

Locals worry flooding will sink visits to Glendo

'This place should be packed'

By JOSHUA WOLFSON - Star-Tribune staff writer | Posted: Sunday, July 4, 2010



Marina employee Jon Hutmacher pulls the ferry from the courtesy dock to shore after delivering fuel to a customer on Thursday afternoon at Glendo State Park. Hall's Glendo Marina built the ferry after high waters submerged the dock's staircase. (Tim Kupsick/Star-Tribune)



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Trib.com visits Glendo to see what the circumstances are now that rising waters have closed some campsites at Glendo Reservoir.

GLENDO STATE PARK -- When the waters rose, workers at Hall's Glendo Marina fashioned a pontoon boat into a makeshift ferry so boaters could still reach the docks.

They also set to work on new campsites to substitute for spaces submerged when the lands surrounding the reservoir flooded last month.

But a day before the start of the July 4 weekend, the marina parking lot remained nearly empty and only a handful of boats skimmed across the reservoir's inviting waters.

"It's a ghost town out there," said Art Hansen, a Glendo regular who'd just returned to the marina after navigating his 21-foot boat around the lake.

Marina worker Jon Hutmacher, who was busy fueling up Hansen's boat, agreed.

"I would have figured there would be more boats out there," he said. "It's a nice day."

On most Independence Day weekends, Glendo State Park becomes one of Wyoming's largest cities, attracting between 10,000 and 15,000 people. This year, flood waters have closed more than half of the reservoir's roughly 400 campsites and swamped roads, restrooms and picnic tables. With so much water in the area, officials expect about half of the normal number of visitors this holiday weekend.

"It's an unprecedented situation," said Domenic Bravo, administrator of the Wyoming Division of State Parks.

The expected drop in holiday visitors could end up costing the state more than \$100,000 in entrance fees, Bravo said. That figure doesn't take into account the potential losses for merchants who can usually count on a lucrative July 4.

"It's less revenue for the park," Bravo said. "It's less revenue for the surrounding community."

In response to the flooding, Glendo business owners and park staff have opened about 100 makeshift campsites on higher ground. But some locals worry bad publicity -- and a subsequent announcement from state officials that worrisome levels of E. coli had been detected in certain flooded areas -- will keep vacationers away.

"The water is great," said Melinda Ferguson, who was answering phones Thursday at the marina. "Our boat ramp is working wonderful. There is good camping. Don't believe the rumors."

Minutes earlier, Ferguson had been telling a caller dry camping spaces were still available. Media coverage of the flooding, she said, had unfairly sensationalized the situation.

"The fishing is really good," she said. "We have boats to rent."

While officials warned against swimming in flooded campground areas, tests of E. coli levels near the marina indicated open water areas were safe for use, according state officials.

Marina owner Shawn Hall said he'd suffered 10 to 15 cancellations from bad publicity. But marina workers were trying to make the best of the situation. They've set up about 40 extra camp sites and were using the hand-powered rope ferry to shuttle people between the nearby boat ramp and the docks.

"We are just taking it as we can," Hall said.

Hansen, who's been coming to the lake since he was a boy, said he's worried the lack of visitors will harm Glendo merchants. During a typical July 4 holiday, "the whole state of Colorado comes to visit us," he said.

"This place should be packed right now," he said.

The situation is particularly frustrating because, from Hansen's perspective, there's still plenty of camping available -- even if it's not in the designated spots.

"Real camping is just parking by the lake and enjoying the peace and quiet," he said.

A few miles away, near the Interstate 25 interchange, shoppers were stocking up on gas and supplies at Howard's General Store. Sally Gray, whose mother owns the store, said she's also noticed fewer visitors to Glendo this year.

To help meet the expected need for camping spaces, Howard's set up a campground in a field near the store. Workers used old campaign signs to mark each space. No campers were using the sites early Thursday afternoon.

Still, there were hopeful signs. As Gray discussed the flooding, she noted the arrival of three boats on trailers in the parking lot.

"It will be OK," she said. "People will still come to the lake."

Reach reporter Joshua Wolfson at (307) 266-0582 or at josh.wolfson@trib.com. Visit tribtown.trib.com/JoshuaWolfson/blog to read his blog.