DOUGLAS COUNTY
COLORADO

Memorandum

Date: August 5, 2026

To: Douglas County Advisory Boards

From: Amy Knopp, Manager of Rueter-Hess Recreation

CC: Steven Shoultz, CPRE, Director of Parks and Recreation

Subject: **Rueter-Hess Recreation Update July 2026**

RUETER-HESS UPDATES

4th of July Weekend at Rueter-Hess

Summer has officially arrived, and the Independence Day weekend made that unmistakably clear. This year, more people chose to celebrate at the Reservoir. While visitation grew by 12% this year, the property had plenty of water for paddleboarding, kayaking, and canoeing. Over the four-day period, Rangers proactively assisted 16 visitors to ensure they had a fun, safe day on the water.

Watercraft at Rueter-Hess Reservoir

Life jacket requirements played an important role in keeping visitors safe during wind events, providing an essential layer of protection and contributing to a successful and incident free weekend.

Rueter-Hess Reservoir continues to grow in popularity as an angling destination, with significant increases in visitor use. Adult angler participation is up 74%, and youth fishing has risen an impressive 67% compared to last year.

Surf'SUP Hosts Colorado Academy Summer Camp

Rueter-Hess Reservoir is a popular venue for special events and summer camps. Each summer, Mindy and Nathan Heimer, the owners of Surf'SUP, lead Colorado Academy's Summer Camp by providing paddleboarding equipment and expertise for the program. Each week, the campers spend about four hours on the water learning paddleboarding skills. Instruction includes safe maneuvering techniques and basic rescue practices. Campers also meet the Park Rangers to better understand their role as knowledgeable and supportive resources. This partnership helps young participants build confidence and awareness in outdoor recreation. The collaboration with Colorado Academy, Surf'SUP, and the Park Rangers has strengthened community engagement at the reservoir. Overall, the program successfully teaches water safety while encouraging youth to enjoy our natural spaces responsibly.

Youth Camp at Rueter-Hess Reservoir

Dive Rescue Training Enhances Public Safety at Rueter-Hess Reservoir

On July 20, 22, and 24, Park Rangers partnered with South Metro Fire Rescue to host dive rescue trainings at Rueter-Hess Reservoir. Six dive teams practiced coordinated responses to water emergencies, reviewed communication protocols, and conducted simulated rescue scenarios.

South Metro Dive Rescue Equipment

This collaborative training strengthens emergency preparedness, improves coordination among first responders, and helps ensure a faster, more effective response to water emergencies, enhancing safety for everyone who visits the reservoir.

Heat Safety Awareness on the Rueter-Hess Trail System

With a total of 44,042 trail visitors recorded from January through June this year, Rueter-Hess Reservoir continues to experience significant use of its trail system during the summer months. As temperatures rise, Rangers reminded guests to carry an adequate supply of water, wear lightweight and sun-protective clothing, apply sunscreen, and plan hikes during the cooler morning or evening hours to reduce the risk of heat-related illness. Rangers are equipped with first aid training and experience in recognizing and responding to heat-related medical emergencies and maintain radio communication to quickly coordinate with South Metro Fire Rescue or Douglas County emergency responders when additional medical assistance is needed. Through proactive patrols, public education, and emergency preparedness, the Park Ranger program remains committed to promoting a safe and enjoyable experience for everyone visiting the Rueter-Hess Reservoir trail system throughout the summer.

Hiker at Rueter-Hess

Keeping Trails Safe by Controlling Poison Hemlock

The Parks Rangers discovered Poison hemlock (Conium maculatum). Colorado State University reports that it is a potentially dangerous noxious weed for people and wildlife, along the Coyote Run Loop trail at Rueter-Hess Reservoir. The Colorado Department of Agriculture reports that Poison hemlock is designated as a “List C’ species on the Colorado Noxious Weed Act. Plants touching the Coyote Loop Trail were physically removed.

Picture of Poison Hemlock

While it may resemble harmless plants such as Queen Anne’s lace, wild carrot, or parsley, it is highly toxic when touched or ingested. The plant can grow up to 8 feet tall and is recognizable by its purple spotted stems, lack of hairs, and delicate white blooms. Its leaves have a lacy appearance that often leads to misidentification.

Visitors should avoid contact with any part of this plant. The discovery underscores the importance of staying on designated trails. Remaining on marked routes protects both visitors and the surrounding ecosystem. Rangers remain committed to educating the public and ensuring a safe and enjoyable experience for all.

To learn more about Poison hemlock, visit Colorado State University's website or Colorado Department of Agriculture's website.

