

Dear SaveBCLP friends,

I hope you're enjoying this beautiful fall. Thanks to everyone who came out for National Public Lands Day. The crew put hundreds of native plants into the the ground and raised a section of the Mount Carbon Loop Trail to increase its drainage and resiliency. We worked in the area just west of the main boat launch, which takes the brunt of flood damage during high-water events.

For those of you who are new to this list, thanks for joining! We continue to meet folks who thank us for "saving the park"... as if the threat has passed. It has not. Some people ask when we get to vote on it. We do not. Our "votes" take the form of submitting a comment to the Corps of Engineers (more on that below).

The fight to Save Bear Creek Lake Park continues as the Army Corps of Engineers investigates the potential impacts of increasing water storage in the Bear Creek Reservoir. Bear Creek Lake Park is owned by the Corps of Engineers and managed by the City of Lakewood. The study is looking into reallocating a portion of the reservoir's capacity from flood control to water storage. Alternatives under consideration range from no change to a tenfold increase in the volume of the Reservoir, which would reduce land acreage of Bear Creek Lake Park by over 500 acres. The primary partner interested in purchasing storage in Bear Creek Lake is the City of Brighton.

If approved, a large reallocation would inundate over a mile of Bear Creek and could necessitate removal of up to 75% of the trees in the Park. These riparian corridors are the heart and lungs of BCLP. They provide vital habitat and host twelve miles of shady, wooded trails. The Corps is now six years into a study that was initially expected to span three years. Numerous factors are being considered, including flood risk, inflow potential, recreational and environmental impacts.

**Community impact is also a factor, and the Corps needs our input to assess how losing so much of our park would affect us. Information on where/how to submit a comment to the Study Team is here: <https://savebearcreeklakepark.org/take-action/>.** Your input doesn't need to be long or technical. What would it mean to you if the core of Bear Creek Lake Park were inundated by intermittent water storage?

The project study team at the Corps, in partnership with the Colorado Water Conservation Board, estimates they will be ready to share the initial study findings at a public hearing in late January. If you haven't submitted your opinion yet, now is the time.

Some people ask, "But don't we need this water storage?" The amount of storage that could reasonably be captured is minimal compared to the relative destruction of the Park. Save Bear Creek Lake Park supports smart, sustainable and innovative solutions to our water needs. These include conservation, aquifer storage and recovery, and less destructive surface storage alternatives. We can secure Colorado's water future without destroying cherished places like Bear Creek Lake Park.

While our opposition to a reallocation has focused on what's at stake in the Park, many people who live downstream of the dam are worried about the potential for increased flood risk. On that note, the following comment was submitted to the Corps of Engineers by Don Baumgardt:

Flood Control. That's the original and current purpose of Bear Creek Lake dam and reservoir. They exist to protect lives and property downstream from a repeat of massive floods that devastated the region in 1965.

The tragic events now taking place in the southern New Mexico town of Ruidoso provide a timely reminder of why flood control is so crucial and reinforce that it is difficult to predict the severity of future weather events. The Ruidoso area has a total year-round population of under 15,000 people but it often swells with tens of thousands of visitors, especially on summer weekends. It's situated at just over 7,000 feet above sea level and on the southeastern flanks of 11,981 foot Sierra Blanca, the tallest mountain in the region.

Large wildfires swept through the area in 2022 and 2024, burning over 30,000 acres in total. Decades of fire suppression throughout the west, coupled with warming temperatures are increasing the frequency and size of wildfires. Some of these fires burned hot, hot enough to change the soil's composition and make it hydrophobic - less able to absorb rainfall. The Ruidoso fires were that type. Last year and this year heavy rains upstream of populated areas have repeatedly sent suddenly rising waters in the Rio Ruidoso through the heart of the town. Three people have died and several hundred homes were damaged or destroyed. The Ruidoso Downs horse racing track was even forced to close for the remainder of the summer season and possibly forever because of damage received.

How does this relate to Bear Creek Lake? The watersheds of Bear Creek and Turkey Creek - the two sources of water entering Bear Creek Lake - are significantly larger than the landmass above Ruidoso. And, as in Ruidoso, there are no other flood control structures above Bear Creek Dam. Read the news. Larger wildfire and flood events are happening everywhere these days.

A December 8, 2022 memorandum from the USACE Risk Management Center (SUBJECT: Bear Creek Dam Periodic Assessment 01) expressed concern about undertaking the reallocation study, noting that it may recommend trading flood risk management benefits for water supply benefits. The memo referenced the 2019 disapproval of the Aquilla Lake, Texas Reallocation Report and cautioned that while risk neutral alternatives likely exist, they would require significant infrastructure investment. Even with such investment, the risk of fire in and above the WUI (Wildland Urban Interface) surely increases potential for more sudden and devastating flood events in the Bear Creek Watershed. Has this risk factor been considered in the Feasibility Study?

How much of Bear Creek Reservoir's capacity can be reallocated to water storage without increasing flood risk? Save Bear Creek Lake Park has primarily focused on the environmental and recreational impacts of a reallocation on the park itself. However, flood risk is also a major concern in the broader community. It's hard to see how increasing

water storage in the reservoir, thereby reducing its capacity to absorb and store floodwaters, is risk neutral.

Happy Trails,

Katie Gill and Don Baumgardt  
Directors, Save Bear Creek Lake Park