Regulating the 'last frontier'

BY BOB BERWYN
summit daily news
March 7, 2006

SUMMIT COUNTY - Hoping to limit impacts to resources and reduce conflicts among user groups, the Forest Service adopted a formal management plan for Green Mountain Reservoir. It's the first time the popular area has been formally managed since recreational use began there in 1943.

Outlining the genesis of the planning effort, Forest Service officials said users of the area "can be characterized as people that desire an unregulated environment," rangers wrote in a brief history.

The report explains that the recreational setting was established by users and not by district management. Regulations aimed at protecting the environment have largely been ignored, including leash requirements, off-highway vehicle regulations and restrictions on fireworks and campfires.

Problems identified by the Forest Service include human waste in areas without toilets, litter, hazards from user-made fire rings (broken glass, cans), conflicts between anglers and water skiers, unleashed dogs and noise.

"Some value Green Mountain because it is the 'last frontier,' an unregulated environment that allows users a great deal of freedom to do what they please," the report said. "The reservoir is a 'local's favorite,' used heavily by people who live within 100 miles, with 90 percent of the use occurring on weekends in the form of destination camping."

According to the Forest Service, campers at Green Mountain tend to be working-class people who prefer to rough it in tents, pickup campers and old camp trailers. This user demographic doesn't ask for much in the way of developed services besides a clean bathroom and place to put trash. "In short, they like Green Mountain Reservoir just the
way it is and don't desire a lot of interaction with the Forest Service," according to the report.

But following demographic trends, the number of retiring baby boomers using self-contained RVs at Green Mountain has increased in recent years, constituting a group with somewhat higher service expectations.

The challenge for the Forest Service was to balance the interests of the user groups while meeting the agency's obligations to protect resources, said Ken Waugh, recreation staff officer for the Dillon Ranger District.

To make the needed improvements, the Forest Service projects spending $1.21 million during the next 10 years. The funding will come at least in part from fees collected at the site. Day use at the area will cost $5 per vehicle. The expanded fee, covering overnight camping, is $10. Season passes for the area will cost $65 and will be sold at local Heeney businesses.

Waugh said one of the biggest concerns among local business owners was that raising the rates would drive away customers. He said the new rates might initially cause a drop in use, but that a new clientele based on the new management regime will grow in its place.

Tighter enforcement
A blanket leash requirement for pets will be in place at all campgrounds, and the Forest Service plans to crack down on off-highway vehicle (OHV) use. The Dillon District will pursue designation of an OHV area, but that will take time, Waugh said.

"Basically, it's going to be, don't bring your OHV. Leave one of your toys at home," he said, explaining that it will be illegal to ride anywhere other than in and out of the campgrounds on designated roads. "That's going to make some people unhappy," he acknowledged.

But following demographic trends, the number of retiring baby boomers using self-contained RVs at Green Mountain has increased in recent years, constituting a group with somewhat higher service expectations.

The challenge for the Forest Service was to balance the interests of the user groups while meeting the agency's obligations to protect resources, said Ken Waugh, recreation staff officer for the Dillon Ranger District.

To make the needed improvements, the Forest Service projects spending $1.21 million during the next 10 years. The funding will come at least in part from fees collected at the site. Day use at the area will cost $5 per vehicle. The expanded fee, covering overnight
camping, is $10. Season passes for the area will cost $65 and will be sold at local Heeney businesses.

Waugh said one of the biggest concerns among local business owners was that raising the rates would drive away customers. He said the new rates might initially cause a drop in use, but that a new clientele based on the new management regime will grow in its place.

The recreation areas around the reservoir will be staffed by four people throughout the summer. Portable toilets will be required at North and South Cow Creek campgrounds, as well as at the Willows and Elliot campgrounds.

For more detailed information on site-specific management, go to: http://www.dillonrangerdistrict.com/projects.htm#green_mountain_res.

Bob Berwyn can be reached at (970) 331-5996, or at bberwyn@summitdaily.com.