommend the plan that maximizes NED benefit does not preclude Environmental Quality and Other Social Effects accounts from being evaluated. These accounts are evaluated and documented in the draft report. If Environmental Quality and Other Social Effects impacts show that a plan other than the NED plan would be significantly more beneficial than the NED plan, a policy waiver may be requested by the Project Delivery Team to recommend a non-NED plan. While we put forth effort to capture, describe, and compare the social and environmental benefits between alternatives, we do often lack the tools or empirical data to determine their monetary value (hence the non-monetary distinction in the paragraph above) to compare them dollar for dollar to the NED benefits.”

Finally, we are still in a holding pattern, waiting for USACE to schedule the second Public Scoping Meeting. Let’s make sure they’ve heard from all of us while they are considering what alternatives to rule out and/or advance.

Best,

Katie Gill
Director, Save Bear Creek Lake Park