Operational Updates

The July 4th holiday period saw a significant increase in angler visitation activity. Rangers recorded 145 adult anglers and 71 youth anglers early in the holiday period, followed by 91 adults and 42 youth anglers later in the weekend. This represents approximately a 60 percent increase in adult anglers and a 70 percent increase in youth anglers compared to last year. The Holiday weekend had some water assists, but rangers did a great job of keeping it uneventful.

Weekend afternoons throughout July were marked by frequent inclement weather events, leading to elevated water-assist activity. Rangers completed 32 assists, supporting 37 individuals on the water. This marks more than a 350% increase from last year's assistance numbers. All individuals were wearing their life jackets. Life jacket enforcement remained a primary focus due to statewide water-related incidents and increased on-water risk.

The number of red flag days slowed mowing operations. When mowing was conducted, staff notified South Metro Fire when mowing and ensured a charged, current fire extinguisher was on board to maintain fire safety during operations.

Safety equipment was added to both the primary and backup safety boats. This ensures all boats remain fully equipped without the need to transfer gear between boats.

Rangers collaborated with South Metro Fire during dive rescue training. Discussions focused on joint operational procedures for a major incident at the reservoir. Continued coordination with South Metro Fire is planned.

Park Ranger Supervisor Jason Trujillo will be retiring in early August. Jason began his service in June 2023 and is grateful for the opportunity to work alongside the team. He wishes continued success for the reservoir and all staff.

SPECIAL USE CALENDAR

Upcoming Calendar of Events 2026		
Date	**Special Event**	**Location**
6/1/2026 to 8/14/2026	Avid4 Adventure Summer Season Day Camp	Reservoir
8/21/2026	Douglas County Sheriff's Office	Reservoir
9/18/2026	Denver Audubon/Denver Field Ornithologist	Reservoir
	RAB /Partner Days	**Location**
8/9/2026	Castle Pines Partner Day	Reservoir
8/15/2026	Parker Partner Day	Reservoir

8/16/2026	Castle Rock Partner Day	Reservoir
	Partner Programing	**Location**
8/25/2026	PWSD hosting Public Works Op's Appreciation Lunch	Reservoir
	Surf'SUP Vendor Programing	**Location**
8/30/2026	Surf'SUP Worship on the Water	Reservoir
9/27/2026	Surf'SUP Worship on the Water	Reservoir
	Volunteer Events/Days	**Location**
8/7/2026	Shoreline Cleanup	Reservoir
8/16/2026	Geocache Group 50 People	Incline/ Rocky Outcropping
9/24/2026	70 Ranch View Middle School, Shoreline Cleanup	Reservoir

RECREATION STATS (UPDATED 8/05/26)

Visitation	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	2026 Total
Reservations Made	30	44	218	206	459	712	1002	**2,826**
Reservoir Visitors	66	102	393	376	845	1769	2333	**6,204**
RHR Incline (Reported Monthly)	4520	5580	5883	6660	7175	7716	6491	**44,025**
RHR Coyote Run Loop (Reported Monthly)	668	904	1027	1034	1136	1295	980	**7,044**
RHR Newlin Gold Trail (Reported Monthly)	28	59	76	63	102	116	92	**536**
Trails Visitors	5216	6543	6986	7757	8413	9127	7563	**51,605**
Visitors	5282	6645	7379	8133	9258	10896	9896	**57,809**

Special Use	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	2026
Special Event /Use	0	0	0	0	0	13	9	**22**
Special Event/Use Attendance	0	0	0	0	0	603	146	**749**
Special Activities/Events	0	0	2	1	0	14	10	**27**
People Attending Special Activities/Events	0	0	5	0	0	874	232	**1111**

Fishing	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	2026
Adult Anglers	27	18	218	209	327	353	366	**1565**
Youth Anglers	3	6	60	63	84	122	184	**555**
Total Anglers	30	24	278	272	411	475	550	**2120**

Watercraft Inspections	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	2026
Watercraft Inspections	0	0	16	74	449	789	1199	**2732**

