

2

GRAND LAKE'S CONTEXT

2.1 GRAND LAKE'S HISTORY²

Unlike many of its Middle Park neighbors where gold fever was rampant, Grand Lake's natural resources were, and remain, majestic views and untainted wilderness. As a result, Grand Lake's history is one of tourism.



Over a thousand years ago, Indian tribes from the Ute and Arapaho nations were the first to call Grand Lake home. According to legend, one cold December day an Arapaho

Indian chief tracked a herd of buffalo across the snow covered ice of Grand Lake. Among the buffalo tracks stood out one particular enormous set. Intrigued, the chief followed them to an opening in the ice where the tracks originated. The chief returned to his tribe and spoke of a supernatural buffalo that lives in the depths of the lake, and so named it the Spirit Lake.

Since its discovery as a hunter's paradise by European noble Sir George Gore, many have come to Grand Lake in search of adventure. One man was Joseph L. Wescott who came to Grand Lake in 1867 and was so awe struck with its beauty and abundant game that he built Grand Lake's first building.

With the mining boom in the 1870s and early '80s many towns blossomed overnight. Grand Lake, without any significant mineral claims, evolved as a support center. The role as outfitter to the prospectors of the region was a profitable one; hotel rooms and supply stores quickly lined the streets of Grand Lake.

The official survey and town dedication in 1881 relocated the business center of Grand Lake from the west shore of the lake to the broader and flatter north shore. As the new Grand County Seat, it boasted 43 blocks and a 100-foot wide main street. The street was designed with this width not to accommodate transportation movements, but as public space. The street was regularly closed off for rodeos, dances, horse races, and all manner of cook-offs.

As the mining boom dwindled away from Middle Park, so did Grand Lake's political power. Former county seat, Hot Sulphur Springs, was intent on regaining its position as County Seat. After a bloody Fourth of July shoot-out leaving the County Clerk and three of the County Commissioners dead, Grand Lake eventually relinquished the seat back to Hot Sulphur Springs.

With the loss as a political center, Grand Lake focused on its innate qualities as a tourist destination. By 1900 Grand Lake had only 100 year-round residents, but more than 1000 people migrated to the lake every summer, on an annual basis. Fifteen years later, in 1915, Congress created the Rocky Mountain National Park. Grand Lake instantly became bordered on three sides by the new national park and evolved into a gateway city. While in 1915 access to the park was limited, subsequent state highway projects have opened the park up to over 3 million visitors annually.

In the mid-1920s, as the Front Range of Colorado began to grow, so did its need for water. The Colorado-Big Thompson (CBT) project began in 1938, diverted water from Grand Lake to the eastern slope of the Front Range. While Grand Lake did not make a direct gain from the construction of this project, it did reap more than twenty years of indirect benefits from construction crews and engineers that poured into the valley. One of the long lasting benefits of the CBT project resulted in stable water levels in Grand Lake and Shadow Mountain Reservoir (see section 2.2.5 for additional information).

Grand Lake's unique, western mountain character and design style are found in its numerous log cabins and clapboard buildings, the wooden boardwalks, the central town park, and its location on the shores of Grand Lake. The scale, style, and architectural similarity of the building designs contribute to the town's overall charm.

Grand Lake is no longer regarded strictly as a summer resort community. The popularity of the area with winter sports enthusiasts, helped by strategic, citizen lead marketing, has also contributed to the year-round economy. Grand Lake is called the "snowmobile capital of Colorado" and is consistently ranked in the top 20 of best places to snowmobile in the United States.

Grand Lake has grown little and changed even less over the last hundred years. Its economic health still sits firmly on revenue from realty, its summer home developments, tourism, and its countless recreational opportuni-



FIGURE 8

Grand Lake has a long history as a boating and recreation destination.



FIGURE 9

Early Grand Lake pioneers Judge Wescott (left) and fiddler/square dance caller John Mitchell (right). "Swing your partner like swinging on a gate, swing her again and promenade eight."

