

Proposal Threatens Bear Creek Lake Park

A proposal to expand the Bear Creek Reservoir- by up to ten times its current volume- is being studied by the US Army Corps of Engineers. A tenfold increase in the Reservoir's volume would flood over 500 acres of Bear Creek Lake Park (BCLP) and potentially increase flood risk.



The darker blue in the center represents the reservoir at its current storage volume of 2,000 acre feet (AF). The light blue overlay represents a storage increase of 20,000 AF.

A 20,000 AF expansion would flood nearly a third of Bear Creek Lake Park (excluding the golf course). Twelve miles of the most popular trails and significant stretches of an irreplaceable riparian ecosystem would be inundated. As you can see in the image, the majority of the Bear and Turkey Creek corridors would be consumed by the expansion. According to the EPA, riparian areas comprise less than one percent of the land area of most western States, yet up to 80 percent of all wildlife species depend on riparian areas for at least part of their life cycles. The core of the Park's wildlife habitat, along with hundreds (even thousands) of cottonwood trees are threatened by this proposal. These inner regions of the park encompass nearly a square mile.

Another negative impact would be fluctuating water levels in the reservoir. The full volume of 22,000 AF will not be available every year, so after stored water is drawn out of the reservoir, a "bathtub ring" of mud flats would be left behind. In drought scenarios, such barren regions could persist for years. If you remember the floods of 2013 and 2015, the proposed maximum volume would exceed peak levels of those flood events.

Background: The Bear Creek Dam was built in the 1970's by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to provide flood control. The Park is managed by Lakewood and owned by the Corps. In 2015, USACE and the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) proposed expanding the Reservoir for the purpose of water storage. **Primary partners interested in acquiring storage rights in the Reservoir are the Cities of Brighton, Berthoud and Dacono.** The project was suspended in 2019 to evaluate the flood risk of maintaining a larger pool and decreasing capacity for flood water storage. In September of 2021, the CWCB and the Corps decided to move forward with the **Bear Creek Lake Reallocation Feasibility Study.** The proposal seeks to reallocate capacity in the Reservoir *from* Flood Control *to* Water Storage. The study, originally expected to span three years, will address flood safety, storage potential, environmental concerns and quality of life impacts.

How much parkland and critical habitat should we sacrifice in order to provide water storage for distant municipalities? BCLP attracts an estimated 800,000 user visits annually, which doesn't account for all of the users who walk or ride into the Park.

Alternatives being considered range from “no change” to a 20,000 AF expansion. Excavating to deepen the current pool is one option. This would provide additional water storage within a smaller footprint of impact. The current reservoir (approximately 110 acres on the surface) evaporates an estimated 250 AF of water every year. An additional 500 acres of surface area would be highly evaporative. Across the West, Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) is offering a more sustainable and less evaporative means of storing water in semi-arid, increasingly warmer climates.

Website: SaveBearCreekLakePark.org **Facebook:** [Save Bear Creek Lake Park](#)

Email Katie@SaveBearCreekLakePark.org to receive updates and an invitation to the next public hearing.

The First Public Scoping Meeting was held virtually on October 14, 2021. More than 200 people attended, overwhelmingly opposing a 20,000 AF expansion. The public emphasized that Bear Creek Lake Park provides recreation as well as mental and physical well-being. During that meeting, Chief of Project Management Greg Johnson said, *“There is some special emphasis on social well-being considerations in the decision-making process that came out of the Assistant Secretary of the Army within the last calendar year, so it is being elevated to a higher level of consideration versus just pure economics anymore.”* Since then, additional federal guidance further strengthened the role of public input in the Study.

“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.” (Bear Creek Study Team).

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- **Tips and talking points for submitting a comment, are on the [Take Action](#) page at SaveBearCreekLakePark.org**