

Project Overview

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS), together with the U.S. DOT Volpe Center, Colorado DOT, and Colorado State Patrol, is working to improve conditions at the popular Hanging Lake rest area and recreation site, which is located along Interstate 70 in Glenwood Canyon.

A diverse group of stakeholders identified the following issues and project goals and considered them when developing an initial set of near-, medium-, and long-term improvement strategies.

Issues:

- Degradation of natural resources and National Natural Landmark
- Over-capacity of trail and site
- Parking lot congestion
- Parking lot designation as safety rest area and varying land ownership
- Traffic spreads canyon-wide and to other safety rest areas
- Public safety concerns
- Staffing and funding shortages



Hanging Lake Source: Volpe Center



Aerial view of Hanging Lake parking lot Source: Google Maps

Project Goals:

1. Protect natural resources
2. Manage congestion at Hanging Lake parking lot
3. Enhance public safety
4. Improve visitor experience
5. Support local tourism

Existing Conditions

Visitation

- 130,000 visitors/year
- Peak: May - September
- Average visit time: 2.5 - 3 hours
- Day-trip intentional and spontaneous visitors
- Parking lot and site exceeds capacity

Public Safety

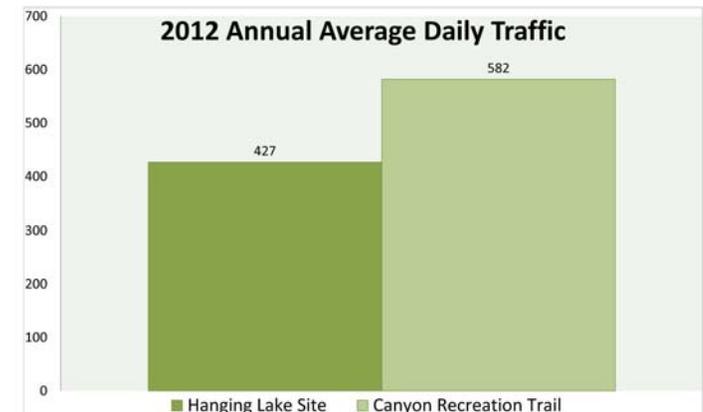
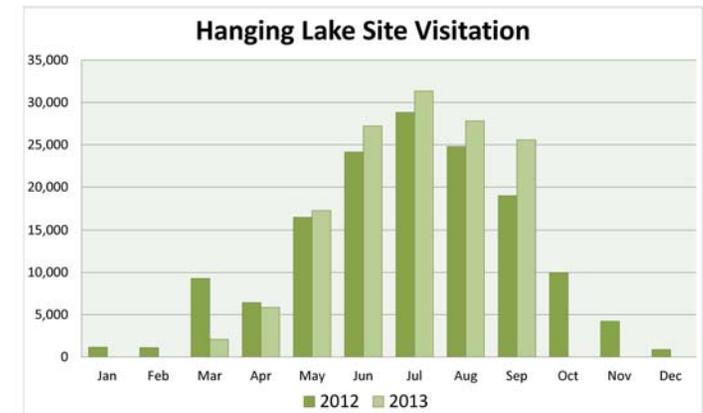
- Illegal parking delays and sometimes prohibits passage of emergency vehicles
- Vehicles park on the on- and off- ramps to I-70 occasionally backing onto the Interstate
- EMS called to site 8-10 times in 2013

Transportation Infrastructure/Access

- 110 parking spaces
- No room for large vehicles to turnaround inside the parking lot
- Bike access along Glenwood Canyon Recreation Path
- Exclusive vehicle access from eastbound off-ramp of I-70
- Designated as a safety rest area

Staffing

- No consistent funding source to provide staffing on-site to manage parking lot, monitor site use, enforce rules, or provide interpretation
- CSP and USFS paid for overtime staff on weekends in previous years (funding is no longer available); turned around approximately 200 vehicles/day



