Executive Summary

The third year of Lake Nighthorse Recreation Area being open to public recreation took place during the COVID-19 pandemic yet provided safe outdoor recreation and exceeded financial goals for the facility. Total visitation continues to trend upwards each year, with the 2020 increase over 2019 being 46% and a cost recovery of 92.8%. Cost recovery for this season reflects record visitation as well as record paddle craft rentals offered by the contracted concessionaire, 4Corners Riversports. Opening day was delayed to May 15 due to the pandemic, and programs and activities offered by local businesses as contracted services were delayed until early June. Lake operations as well as programs were modified per safety guidelines from San Juan Basin Public Health (SJBPH). No special events were hosted by the City of Durango due to COVID-19.

The highly desired and long-awaited swim beach construction took place from April through September, with public access beginning on August 8. During this extensive project, the paddle craft rentals were temporarily located at the ADA Fishing Dock shoreline and picnic pavilion, and the public was allowed to launch paddle craft and swim from that improved shoreline. The completed swim beach is over 1.5 acres in size and includes these new amenities: sand shoreline, ADA access, loading/unloading zone, two vault toilets, one changing room, additional parking including ADA and loading/unloading, picnic facilities, lifeguard station, vending machines, wave attenuation, and designated hand launched paddle craft rental area. In partnership with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, new signs were constructed at the entrance to Lake Nighthorse and at the Tribute Garden.

The Durango Parks and Recreation Department continued to implement adaptive management, ensuring public recreational experiences were enjoyable and in accordance with the Lake Nighthorse Operations Plan. Parks and Recreation Department staff continue to monitor recreational use of Lake Nighthorse by tracking lake entries by recreational use. The top three uses across all types of passes sold in 2020 included (1) stand up paddleboard, kayak, canoe, or row; (2) walk, run, or dog walk; and (3) swimming. The recreation area season concluded on November 14 with a total estimated number of 93,302 participants in 2020.
Operations Plan

Using the foundation of the Lake Nighthorse Recreation Plan Final Environmental Assessment and Finding of No New Significant Impact issued in December 2016 by the U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Reclamation Western Colorado Area Office, the Parks and Recreation Department continued implementation of the Lake Nighthorse Operations Plan in 2020.

Three overarching goals were identified as a priority for the operations of Lake Nighthorse:

- Resource Protection
- Provide Quality Recreational Experiences
- Financial Viability

Ongoing operations of Lake Nighthorse involves a collaborative partnership with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Animas-La Plata Operation, Maintenance and Replacement Association, and the City of Durango. Adaptive management was employed by the City to ensure the goals of the Lake Nighthorse Operations Plan were consistently achieved with continuously evolving circumstances, recognizing that the opening year 2018 created the operations baseline for Lake Nighthorse. Adaptive management implemented in 2019 continued into 2020, with some temporary changes and/or COVID-19-specific. Examples include the designation of 14 trailer-only parking spaces in the boat ramp parking lot; addition of more picnic tables, season and 5-punch passes available for purchase online; paddle craft launching and swimming temporarily allowed at the ADA fishing dock shoreline due to swim beach construction; rentals being located in picnic pavilion to prevent public group gathering per SJBPH; daily disinfection of shared and public touch points such as bathroom door handles; modified boat inspections in the spring; modified hours of operation; and safety guidance including mask wearing, social distancing, and hand sanitizing.

Resource Protection

Resource protection at Lake Nighthorse involves water quality, natural and cultural resources, and invasive species.

