

Waterton Canyon Closure FAQ's

For years Denver Water has invited the public to recreate at its Waterton Canyon property. Unfortunately, over the next 18 months it will be necessary to close the area to recreational use so that the canyon road can be used for its main function - to serve as a vital access road to Strontia Springs Reservoir. Denver Water will be dredging the reservoir to remove at least 625,000 cubic yards of sediment that has built up following forest fires and intense rains, and the canyon road will essentially be a six-mile-long construction site during this project.

The dredging project is necessary to maintain water quality and avoid operational challenges that could impact Denver Water's service to its 1.3 million customers in the Denver metro area. At the completion of this project, Denver Water will reopen the canyon and once again invite the public to enjoy this popular recreational amenity

HOW LONG WILL THE CANYON BE CLOSED?

Waterton Canyon is scheduled to be closed from Monday, Aug. 2, 2010 until Sunday, Dec. 3, 2010, and again from Monday, Feb. 28, 2011 until Saturday, Dec. 31, 2011. There is more than 1 million cubic yards of sediment in the reservoir, and this project aims to remove 625,000 cubic yards. If the project proceeds ahead of schedule, Denver Water may extend the work into 2012 to remove as much of the remaining sediment as possible. Any schedule changes will be posted to www.denverwater.org/waterton

WHY DOES DENVER WATER HAVE TO DREDGE STRONTIA SPRINGS RESERVOIR?

Denver Water's Strontia Springs Reservoir, located at the top of Waterton Canyon, contains more than 1 million cubic yards of sediment — a result of forest fires (notably Buffalo Creek and Hayman) and subsequent intense rains over the years. Increased sediment creates reservoir operation challenges and causes water quality issues that negatively impact the functions of the Foothills and Marston water treatment plants. As a result, a Denver Water contractor will dredge the reservoir to remove at least 625,000 cubic yards of sediment — enough to fill the football field at Invesco to a height of more than 200 feet.



WHY DOES WATERTON CANYON HAVE TO BE CLOSED DURING THE DREDGING PROJECT?

On high-use days, there are more than 2,000 visitors to Waterton Canyon, ranging in age from small children to older adults. Those using the canyon come on foot, bicycles and horseback. This large-scale project will require heavy machinery and equipment in the canyon, creating essentially a six-mile-long construction site. As a result, Denver Water has determined it is in the best interest of public safety to close the road.

DID DENVER WATER EVALUATE ALTERNATIVES OTHER THAN CLOSING THE CANYON?

Since 1997, Denver Water has investigated 24 different alternatives. Each alternative was rated and ranked based on technical feasibility, environmental impacts, permitting requirements, public safety, policy issues and costs. The top two alternatives — dredge and transport the sediment upstream and dredge and transport the sediment downstream — were reviewed by members of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners, who ultimately selected the downstream option as the most appropriate alternative.

WHY CAN'T THE PROJECT BE COMPLETED IN THE WINTER MONTHS?

The dredging cannot be performed when the reservoir is iced-over. To remove the large amount of sediment, Denver Water will need three to four months for project mobilization and at least five months to dredge.

WHY CAN'T THE CANYON BE OPENED ON THE WEEKENDS FOR RECREATION AND THE PROJECT WORK LIMITED TO WEEKDAYS?

Because of the ice on the reservoir in the winter months, there is only a six- to seven-month window for dredging. Removing the large amount of sediment requires working 24 hours a day, six days a week for four to five months. It is estimated that unscheduled work stoppage would cost Denver Water ratepayers \$80,000 a day and would increase the likelihood that the project would not be completed on time.

IF THE CONTRACTOR IS ONLY WORKING SIX DAYS A WEEK, WHY CAN'T THE CANYON OPEN ONE DAY A WEEK?

To only open the canyon one day a week would create significant safety risks, as the canyon will essentially be a six-mile-long construction site. It also could potentially extend the timeline of the project, increase security or vandalism risks and increase the cost of the project.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF DENVER WATER DIDN'T DREDGE THE RESERVOIR?

Sediment routinely makes its way into the reservoir, but because of the recent fires, the annual sediment load that now flows into the reservoir has increased by four to six times, depending on the amount of rainfall. This increased sediment load has caused a large delta to form in the upper end of the reservoir. This delta creates reservoir operation difficulties, increased water treatment challenges at Foothills and Marston treatment plants, and an increased dam safety risk if the sediment were ever to mobilize and move downstream against the face of the dam.

WILL DENVER WATER NEED TO DREDGE THE RESERVOIR AGAIN AFTER THIS PROJECT?

Denver Water will continue to investigate alternatives for preventing sediment from entering the reservoir; however, it can be expected that dredging will be required in the future. The amount of sediment entering the reservoir is determined by the amount of rainfall in the surrounding watershed and the pace at which the area burned by forest fires returns to pre-fire conditions.

HOW DO I ACCESS THE COLORADO TRAIL DURING THIS CANYON CLOSURE?

Access to The Colorado Trail from Waterton Canyon also will be closed during this project. The next closest access to Colorado Trail Segment 1 is via the Indian Creek Trailhead on Colorado 67, 10.5 miles west of Sedalia (see www.coloradotrail.org).

WHY WILL THE PARKING LOT BE CLOSED IN ADDITION TO THE CANYON?

Almost all of vehicles using the Waterton Canyon parking lot are associated with use of the canyon. Parking for access to Chatfield State Park can be accommodated at Chatfield or at the Discovery Pavilion adjacent to the Waterton parking lot. Opening the parking lot without legitimate recreation destinations may promote unwanted activities and vandalism.

IF THE CANYON IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, WHY WASN'T THE PUBLIC CONSULTED ABOUT THE PROJECT AND CLOSURE?

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Forest Service have determined that this project does not create environmental issues critical enough to require public hearings. However, we encourage the public to ask questions and share their concerns. Questions and comments should be directed to watertoncanyon@denverwater.org.

WHO CONTROLS THE USE OF WATERTON CANYON?

Denver Water controls use of the canyon under the terms of its agreements with the city of Aurora, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

HOW MUCH WILL THIS PROJECT COST, AND WHO IS PAYING FOR IT?

The contract to remove 625,000 cubic yards of material is for just over \$30 million. This amount will increase if additional material is removed. Denver Water and the City of Aurora have an agreement in place for maintenance activities at the facilities, in which Denver Water pays for the construction and Aurora reimburses Denver Water for its 15 percent share.

HOW WILL LOCAL WILDLIFE BE IMPACTED AND PROTECTED DURING THE PROJECT?

Denver Water has consulted with the U.S. Forest Service and the Colorado Division of Wildlife. Other than the increased traffic in the canyon, there are no other activities that will have an adverse effect on fish or wildlife.

WHAT STEPS IS DENVER WATER TAKING TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT DURING THIS PROJECT?

Denver Water and the contractor are taking all the necessary precautions to protect the environment. Environmental permits for dust and erosion control will be obtained from Jefferson County and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. The contractor will have an extensive spill control and response plan for all hazardous materials on the site. All booster pumps located on the reservoir and in the canyon will be fitted with hospital-grade mufflers to operate the pumps as quietly as possible. The pumps also will have required fuel containment precautions.

Additional questions and answers will be added to www.denverwater.org/waterton as they are received.

Please e-mail watertoncanyon@denverwater.org with questions or comments.