Executive Summary

The fourth year of Lake Nighthorse Recreation Area being open to public recreation took place during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic yet provided safe outdoor recreation and continued to exceed financial goals for the facility. Total visitation continues to trend upwards each year, with the 2021 increase over 2020 being 15% and a cost recovery of 99.4%, nearly achieving the goal of 100%. Opening day was April 2 with lake operations and programs following COVID-19 safety guidelines from San Juan Basin Public Health.

Lake Nighthorse experienced an extraordinary season this year. The new swim beach, completed in the fall of 2020, provided a wonderful recreational experience for lake visitors this season. The floating, inflatable Wibit aqua park was installed in May, becoming a one-of-a-kind experience in Southwest Colorado. Use of the beach and aqua park are included in the entrance fee for Lake Nighthorse, and complimentary PFDs are provided by the City of Durango for safe use of the aqua park. The Wibit was open from May through Labor Day, with lifeguards on duty for the aqua park and swim beach.

The City hosted extensive public engagement prior to opening for the season. This process resulted in the expansion of the No Wake Zone on the lake as well as the addition of a paddle craft launch ramp. These additions, in combination with the new swim beach, resulted in separating motorized use from non-motorized uses better to reduce user conflicts previously occurring at the motorized boat ramp.

New, local businesses operated programs and activities this year, further expanding recreational and economic opportunities for the community. The City permitted the first triathlon sprint race event this year, which combined running and cycling on roadways with an open water swim, drawing over 80 participants. The recreation area season concluded on November 14 with a total estimated number of 107,415 participants in 2021.

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 2021.

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 2021, with some temporary changes that are COVID-19-specific.
Resource Protection

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

- Parks and Recreation Department staff completed 5,986 boat inspections for aquatic nuisance species by certified inspectors following the Department of Natural Resources standards for bodies of water in Colorado
- Decontamination was completed on 612 boats
- Parks and Recreation Department staff removed 2,912 boat seals during incoming boat inspections, of which 2,342 were returning Lake Nighthorse boat seals
- Parks and Recreation Department staff issued 3,068 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 the new swim beach 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 – April 1 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-trailer craft that are high risk and followed recommended procedures
- Boats with ballasts were permitted and adhered to State approved methods for decontamination
- 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
## 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>
<th>2021 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>
<td>5,986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aquatic Nuisance Species Decontaminations</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incoming Boat Seals Removed</td>
<td>1,410</td>
<td>1,756</td>
<td>2,411</td>
<td>2,912</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>
<td>2,342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit Boat Seals Applied</td>
<td>1,739</td>
<td>2,322</td>
<td>2,772</td>
<td>3,068</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Lake Nighthorse watercraft inspection and decontamination station is located at the entrance station.

## Provide Quality Recreational Experiences

2021 operations allowed for diverse desires for inclusive recreational experiences at Lake Nighthorse and continued to build upon the 2016 Lake Nighthorse Recreation Plan Environmental Assessment as well as the 2018 Operations Plan. Adaptive management changes have been made each year as a result of on-going public engagement as well as resource protection and financial viability goals.

### 2021 Adaptive Management

- Opening day for non-motorized recreation was April 2 and motorized recreation began on May 15
- Wakeless & Quiet Hours designated Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from open until 10 a.m.
- A paddle craft launch ramp was constructed at the swim beach with access path and loading/unloading parking spaces
- No Wake Zone was expanded to connect the east and west sides of the lake, increasing the No Wake Zone from 37% to 42% of the entire lake
- Loading/unloading parking spaces were designated at the boat ramp
- Swim beach was life guarded and the Wibit Aqua Park open from May 14 to September 6
- Swimming was no longer permitted in the motorized boat ramp cove
- Hours of operation were expanded. However, due to severe staffing shortages caused by COVID-19, the hours of operation and boat decontamination schedule had to be modified.
• The City authorized 6 third-party educational programs and special activities at Lake Nighthorse in 2021 with total participants being 166, including a triathlon sprint race event
• The Durango Police Department and Sheriff’s Office determined appropriate local law enforcement presence and extra patrolling based upon conditions
• Colorado Parks and Wildlife conducted its first creel survey May 1 to July 31
• Nine local business operated as independent contractors at Lake Nighthorse in 2021 with a total of 488 program participants
• Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stocked a total of 237,896 fish (brown trout, rainbow trout and Kokanee salmon)
• Colorado Parks and Wildlife conducted several Kokanee Salmon spawn takes for a total of 1,208,886 green eggs; 550,000 eggs allocated for local reservoir needs; 658,886 eggs contributed to other water bodies throughout Colorado
• Colorado Parks and Wildlife hosted three days of Kokanee Salmon giveaways during which an estimated 16,500 salmon were given to a total estimate of 210 participants