- Parks and Recreation Department staff completed 5,392 boat inspections for aquatic nuisance species by certified inspectors following the Department of Natural Resources standards for bodies of water in Colorado
- Decontamination protocol with infrastructure on-site was completed on 122 boats
- Parks and Recreation Department staff removed 2,411 boat seals during incoming boat inspections, of which 1,985 were returning Lake Nighthorse boat seals
- Parks and Recreation Department staff issued 2,772 exit inspection boat seals with documentation in the national database
- Bureau of Reclamation and Colorado Parks and Wildlife conducted water quality monitoring
- There was a designated fueling area at the entrance station
- Cultural Resources Sensitivity Training was provided to all employees and contractors
• Bureau of Reclamation conducted archaeological monitoring
• Golden Eagle surveying was implemented prior to construction activities
• City staff restricted public shoreline access to 25 feet above high-water line and in developed recreation areas with the assistance of signage installed by Reclamation
• Smoking, all types of grilling, and fires were not permitted
• Extensive public education continued and additional signage was installed at the boat ramp parking area and overflow parking area
• Law enforcement was routinely provided by the Durango Police Department, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and La Plata County Sheriff
• Adherence to City, State and Federal Laws
• Winter wildlife closure was in effect January 1 – March 31 and November 15 – December 31
• Houseboats that are used as a human dwelling; cabin cruisers with full living quarters on board, including plumbing were not permitted
• No boats with open-air-exhaust were permitted
• Adherence to Colorado Parks and Wildlife Fishing Regulations including no aquatic live bait
• In addition to following State standards for inspection of watercraft for aquatic nuisance species, the City consulted with the State on the inspection of non-trailered craft that are high risk and followed recommended procedures
• Boats with ballasts were permitted and adhered to State approved methods for decontamination
• Reclamation monitored cultural resources and project infrastructure and the City modified shore access by the public as needed
• Dogs were permitted (except at swim beach), and pet owners were required to adhere to the City leash law; dog waste bag dispensers were provided by the City
• The City implemented extensive reporting and tracking of recreational users at Lake Nighthorse and utilized data for adaptive management
• The City emailed a visitor use survey to all season and 5-punch pass holders in order to gather public comment

### Resource Protection Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource Protection Description</th>
<th>2018 Total Number</th>
<th>2019 Total Number</th>
<th>2020 Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aquatic Nuisance Species Inspections (Incoming and Outgoing)</td>
<td>3,657</td>
<td>4,642</td>
<td>5,392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aquatic Nuisance Species Decontaminations</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incoming Boat Seals Removed</td>
<td>1,410</td>
<td>1,756</td>
<td>2,411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incoming Boat Seals on returning Lake Nighthorse boats</td>
<td>1,162</td>
<td>1,441</td>
<td>1,985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit Boat Seals Applied</td>
<td>1,739</td>
<td>2,322</td>
<td>2,772</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Provide Quality Recreational Experiences

2020 operations allowed for diverse desires for recreational experiences at Lake Nighthorse and continued to build upon the 2016 Lake Nighthorse Recreation Plan Environmental Assessment and adaptive management changes made each year.

- Opening day for the season was postponed to May 15 and boat inspections and decontaminations were restricted until June 1 due to COVID-19
- There were modified hours of operation throughout the season due to COVID-19, posted monthly online and at Lake Nighthorse; day use only
- There were multiple uses allowed at Lake Nighthorse including motorized and non-motorized recreation
- Local, State and Federal law enforcement officials had a presence at Lake Nighthorse
- Adherence to City, State and Federal Laws
- ADA fishing dock, picnic pavilion, and improved sand shoreline has been constructed near the boat ramp
- The swim beach was constructed providing a sand shoreline, ADA access, lifeguard station, vending, additional parking, loading/unloading areas, additional vault toilets, change room, paddle craft rentals, and paddle craft launch into No Motorized Craft zone
- 14 parking spaces at the Boat Ramp parking lot were designated as trailer only
- Three public courtesy docks for motorized and non-motorized use are available, in addition to the ADA fishing dock and the public safety personnel dock
- Zoned recreation at Lake Nighthorse was implemented with buoys, signage and education
- Restricted public access to 25’ above high-water level and in developed recreation areas
- Boats travelled in a counterclockwise direction for towed recreation in the open use area
- Qualified Parks and Recreation Department staff were on-site during operating hours
- There was a designated no motorized craft area near the paddle craft rental and swim beach area; Official boats had access through the no motorized craft area to the public safety personnel dock
- Motorized personal watercraft (e.g. jet skis) were not allowed; Parks and Recreation Department staff closely monitored motorized personal watercraft use requests and the Operations Plan may be adjusted as necessary in the future
- Public access on west CR 211 was not permitted due to concerns identified by the Animas-La Plata Operation, Maintenance and Replacement Association, opposition from adjacent neighbors, use of the winter wildlife area would require Colorado Parks and Wildlife concurrence, and additional infrastructure would be required for resource protection and day use fee collection
- The City will continue to explore volunteer or concessionaire opportunities to provide a shuttle service for paddlers to the west no wake zone
- The City will continue to explore solutions for parking congestion
- There are limited designated trails due to concerns identified by the Animas-La Plata Operation, Maintenance and Replacement Association for resource protection
- The Durango Police Department and Sheriff’s Office determined appropriate local law enforcement presence and extra patrolling based upon conditions; there were two accidents,
two citizen assists, one driving under the influence (DUI) citation, one theft, and one vehicle stop addressed by the Durango Police Department

