Executive Summary
This season marks the sixth year of Lake Nighthorse Recreation Area being open to public recreation. Visitation for the 2023 season went up to 98,117 total visitors from 89,338 in 2022. A possible reason for this increase in visitors is due to the structure of the new daily Wibit operations. With people needing to make reservations and putting a limit on the number of patrons on the Wibit at a time, this allowed for more turnover for the park. Other than the $5 Wibit passes, daily operations and fees remained the same.

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 2023.

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. The opening year of 2018 created the operations baseline for Lake Nighthorse. Adaptive management has been implemented and expanded upon every season since opening.

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

- Parks and Recreation Department staff completed 5,167 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 477 boats
- Parks and Recreation Department staff removed 2,589 boat seals during incoming boat inspections, of which 2,148 were returning Lake Nighthorse boat seals
- Parks and Recreation Department staff issued 2,577 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
• Added new regulatory signage at the swim beach to help enforcement of no drinking and no pets
• New informational signs were also installed at the swim beach translated into Spanish
• 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 12 – 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
• 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>2019 Total Number</th>
<th>2020 Total Number</th>
<th>2021 Total Number</th>
<th>2022 Total Number</th>
<th>2023 Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aquatic Nuisance Species Inspections (Incoming and Outgoing)</td>
<td>4,642</td>
<td>5,392</td>
<td>5,986</td>
<td>5,140</td>
<td>5,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aquatic Nuisance Species Decontaminations</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incoming Boat Seals Removed</td>
<td>1,756</td>
<td>2,411</td>
<td>2,912</td>
<td>2,511</td>
<td>2,589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incoming Boat Seals on returning Lake Nighthorse boats</td>
<td>1,441</td>
<td>1,985</td>
<td>2,342</td>
<td>2,071</td>
<td>2,148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit Boat Seals Applied</td>
<td>2,322</td>
<td>2,772</td>
<td>3,068</td>
<td>2,629</td>
<td>2,577</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Provide Quality Recreational Experiences

2023 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 because of on-going public engagement as well as resource protection and financial viability goals.

2023 Adaptive Management

- More “No Wake” buoys were installed at the boat ramp to help slow boats down before entering the wave break
- Employee parking signs were installed near the beach so staff would be able to get to work on time
- Riprap and concrete footers were installed at the paddle craft launch ramp to help with shoreline stabilization
- Wibit operations consisted of a $5 per person fee for 1.75-hour time limit
- The purchase of a new boat allowed staff to patrol the lake often for enforcement of rules and regulations

2022 Adaptive Management

- Buoys were installed along the newly expanded No Wake Zone that connects the east and west sides of the lake along the north side of the lake
- Two docking stations were installed at the Wibit Aqua Park to provide places to tie paddle craft near the inflatable park, reducing swim distance
- Nine local business operated as independent contractors at Lake Nighthorse in 2022 with a total of approx. 340 program participants
- Decontamination schedule for ballasted boats supported staffing capacity
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stocked a total of 223,043 fish (brown trout, rainbow trout and Kokanee salmon)
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife conducted several Kokanee Salmon spawns takes for a total of 2,353,570 green eggs which contributed to other water bodies throughout Colorado
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife hosted three days of Kokanee Salmon giveaways during which an estimated 12,000 salmon were given to a total estimate of 220 participants
- Swim beach maintenance access was created
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 spawns 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>2019 Total Number</th>
<th>2020 Total Number</th>
<th>2021 Total Number</th>
<th>2022 Total Number</th>
<th>2023 Total Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lake Nighthorse Users</td>
<td>63,735</td>
<td>93,302</td>
<td>107,415</td>
<td>89,338</td>
<td>98,117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season Pass Holder Entries</td>
<td>19,533</td>
<td>42,468</td>
<td>50,458</td>
<td>44,002</td>
<td>49,433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Use Admissions</td>
<td>33,780</td>
<td>43,889</td>
<td>50,488</td>
<td>39,902</td>
<td>43,873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Punch Pass Holder Entries</td>
<td>2,793</td>
<td>6,717</td>
<td>5,760</td>
<td>4,942</td>
<td>4,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs Participants (also in Day Use)</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>527</td>
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<tr>
<td>Free Special Events Participants</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concession Boat Rentals</td>
<td>2,944</td>
<td>2,944</td>
<td>3,679</td>
<td>2,241</td>
<td>2,588</td>
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<tr>
<td>Durango Police Citations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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</table>
**Fish Stocking Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fish Stocking Description</th>
<th>2019 Total Number</th>
<th>2020 Total Number</th>
<th>2021 Total Number</th>
<th>2022 Total Number</th>
<th>2023 Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rainbow Trout, Brown Trout and Kokanee Salmon</td>
<td>186,228</td>
<td>265,071</td>
<td>237,896</td>
<td>223,043</td>
<td>217,415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kokanee Salmon Eggs Collected During Spawn</td>
<td>699,126</td>
<td>1,466,870</td>
<td>1,208,886</td>
<td>2,353,570</td>
<td>833,830</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kokanee Salmon Given Away During Spawn</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>3,300</td>
<td>16,500</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>1,676</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Colorado Parks and Wildlife has stocked Lake Nighthorse annually since 2011. This has contributed significantly to the fishing recreation opportunities.

