CREATING A VISION
CAVE LAKE STATE PARK

Points to Ponder
(Current Staff Suggestions and Observations)

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Cave Lake State Park is located in White Pine County, in eastern Nevada. At 7,300 feet, Cave Lake is perched midway in the Schell Creek Range, seven miles up the Success Summit Road (also known as Steptoe Creek Road and State Route 486) from U.S. 50, and about 15 miles from Ely.

The 1973 Nevada State Legislature authorized the transfer of land in White Pine County from the Nevada Fish and Game Commission (later, the Nevada Department of Wildlife) to the Division of State Parks. The current master plan was completed in 1990.

The reservoir covers 32.2 acres (784 acre feet), and provides opportunities for fishing, boating and swimming. 1,208 land acres plus an additional 2,960 acres of U. S. Forest Service lands acquired through the White Pine County Lands Act passed in 2007, provides a total 4168 acres of opportunity for picnicking, camping, hiking/walking, and relaxing outdoors.

Visitors are drawn to Cave Lake by its incredible geologic and scenic beauty. The Park is accessible year round due to the efforts of the Park staff and NDOT and the County in plowing the roads and parking areas.

The Park’s primary use is for fishing, including ice fishing and the annual Fire and Ice Sculpture Contest. The proximity to both Ely and Las Vegas makes it a very popular destination as well. Cave Lake is also about 1.5 hour's drive from the Great Basin National Park and the Utah state line.

During the first half of 2008, staff collected site and area information for Cave Lake, and the regional area in many categories: land use trends (ownership, land use, zoning, transportation, trails and utilities), natural resources (topography, geology, hydrology, vegetation, soils, slope, wildlife, climate), and cultural resources (existing facilities, archaeological and historical resources). This information was then analyzed and development limitations and opportunities were identified by the staff the week of September 1, 2008. User survey data from the past 5 years were analyzed and used to develop the first draft of these discussion points.

These discussion points will be presented at the first meeting and ideas, suggestions, solutions will be brainstormed by the participants. These points are a mix of issues, considerations, management proposals and opportunities.

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Things to Keep in Mind

**Funding:** Existing levels of outdoor recreation funding continue to be inadequate to meet the recreation needs of Nevada, and therefore needs to be reflected when identifying opportunities.

**Public Access to Public Lands:** There is a growing need to protect, maintain, and increase public access to public lands for the greatest diversity of outdoor recreational users.

**Protection of Nevada’s Natural, Cultural, and Scenic Resources:** There is a need to balance the increased demand for parks with the protection of natural resources.

**Nevada’s Growing Population Increases Demand:** Over the past 10 years, Nevada’s growing population has placed an increasing demand on recreation resources and recreation suppliers at all levels, statewide. Visitation continues to increase at this park.

**Coordination and Cooperation:** Coordination and cooperation between public and private recreation providers at all levels is very important. More true support from private citizens, user groups, and governmental entities (local, state, and federal), are important partnerships to pursue.

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A. Bottleneck in Park Core - The core of the park is defined in this plan as the developed area surrounding the Lake. This includes the boat launch, park office building, campground and day use area. There is a single travel corridor at this time, Cave Lake road. ATV users camping in the core of the park are forced to drive illegally through the park to reach backcountry roads at present because there are no designated connector trails routing them around the core area.

Due to the bottleneck congestion, noise from the ATV’s in the core conflicts with other passive users in the day-use area and campground as well as fishermen. The number of visitors, vehicles and recreational equipment in the park is continuing to grow and exceeds site design, causing erosion, congestion, and noise. This is causing increased overflow into the dispersed camping areas south of the lake and creating damage such as soil compaction and loss of vegetation in the meadows upstream.

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B. Non-point Source Water Pollution/Erosion

Roads, campground pads, day use areas and parking lots do not have Best Management Practices (BMP’s) in place to capture, mitigate and direct stormwater. Rain events are causing damage to facilities and maintenance needs are increasing. Impacts imposed by visitors to these same areas include damage to vegetation caused by foot traffic and the gathering of firewood within the campgrounds, which is no longer allowed. Foot traffic outside of developed trails has also caused erosion of the shoreline in many places, some of which is severe.

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C. User Conflicts

There are currently two campgrounds, the Lake Campground, and the Elk Flat Campground which is outside of the core of the park and downstream. Both campgrounds are being upgraded to include larger and longer sites, and multiple user sites.

Elk Flat is currently being designed to include more units as well as a multi-family campsite and larger pull-through sites for longer vehicles and toy-haulers.

The main campground is being improved to include a reservation only yurt site and an improved group use reserve area.
These two campgrounds still do not fulfill the needs of the public, particularly for winter use, as both of these campgrounds have immense snow removal issues.

A third campground in Grasshopper canyon may be a possibility that could be designed primarily for ATV and snowmobile users to relieve conflicts with the bottleneck in the core of the park and be accessible through the winter.

Horsemen are currently utilizing the Elk Flat campground and the dispersed use areas upstream of the lake. ATV use and horses are naturally incompatible, therefore spreading out the users through designated routes and camping areas has been suggested.

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D. Dam and Spillway repairs

Cave Creek Dam is an earthen dam originally built by the owners of the CB Ranch in the 1930's. It was enlarged in 1961, and stands at 364 feet in length and 60 feet in height.

An analysis of the Dam and all associated components began in 2007. It was found that a deteriorated outflow pipe is jeopardizing the integrity of the dam. In the late summer of 2008, a proposal was written to repair the Dam bringing it up to public safety standards and to include hydropower for the park. Construction is estimated for 2010 or 2011.

The hydropower component would assist in providing energy for the office and residence as well as future campground and facilities downstream such as the proposed Grasshopper Canyon Campground, which would be dependent upon that energy source.

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E. Trails/Access/Trailheads

The park’s current trails system has more than doubled since the last plan. These trails are in need of maintenance and some rerouting. Signage is needed under the Universal Trail Assessment Process (UTAP) and designation of routes for proposed motorized use. Trails maps and brochures are also needed.

There are several bridges that need to be maintained, replaced and/or built to provide for the access necessary to provide for a variety of diverse trail users (motorized and non-motorized).

A trailhead plan is needed for several of the trails to accommodate horse trailers, ATV’s and other parking depending on the trails’ designated use.

A trailhead is needed at the “gateway to the Wilderness” at the far east boundary of the park. This trail connects to the USFS Schell Wilderness Area; Kolchek Basin Trails.

The southwest “new” area of the park now referred to by Staff and this planning effort as part of the Elk Flat Motorized Trail System, is in most need of access and trail marking for ATV and OHV designated use. This area is used by OHV and ATV significantly during the hunting season.

Educational Kiosks and clearly marked trail routes are needed to keep ATV’s and OHV’s on designated routes and to direct trail users to connector trails.

This includes connector trails/routes from the proposed Grasshopper and the current Elk Flat Campground to the Elk Flat Trail System.