- Colorado Parks and Wildlife issued three citations for fishing without valid licenses; number of patrol days were limited due to COVID-19 restrictions
- Existing Parks and Recreation Department standards were followed to address public terms of use and public conduct at Lake Nighthorse
- Third party concessions were available to enhance the quality of the recreational experience by providing programs and activities such as sailing or paddling lessons, guided fly fishing, and wake surfing opportunities; a total of seven local business operated as independent contractors at Lake Nighthorse in 2020 with a delayed start date in June and modified operations due to COVID-19
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stocked a total of 265,017 fish (brown trout, rainbow trout and Kokanee salmon) in 2020
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife hosted two days of Kokanee Salmon giveaways during which an estimated 3,300 salmon were given to a total estimate of 182 participants
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife conducted several Kokanee Salmon spawn takes involving 4,140 female fish for a total of 1,466,870 green eggs; this egg take was absolutely critical for the State of Colorado this year (typically, 8-9 million eggs come from Blue Mesa Reservoir near Gunnison each year but this year only 1.9 million eggs were taken from that reservoir)
- The City regulated type of use with scheduled use to be inclusive as well as provide the most recreational use
- The City monitored use patterns, shared information with the public and encouraged recreational users to select preferred times for use of the lake
- The 2020 recreation schedule included Wakeless Mondays and Wednesdays with the restriction of no wakes all day for recreational users, except holidays
- Public use of the lake November 1 to November 14 was provided on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday only due to inclement fall weather and low visitation during the week
- The City authorized 6 third-party educational programs and special activities at Lake Nighthorse in 2020 with total participants being 228
- The City will continue to monitor, track, and evaluate conditions at Lake Nighthorse on an ongoing basis and implement adaptive management; the City will continue to seek customer input on experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Recreation Experience Description</th>
<th>2018 Total Number</th>
<th>2019 Total Number</th>
<th>2020 Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lake Nighthorse Users</td>
<td>48,078</td>
<td>63,735</td>
<td>93,302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season Pass Holder Entries</td>
<td>14,107</td>
<td>26,449</td>
<td>42,468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Use Admissions</td>
<td>33,328</td>
<td>34,128</td>
<td>43,889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Punch Pass Holder Entries</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2,793</td>
<td>6,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs Participants (in Day Use)</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Special Events Participants</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concession Boat Rentals</td>
<td>1,562</td>
<td>2,944</td>
<td>4,460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durango Police Citations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recreation by Use Categories

Having one entrance to the lake where visitors pass by the entrance booth enables staff to capture general information about recreation uses. Day passes and 5-punch passes require an interaction between the staff and lake visitor during which the visitor is asked what form of recreation they anticipate doing, recognizing weather or other factors may change the recreation type on a given day. The staff then enters the pass sale into the computer by selecting the verbally confirmed recreation use, which allows the City to produce reports detailing day pass and 5-punch pass purchasers. Season passes represent a visual observation by staff, with an assumed level of estimation, and are therefore not represented in the charts below.

**Day Pass Entries by Recreation Use**
(Use confirmed verbally by lake visitor and entered into computer)

- 20% Swim
- 40% Walk/Run/Dog Walk
- 3% Motorized: Ski/Wakeboard
- 1% Motorized: Fishing
- <1% Sail Sport
- 11% Fish by foot
- 1% Fish by non-moto boat
- 24% SUP/Kayak/Canoe/Row

**5-Punch Pass Entries by Recreation Use**
(Use confirmed verbally by lake visitor and entered into computer)

- 50% SUP/Kayak/Canoe/Row
- 15% Walk/Run/Dog Walk
- 1% Fish by non-moto boat
- <1% Sail Sport
- 2% Fish by foot
- 13% Swim
- 8% Motorized: Ski/Wakeboard
- 1% Motorized: Fishing