2020 Adaptive Management
• 1.5-acre swim beach was constructed, including ADA access, restrooms, changing rooms, additional parking, picnic facilities, lifeguard station, wave attenuation, courtesy dock, and vending
• 14 parking spaces at the Boat Ramp parking lot were designated as trailer only
• 10 additional picnic tables were constructed and placed at the swim beach
• Seven local businesses had contracts to operate at Lake Nighthorse in 2020

2019 Adaptive Management
• ADA fishing dock and picnic shelter was constructed
• 8 picnic benches were placed in various locations, including at the ADA fishing dock, at the future swim beach shore, and along the dam access road
• Spring hours of operation were expanded to include Fridays along with Saturdays and Sundays
• Evening hours of operation were expanded to 7 p.m. during the month of September
• Seven local businesses had contracts to operate at Lake Nighthorse in 2019

2018 Baseline and Ongoing Operational Management
• Entrance station building and watercraft inspection and decontamination station were constructed
• Overflow parking lot was constructed providing 32 single vehicle and 33 double vehicle parking spaces
• Boat ramp parking lot was repaved and restriped to accommodate more vehicles
• Lake Nighthorse Road was chip sealed
• Wave attenuation was installed at the boat ramp
• Zoned recreation was designated and implemented with buoys, signage and education
• Three public courtesy docks for motorized and non-motorized use were installed, in addition to one public safety personnel dock
• A no motorized craft area was designated 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
• 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
• 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
• 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 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
• 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, as well as onsite paddle craft rentals

### Quality Recreation Experience Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Recreation Experience Description</th>
<th>2018 Total Number</th>
<th>2019 Total Number</th>
<th>2020 Total Number</th>
<th>2021 Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lake Nighthorse Users</td>
<td>48,078</td>
<td>63,735</td>
<td>93,302</td>
<td>107,415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season Pass Holder Entries</td>
<td>14,107</td>
<td>19,533</td>
<td>42,468</td>
<td>50,458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Use Admissions</td>
<td>33,328</td>
<td>33,780</td>
<td>43,889</td>
<td>50,488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Punch Pass Holder Entries</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2,793</td>
<td>6,717</td>
<td>5,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs Participants (also in Day Use)</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Special Events Participants</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concession Boat Rentals</td>
<td>1,562</td>
<td>2,944</td>
<td>2,944</td>
<td>3,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durango Police Citations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Swim Beach and Wibit Aqua Park

The construction of the swim beach was completed on September 18, 2020 and the lifeguard building the following month. Installation of the Wibit Aqua Park was postponed until 2021 due to COVID-19.

2021 marked the first season the swim beach was open to the public for a full season. Lifeguards were on duty and the Wibit open daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. from May 14 to September 6. The Wibit Aqua Park was free with Lake Nighthorse entrance passes, and complimentary PFDs available.

Fish Stocking Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fish Stocking Description</th>
<th>2018 Total Number</th>
<th>2019 Total Number</th>
<th>2020 Total Number</th>
<th>2021 Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rainbow Trout, Brown Trout and Kokanee Salmon</td>
<td>240,818</td>
<td>186,228</td>
<td>265,071</td>
<td>237,896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kokanee Salmon Eggs Collected During Spawn</td>
<td>783,560</td>
<td>699,126</td>
<td>1,466,870</td>
<td>1,208,886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kokanee Salmon Given Away During Spawn</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>3,300</td>
<td>16,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Colorado Parks and Wildlife has stocked Lake Nighthorse annually since 2011 with Brown Trout, Rainbow Trout, and Kokanee Salmon. This has contributed significantly to fishing recreation opportunities and helps support Kokanee Salmon.
Public safety measures at the swim beach include E. Coli testing per State of Colorado regulations, no pets allowed, and closure during inclement weather.