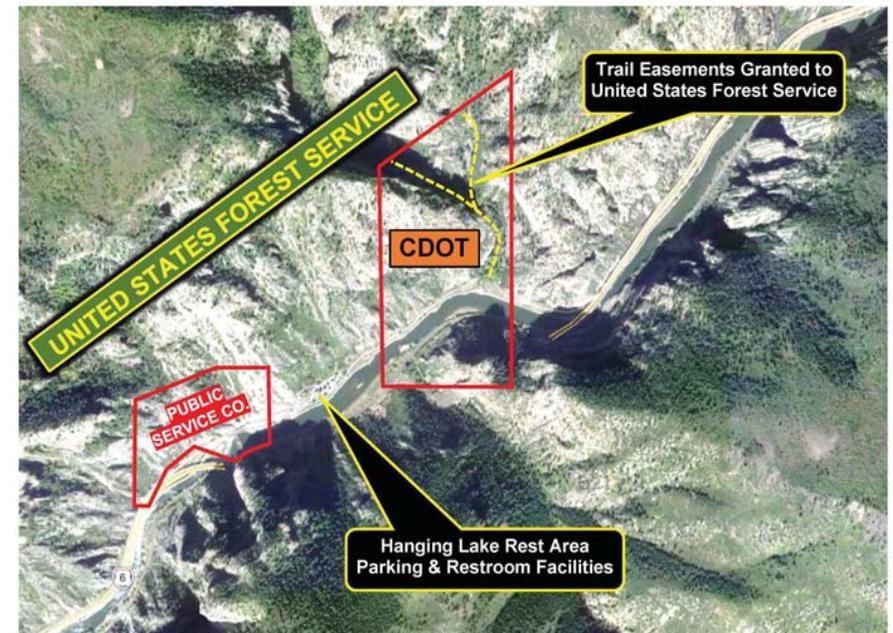
Site Background

History

- 12-mile Glenwood Canyon portion of I-70 was completed in 1992
 - Award-winning engineering design due to creativity and environmental sensitivity
 - Originally designed with six rest areas to provide access to recreational opportunities; only four were built
 - Federal funding was used to build the infrastructure and facilities on the Interstate
- Hanging Lake parking lot is designated as a “safety rest area”
 - Built to accommodate the capacity of Hanging Lake in the 1990s
 - Visitation doubled in the last 20 years

Multiple Land Owners

- CDOT owns part of the parking lot and trailhead
- Colorado Public Service owns a small portion
- USFS owns the rest area facilities and part of the parking lot
- Easements were used to set up the current land management arrangements
- Complex land ownership requires understanding and complying with the different jurisdictions and authorities of each agency



Map outlining land ownership and easements at Hanging Lake rest area and trailhead Source: CDOT

Near-Term Actions

Coordinated Parking Lot Management

- Colorado Department of Transportation
 - Re-painting striping
 - Placing temporary candlestick barricades
 - Updating variable messaging signs
 - Up-to-date information on www.cotrip.org
- Colorado State Patrol
 - Supporting parking lot management where necessary
- Glenwood Springs City Council and the Glenwood Springs Tourism Promotion Board
 - Funding USFS to hire one seasonal employee at parking lot in 2014 (funding is not available in future years)
- USFS
 - Recruiting and paying additional USFS patrols from other programs and districts
 - Continuing to collect visitor use information
 - Improving signage of rules and regulations (Ex: “No dogs allowed” signage in parking lot)
- All
 - Providing up-to-date maps and information on websites to advise of parking difficulties and of rules and regulations at site
 - Interagency collaboration on marketing and creation of products showing alternative recreation opportunities in the Glenwood Springs area



Barricades in Hanging Lake parking lot Source: Volpe Center

Medium-Term Actions

Trailhead Permit System



Hanging Lake trailhead Source: Volpe Center



Hanging Lake trailhead connection to Glenwood Canyon Recreational Path Source: Volpe Center

- Sell day-pass permits at a kiosk from the trailhead to capture vehicle-users and bikers from both directions
 - Include interpretive maps and pamphlets at kiosk
 - Provide funding for seasonal employees adequate to staff Hanging Lake parking lot and site seven days a week through the summer season
- Conduct visitor trail capacity study to inform any further management decisions for preservation of the lake and visitor experience
- Prohibit over-sized vehicles in parking lot (semi-trucks, RVs) to increase capacity, flow of traffic through the lot, and the navigation of emergency vehicles
 - Would require changing the designation from “safety rest area”
- Continue working with local communities on ensuring consistent marketing and messaging

Long-Term Actions

Shuttle System

- Provide public transportation from potential transit hub in Glenwood Springs to Hanging Lake parking lot
 - Similar structure to Maroon Bells shuttle
 - Possible other stops along Canyon
 - Shuttle ticket would include access to Hanging Lake
- Close parking lot during peak months to private vehicles (May - September)
 - Would require changing the designation from “safety rest area”
- Incorporate interpretation during transit ride
- Allow bicycle access from the Glenwood Canyon Recreation Path under the trailhead permit system