Financial Viability
To ensure long-term recreational enjoyment of Lake Nighthorse by area residents and visitors to the region, the 2020 operations implemented the following guiding principles for financial viability:

- The Lease Agreement between the United States and City of Durango for the Administration of the Recreation Area at Lake Nighthorse was executed in January 2017.
- The Cost Share Agreement between the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and City of Durango was executed in September 2018 to formalize the plan to equally share the cost of capital improvements and operational deficits at Lake Nighthorse.
- The City will continue to seek and secure grant funding for capital improvements at Lake Nighthorse.
- The City has dedicated sales tax funds for park capital improvements; $1,611,208 was invested in Lake Nighthorse capital improvements for the swim beach and associated amenities in 2020.
- Lake Nighthorse entrance fees were implemented and will be evaluated annually.
- The City of Durango 2021 Budget provides funding for the continued operations of Lake Nighthorse.
- The City implemented extensive reporting and tracking of recreational use at Lake Nighthorse.
- There is an economic benefit to the region with opening Lake Nighthorse for recreation.
- There was State legislation implementing fees in 2019 associated with an Aquatic Nuisance Species Stamp for motorized boats that took effect in 2020 and will continue in 2021.
- The goal is to continue to keep fees for City Parks and Recreation services affordable, and scholarships are available.
- Third party concessions and independent contracts will continue to be provided to support the financial viability of operations (seven local businesses had contracts to operate at Lake Nighthorse in 2020).
- Special Use Permits will continue to be provided by the City which may result in limiting public access to the area under permit.

### Financial Viability Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Viability Description</th>
<th>2018 Total Number</th>
<th>2019 Total Number</th>
<th>2020 Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expenses (January 1 – December 31 )</td>
<td>$405,936.95</td>
<td>$359,889.44</td>
<td>$386,916.18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revenues for the Season</td>
<td>$194,662.05</td>
<td>$255,358.97</td>
<td>$330,818.96</td>
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<tr>
<td>City Operational Subsidy</td>
<td>$105,637.45</td>
<td>$52,265.23</td>
<td>$28,048.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureau of Reclamation Operational Subsidy</td>
<td>$105,637.45</td>
<td>$52,265.24</td>
<td>$28,048.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost Recovery</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>85.5%</td>
<td>92.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital Improvements</td>
<td>$1,207,903.70</td>
<td>$281,431.70</td>
<td>$1,611,208.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lake Nighthorse Recreation Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wakeless Monday</td>
<td>Multi-use</td>
<td>Wakeless</td>
<td>Multi-use</td>
<td>Multi-use</td>
<td>Multi-use</td>
<td>Multi-use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Wake</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to COVID-19, the 2020 hours of operation were modified and subject to change. The schedule was posted monthly at durangogov.org/LakeNighthorse, and was as follows:

- May 15 – May 17: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday ONLY, SUP, Kayak, Canoe from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- May 22 – May 31: Open Daily, Green Seals and Valid Receipt Motorcraft ONLY, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- June 1 – June 30: Daily from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Begin full watercraft inspections and decontaminations available
- July 1 – September 13: Daily from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- September 14 – September 30: Daily from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- October 1 – October 31: Daily from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- November 1 – November 14: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday ONLY from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- November 15: Closed for Winter Season

The hours of operation did not vary due to inclement weather. The entrance gate closed as well as exit boat inspections and watercraft launches ceased 30 minutes prior to daily closure.

Lake Nighthorse 2020 Fees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fee Type</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Season Vehicle Pass</td>
<td>$70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Vehicle Season Pass</td>
<td>$35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Season Vehicle Pass</td>
<td>$60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Multiple Vehicle Season Pass</td>
<td>$30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season Bike or Walk-in Pass</td>
<td>$20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Vehicle Entry</td>
<td>$8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Walk/Bike-in Entry</td>
<td>$3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Commercial Vehicle</td>
<td>$20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle 5 Punch Pass</td>
<td>$30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Vehicle 5 Punch Pass</td>
<td>$25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk/Bike 5 Punch Pass</td>
<td>$10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lake Nighthorse Recreation Area Map