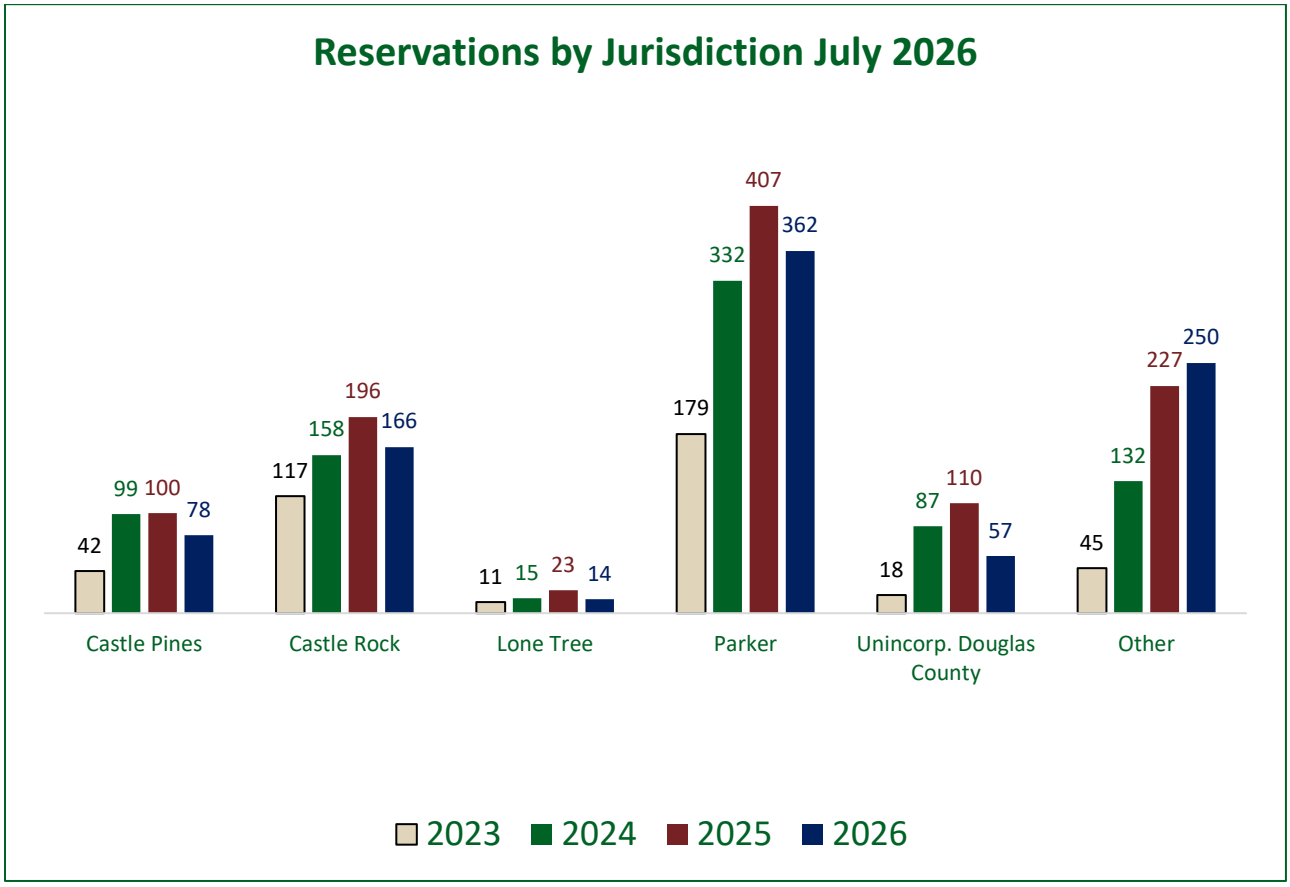
Public Safety	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	2026
Trail Assist	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	**1**
Trail Rescue	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Total Trail Assist/Rescue	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	**1**
Water Assist Event	0	0	2	2	2	42	29	**81**
Water Rescue Event	0	0	0	0	1	13	3	**17**
Water Assist/Rescue Total Events	0	0	2	2	3	55	32	**98**
Water Assists (Needed Help)	0	0	2	3	4	42	37	**92**
Water Rescues	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	**5**
Total Water Assist/Rescue	0	0	2	3	5	42	41	**97**
EMS Requested	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	**1**
People Helped By EMS	0	0	0	0	0	13	0	**13**
Overdue Groups	1	1	3	0	0	1	9	**15**
Overdue People	2	2	9	0	6	2	22	**43**

RULES AND REGULATIONS STATS (UPDATED 7/31 /26)

