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Summit County: Forest Service tackles Green Mtn. master plan

\$1.4 million in stimulus funds will help Forest Service with boat launch site, campground expansions

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SUMMIT COUNTY — A \$1.475 million infusion of stimulus cash likely won't change operations at Green Mountain Reservoir, but the federal dollars will help the U.S. Forest Service complete major projects at the popular recreation site.

“At the top of the list is a centralized boat launching facility,” said Rich Doak, recreation manager for the White River National Forest. Recent concerns about a possible infestation of non-native mussels led state and federal agencies to close off traditional access for boat trailers along the shore of the reservoir.

“It's really exciting to get the stimulus money,” said U.S. Forest Service District Ranger Jan Cutts. “Green Mountain Reservoir hasn't gotten the attention that's needed,” Cutts said, explaining that the agency's inability to implement a fee increase hampered efforts to make the needed improvements. The potential invasive mussel threat added a huge new layer of expenses, she added.

Doak said the money should be transferred to private hands relatively quickly through the “design and build” contracts the Forest Service will issue for the projects. But most of the work will probably have to wait until next summer, he added. One project that will be completed this summer is putting down gravel on some of the roads around the reservoir, Doak said.

“To do the major things down there, you have to do NEPA,” Doak said, referring to federal requirements for environmental studies for projects on federal land.

Master planning

That process could begin as soon as this week, with a scoping notice from the Forest Service to get public input on the proposed projects. The scoping process will include a public open house, with rangers on-hand to answer questions.

The boat ramp facility is the top priority, along with an expansion of existing campgrounds, to make up for the loss of beach camping, said Ken Waugh, recreation staff officer for the Dillon Ranger District.

Preceding the formal scoping phase, Cutts said she met with a focus group of users and other Green Mountain stakeholders to brainstorm.

“We want to figure out how we can have a sustainable operation down there,” Cutts said. Several small local businesses around the reservoir rely almost exclusively on traffic from reservoir visitors, she added.

At the end of the process, Cutts hopes to have a viable master plan for Green Mountain Reservoir.

Those sessions included input from a citizen group that opposes recreation fees on federal lands. Cutts said those critics are opposed to the agency's use of a high-impact recreation area designation for Green Mountain. The group also opposes inclusion of the Cataract Lake trail head in the fee scheme at Green Mountain. The group claims the parking fee at the trail head is illegal, while the Forest Service says it's a justified charge for the use of some basic facilities near Cataract Lake.

The funding for Green Mountain Reservoir was the only big chunk of Forest Service stimulus money awarded to the White River National Forest. Smaller amounts were doled out to work on preservation of some historic

cabins in Eagle County.

Both Cutts and Waugh were pleased with the stimulus funding. They characterized it as a big deal for Summit County and the local Forest Service district. The agency has struggled to find funding for the popular boating and camping area in the past few years.

About 30,000 to 35,000 people use the Green Mountain recreation area annually. Growing use created public safety and sanitation problems, but the Forest Service successfully tackled those issues with the installation of new toilets and fire rings at camp sites. Additionally, the agency has planted scores of cottonwood seedlings at the camp sites around the reservoir to create a separation between the sites.

For more information on Green Mountain Reservoir, go to www.dillonrangerdistrict.com/ or www.greenmountainreservoir.com.

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