Wibit Aqua Park rules include the following:

- All guests must wear life jackets.
- Children under 12 years old must be accompanied by an adult.
- No paddle craft allowed inside the yellow safety buoys.
- Remove all sharp objects before entering the aqua park.
- Never swim underneath any of the inflatables.
- No diving or sliding headfirst off the aqua park.
- Shoes are not allowed on the aquapark.

Financial Viability

To ensure long-term recreational enjoyment of Lake Nighthorse by area residents and visitors to the region, the 2021 operations implemented the following guiding principles for financial viability:

- The City has dedicated sales tax funds for park capital improvements; $39,011.67 was invested in Lake Nighthorse capital improvements as well as $12,009.53 in operational expenses associated with the adaptive management changes that resulted from the 2021 wakeless public engagement for a total expenditure of $51,021.20.
- 2021 operating expenses included the addition of lifeguard staffing expenses for the swim beach and Wibit Aqua Park.
- 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.
- 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
• There is an economic benefit to the region with the recreational opportunities at Lake Nighthorse
• There was State legislation implementing fees in 2019 associated with an Aquatic Nuisance Species Stamp for motorized boats that took effect in 2020 and continued 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 (nine local businesses had contracts to operate at Lake Nighthorse in 2021)
• 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>
<th>2021 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>
<td>$511,941.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenues for the Season</td>
<td>$194,662.05</td>
<td>$255,358.97</td>
<td>$330,818.96</td>
<td>$506,198.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Operational Subsidy</td>
<td>$105,637.45</td>
<td>$52,265.23</td>
<td>$28,048.61</td>
<td>$2,871.75</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>
<td>$2,871.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureau of Reclamation Grant Drawdown</td>
<td>$97,331.03</td>
<td>$127,679.49</td>
<td>$165,409.48</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost Recovery</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>85.5%</td>
<td>92.8%</td>
<td>99.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital Improvements</td>
<td>$1,207,903.70</td>
<td>$281,431.70</td>
<td>$1,611,208.73</td>
<td>$42,761.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Grant drawdown difference to be used for future projects and operation.

Motorized recreation begins May 15 each season, and provides diverse opportunities for fishing, skiing, wake surfing, wake boarding, touring, and educational research.
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 &amp; Quiet</td>
<td>Multi-use</td>
<td>Wakeless &amp; Quiet</td>
<td>Multi-use</td>
<td>Wakeless &amp; Quiet</td>
<td>Multi-use</td>
<td>Multi-use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Until 10 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Until 10 a.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- April 2 – May 9: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday ONLY 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
- May 14 – May 31: Open Daily 8 a.m. – 6 p.m.
- June 1 – August 31: Daily 6:30 a.m. – 7:30 p.m.*
- September 1 – September 30: Daily 7:30 a.m. – 6:30 p.m.*
- October 1 – October 17: Daily 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
- October 22 – November 14: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday ONLY 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
- November 15: Closed for Winter Season

*Hours of operation were modified August 23 through September 30 to 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. due to severe staff shortages caused by COVID-19.

The entrance gate closed as well as exit boat inspections and watercraft launches ceased 30 minutes prior to daily closure.

Lake Nighthorse 2021 Fees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fee Type</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Season Vehicle Pass</td>
<td>$80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Vehicle Season Pass</td>
<td>$40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Season Vehicle Pass</td>
<td>$70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Multiple Vehicle Season Pass</td>
<td>$35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season Bike or Walk-in Pass</td>
<td>$25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Vehicle Entry</td>
<td>$10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Walk/Bike-in Entry</td>
<td>$4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Commercial Vehicle</td>
<td>$25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle 5 Punch Pass</td>
<td>$40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Vehicle 5 Punch Pass</td>
<td>$30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk/Bike 5 Punch Pass</td>
<td>$15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>