

Attn.: CELRM=PMP, David Adams  
Department of the Army  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Nashville District

March 18, 2021

Re.: Project Planning Branch Letter  
Date Feb 22, 2021,  
Subject: Cook Recreation Area

Dear Mr. Adams,

We are responding to the letter of February 22, 2021, requesting public comments concerning environmental and socioeconomic issues on a proposed long-term lease of Cook Recreation Area to private interests. My wife and I are long-term residents of this area, having lived in middle Tennessee (Mt. Juliet and Hermitage) since 1988. My parents built our current home on Stewarts Ferry Pike in 1974, and we have resided here since 2012. We have seen many changes to the area surrounding Percy Priest Reservoir over the decades since the lake was formed.

We have several concerns about the proposed action, as listed below:

- **Increased traffic and congestion** – traffic in our area is increasing dramatically, and is expected to increase more as new developments are completed, and as the Nashville area population grows. Last year, the weekend traffic to Cook's and Seven Points recreation areas was especially high from spring to fall. This was at least partially due to the Covid-19 pandemic, during which many people sought outdoor activities to enjoy. Whether or not this increased traffic load will continue as the pandemic recedes is anyone's guess, but last year was especially high and may be a harbinger of things to come.

Access to the Cook Recreation Area is limited to South New Hope/Stewarts Ferry/Old Hickory Blvd roadways, with a single dead end entrance into Cook Recreation Area. I am concerned that traffic congestion will get much worse in our area if Cook Recreation Area is developed into another tourist destination.

- **Potential Environmental Impacts** – I am concerned about the potential environmental impacts of the proposed development, especially the creation of

additional parking areas, and picnic pavilions. These “improvements” will necessitate the clearing of some forests on the Cook Recreation Area. Forests are one of our area’s most important ecological assets, and they are increasingly threatened by development. Within just the last few years, over 160 acres of forests and open lands have been cleared to make way for new residential developments in the vicinity of our neighborhood. These include 2 new developments along South New Hope Rd., a development at the north end of Smotherman Lane, and new developments along Earhart Rd.

It seems that the pressure to develop new residential neighborhoods in our area will continue to increase as Nashville’s population grows, and our area has a bullseye on it for developers because it has been identified as a “Suburban Neighborhood Evolving” in the Donelson-Hermitage-Old Hickory Community Plan. This will result in continued clearing of forests, and increased impacts on the wildlife that inhabit our area. Cook Recreation Area will become an oasis of forestland in a sea of residential development. This is unfortunate, and we should be doing all we can to protect the integrity of our forests and the ecological services that they provide to our community. These include the ability to sequester carbon, moderate excessive temperatures, provide water filtration during storm events, and provide important wildlife habitat. Let’s please make sure that we protect the forests that we have in our area, and look for ways to increase that protection.

Cook Recreation Area is a popular destination for the area’s bird watchers. According to the most recent data available on eBird, Cook Recreation Area is a birding hotspot in our region, recording 140 species on 458 checklists. Any proposal to develop Cook Recreation Area will need to consider potential impacts on birds and other wildlife that inhabit the area.

- **Increased costs of using Cook Recreation Area** – the letter indicates that the proposal is considering a renovated campground, to include RV use. Besides the headaches that increased RV traffic will cause in the So. New Hope/Stewarts Ferry/Old Hickory Blvd. corridor, I fail to see the need for another RV campground in our area when you already have a perfectly good one at Seven Points, a mere 2 miles away from Cook Recreation Area. What about providing a campground experience that is real camping? An RV campground will be more expensive to maintain, which will increase the price of using Cook Recreation Area, putting it out of reach of many

citizens. Again, there is no need for an additional RV campground when you already have a suitable campground for RV's at Seven Points.

- **Private sector profits on public lands** – the Cook Recreation Area is part of the nation's federal public lands, which are held in trust by the federal government for the use and benefit of our nation's citizens. I am always concerned when I see proposals that allow the private sector to utilize our public trust lands for profit, while restricting the use of those public trust lands by ordinary citizens. This goes against the very purpose of a public trust resource. We already pay taxes to support our federal government. I suggest that the Corps re-evaluate its operations on Percy Priest, and find ways to keep our public trust lands truly public and available to all citizens who want to enjoy them.
- **Communications with the neighborhood** – we live on Stewarts Ferry Pike between Cook Recreation Area and Seven Points. Yet we received no notification of the Corps' interest in developing Cook Recreation Area. If it wasn't for social media apps like NextDoor, and communications from our District 12 Councilwoman, Erin Evans, I would have no idea that this proposal is being considered. Please review your system for notifications, and expand the distribution list. Citizens need to be informed as to the work of our government, and what proposals are being contemplated. There are too many incidents in which these kinds of proposals fly under the radar, and citizens are unaware of government plans. This creates much distrust in government, and understandably so. Before you move further on this proposal, I recommend a more comprehensive outreach effort on the part of the Corps to better understand the needs and desires of our community as it relates to the use and enjoyment of Percy Priest Reservoir.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal.

Greg and Rose Wathen