**Swim Beach and Wibit Aqua Park**

This year marked the third year the Wibit Aqua Park was open, and the fourth year for the swim beach. Lifeguards were on duty and the Wibit opened daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. from June 1 to September 3. Public safety measures at the swim beach include E. Coli testing per State of Colorado regulations, no pets allowed, and closure during inclement weather.

**Financial Viability**

To ensure long-term recreational enjoyment of Lake Nighthorse by area residents and visitors to the region, the 2023 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
- Lake Nighthorse entrance fees were implemented and will be evaluated annually
- The City of Durango 2023 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 and 2022
• 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 2023)
• 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>2019 Total Number</th>
<th>2020 Total Number</th>
<th>2021 Total Number</th>
<th>2022 Total Number</th>
<th>2023 Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expenses (January 1 – December 31)</td>
<td>$359,889.44</td>
<td>$386,916.18</td>
<td>$511,941.98</td>
<td>$709,063</td>
<td>$626,105.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenues for the Season</td>
<td>$255,358.97</td>
<td>$330,818.96</td>
<td>$506,198.48</td>
<td>$429.138</td>
<td>$538,746.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Operational Subsidy</td>
<td>$52,265.23</td>
<td>$28,048.61</td>
<td>$2,871.75</td>
<td>$90,332</td>
<td>$87,358.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureau of Reclamation Operational Subsidy</td>
<td>$52,265.24</td>
<td>$28,048.61</td>
<td>$2,871.75</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureau of Reclamation Grant Drawdown</td>
<td>$127,679.49</td>
<td>$165,409.48</td>
<td>Grant drawdown\n\ndifference to be used for future projects</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost Recovery</td>
<td>85.5%</td>
<td>92.8%</td>
<td>99.4%</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital Improvements</td>
<td>$281,431.70</td>
<td>$1,611,208.73</td>
<td>$42,761.65</td>
<td>$20,905</td>
<td>$198,471.62</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 &amp; Quiet Until 10 a.m.</td>
<td>Multi-use</td>
<td>Wakeless &amp; Quiet Until 10 a.m.</td>
<td>Multi-use</td>
<td>Wakeless &amp; Quiet Until 10 a.m.</td>
<td>Multi-use</td>
<td>Multi-use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• April 14 – May 7: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday ONLY 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
• May 12 – May 31: Open Daily 8 a.m. – 6 p.m.
• June 1 – September 4: Daily 7 a.m. – 7 p.m.
• September 5 – September 30: Daily 8 a.m. – 6 p.m.
• October 1 – October 15: Daily 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
• October 20 – November 12: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday ONLY 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
• November 13: Closed for Winter Season
The entrance gate closed as well as exit boat inspections and watercraft launches ceased 30 minutes prior to daily closure.

Lake Nighthorse 2023 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>Commercial 5 Punch Pass</td>
<td>$100</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>
**Lake Nighthorse Recreation Area Map**

Legend:
- No Public Access
- Paved Roadway
- Gravel Roadway, Public access limited to foot or bicycle
- Foot path between parking lots
- Wave breakers
- Swim beach
- No Wake Zone
- Open Use Area
- Courtesy docks

Public shoreline access is limited to 25 ft. above high water line and in developed areas.

**Swim Beach Inset Map**