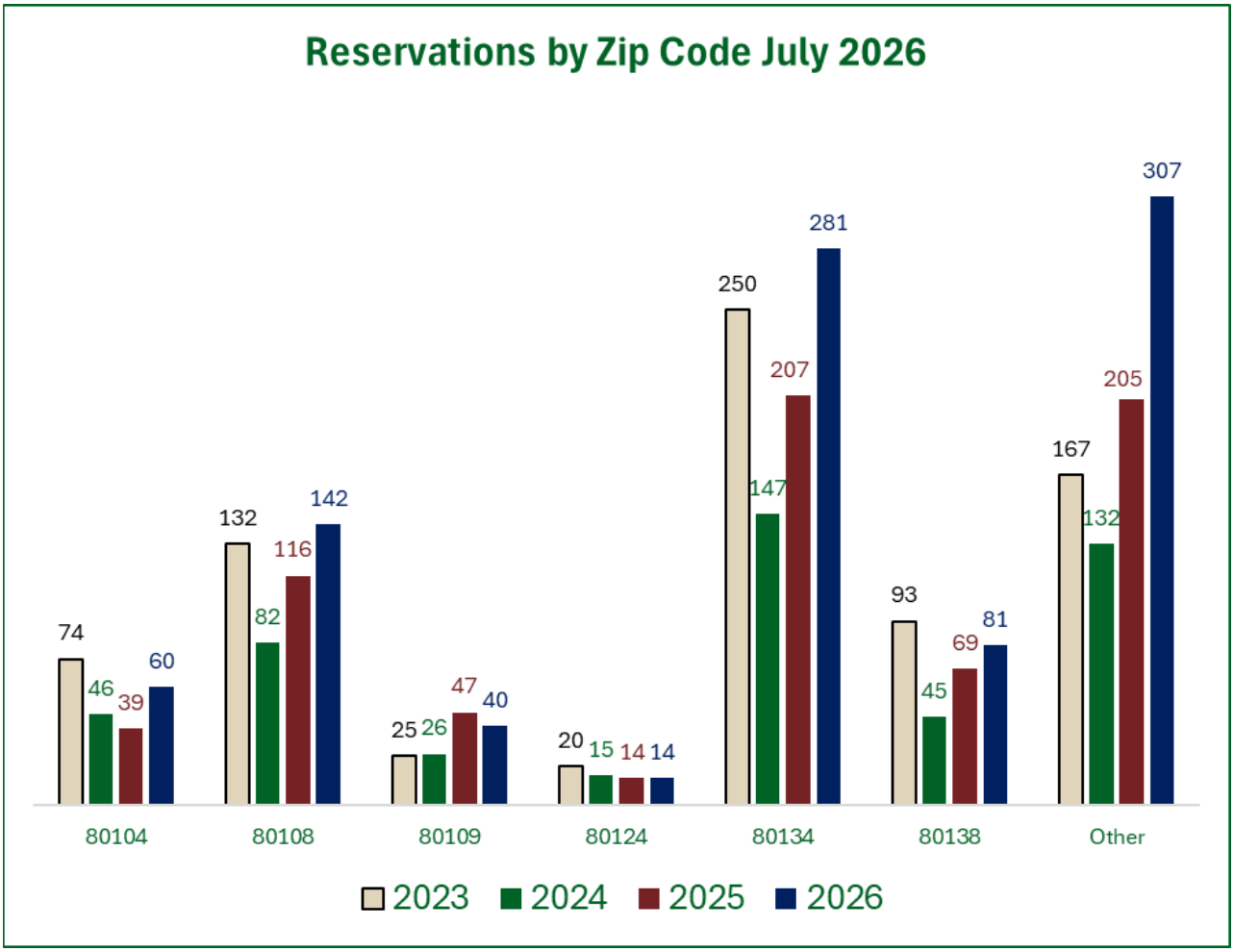
Rules and Regulations	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Total Violation by Type
Class III E-Bikes	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	**3**
Dogs Off Leash	1	1	3	3	3	5	0	**19**
Dogs On Shore	0	0	1	1	2	2	3	**7**
Fishing	0	2	5	4	5	6	4	**26**
Off Trail Use	0	1	2	5	8	7	13	**31**
Watercraft Closed Area	0	0	2	3	4	7	19	**21**
PFD	0	1	3	2	5	11	35	**33**
Swimming Prohibited	0	0	1	1	2	2	9	**9**
Wading Prohibited	0	1	2	2	3	5	12	**18**
Parking Closed Area	0	1	2	1	1	2	0	**9**
Other*	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	**6**
Total Violation by Month	**2**	**9**	**22**	**23**	**34**	**49**	**96**	**182**

DOUGLAS COUNTY
COLORADO

Rueter-Hess Recreation



Reservations by Jurisdiction July 2026				
	2023	2024	2025	2026
Castle Pines	42	99	100	78
Castle Rock	117	158	196	166
Lone Tree	11	15	23	14
Parker	179	332	407	362
Unincorporated Douglas County	18	87	110	57
Other	45	132	227	250



Reservations by Zip Code July 2026				
	2023	2024	2025	2026
80104	74	46	39	60
80108	132	82	116	142
80109	25	26	47	40
80124	20	15	14	14
80134	250	147	207	281
80138	93	45	69	81
Other	167	132	205	307