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Forest Service releases Final Decision for Hanging Lake Plan and partners with Glenwood Springs for Management

Hanging Lake, a National Natural Landmark, is situated between the communities of Eagle and Glenwood Springs in Glenwood Canyon, located in Garfield County, Colorado.

GLENWOOD SPRINGS, Colo. –The Forest Service has signed the Final Decision Notice for the Hanging Lake Management Plan and has entered into a formal partnership with the City of Glenwood Springs to manage Hanging Lake visitation through a seasonal shuttle service and year round reservation system.

“The Forest Service is excited about the opportunity to partner with the City of Glenwood Springs to effectively manage Hanging Lake and improve the visitor experience for everyone,” said Aaron Mayville, District Ranger. “We are currently working out the details for the transportation and reservation system, but expect to begin shuttle operations in May of 2019.”

The Decision will implement a management plan for the Hanging Lake area that defines a daily capacity of 615 users per day, year-round, to protect resources, manage congestion, improve safety and visitor experience and continue to support local tourism. A third-party transportation provider and fee-based reservation system is expected to be in effect beginning in May 2019 which would allocate the daily visitor capacity year-round.

To effectively implement this plan for the long-term, the Forest Service and the City of Glenwood Springs are working to partner with the goal of improving visitor experience, safety, crowding and congestion. Specific implementation details such as the shuttle provider, shuttle cost, and how to obtain a reservation are currently being worked out between the City and the Forest Service.

The partnership is expected to cooperatively provide additional capacity, infrastructure, interpretive services and management support for implementing the Hanging Lake Management Plan into the future to provide locals and the broader public with high-quality recreation experiences and excellent customer service. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 broadened U.S. Forest Service authority for working with partners like the City of Glenwood Springs under the Cooperative Funds and Deposits Act. The City of Glenwood Springs may seek a third-party transportation provider through their Request for Proposals process.

“I am pleased that the United States Forest Service and the City of Glenwood Springs are able to work together to protect Hanging Lake, while continuing to provide access to our residents and visitors. I look forward to a successful partnership,” stated Mike Gamba, Mayor, City of Glenwood Springs.

The Forest Service also expects the natural ecosystem of the lake and trail to improve with more direct management and educational opportunities. As part of implementation of this Plan, partners are working on creating additional interpretive signage and learning opportunities along the trail.

The Hanging Lake Management plan will be implemented year-round. During the “Off-Peak” season, (currently November- April) the area would be managed to its daily capacity through a fee-based reservation, and visitors will be able to access the site using their own vehicles. An adaptive management strategy relies on monitoring to ensure that the plan’s objectives are obtained and the intent of the plan continues to be effective in the face of future changes.

This plan has been years in the making as visitation and management issues have significantly increased. In 2012, the Forest Service convened a stakeholder group that included: CDOT, Glenwood Springs Tourism Promotion Board, Garfield County Board of County Commissioners, Xcel Energy, U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highways, Glenwood Springs Fire Department, Garfield County Search and Rescue, and Colorado State Patrol (stakeholder group). The goal of this stakeholder group was to discuss and implement short, medium and long-term management actions for the Hanging Lake Area, and after years of studies and work, a management plan was developed. In 2017, trail data revealed 184,000 visitors at Hanging Lake, which represented a 23% increase in only one year – demonstrating the need for a management solution.

The management plan and associated project documents can be found at this link:
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=50479>

NOTE – If any Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) fee is associated with this proposal in the future, a separate public comment period process will be available prior to implementation of a FLREA fee for a limited entry “special recreation permit”. Questions and comments on the details of a “special recreation permit” system will be more pertinent to that secondary process.

For additional information please contact Marcia Gilles at (970) 827-5152 or mgilles@fs.fed.us.