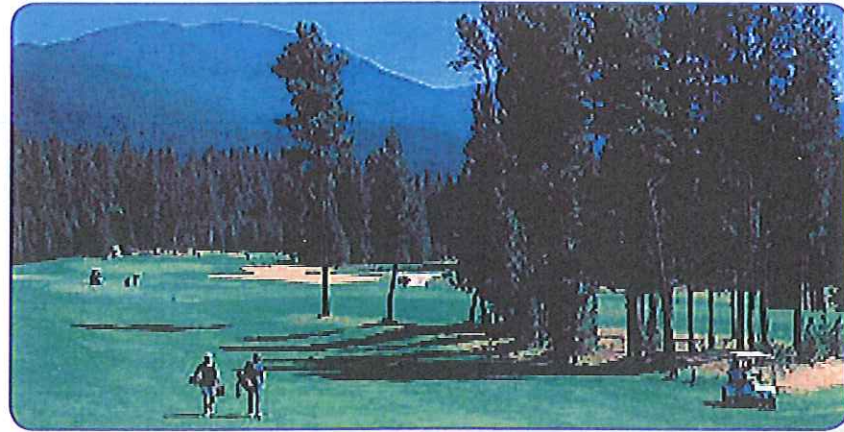


FIGURE 10

The Grand Lake Golf Course is operated by the Grand Lake Metropolitan Recreation District.



FIGURE 11

Mount Baldy (in Rocky Mountain National Park) as seen from the shores of Grand Lake.

ties. While many homes dot the mountains surrounding the town, Grand Lake is a quaint, western village with approximately 500 full-time residents. Today, the town is home to a lively community of artisans, musicians, retirees and outdoor enthusiasts. The same rustic feel that homesteaders found a hundred years ago is still what makes Grand Lake a unique Rocky Mountain hamlet for visitors and residents alike.

2.2 GRAND LAKE'S PHYSICAL SETTING

Surrounded by snow-capped peaks, uninhabited wilderness and alpine creeks that meander through fragrant meadows, Grand Lake sits in a pristine corner of Grand County and serves as a gateway to Rocky Mountain National Park, which surrounds the town on three sides. The central business district sits on the shores of Grand Lake and offers unparalleled lake and mountain views. Mountainous terrain within the Town boundary offers visitors and residents alike remarkable year-round vistas of ancient, glacial-carved valleys.

2.2.1 Regional Context

Grand Lake is located in Grand County, approximately 2.5-hours west of Denver. Two hours west of Denver is Berthoud Pass, accessed via US Highway 40. At 11,315 ft. the pass serves as the eastern portal to Grand County for a majority of Grand County visitors, which come from the Denver



FIGURE 12

Grand Lake's regional context

Metro area. Visitors travel north through the Fraser Valley where in nearby Granby, home to the Granby-Grand County airport, US Highway 34 runs north to Grand Lake.

Grand Lake's location gives the community the unique distinction of being a gateway to unmatched recreational pursuits available to few other communities primarily due to the proximity of Rocky Mountain National Park, the Arapaho National Forest, Arapaho National Recreation Area, and Grand and Shadow Mountain Reservoirs. The Trail Ridge Road Scenic Byway (US Highway 34) runs from Grand Lake through Rocky Mountain National Park, world-famous for the sweeping vistas of the crags and valleys that characterize this part of the Rockies. Trail Ridge Road, the highest continuous paved road in the US, is a popular tourist attraction. Trail Ridge road outlets in Estes Park, approximately 48 miles to the east. Approximately 500,000 summertime visitors come through Grand Lake from Rocky Mountain National Park; however, the road is closed during the winter months.

2.2.2 Climate

For summer, expect warm days and cool to freezing nights, especially in the high country. Many of the points of interest in the highest elevations remain inaccessible until early or mid-July. The rainy season lasts from mid-July through August, when afternoon thunderstorms occur frequently. The first snow can fly any time after the first of September! Both lakes largely

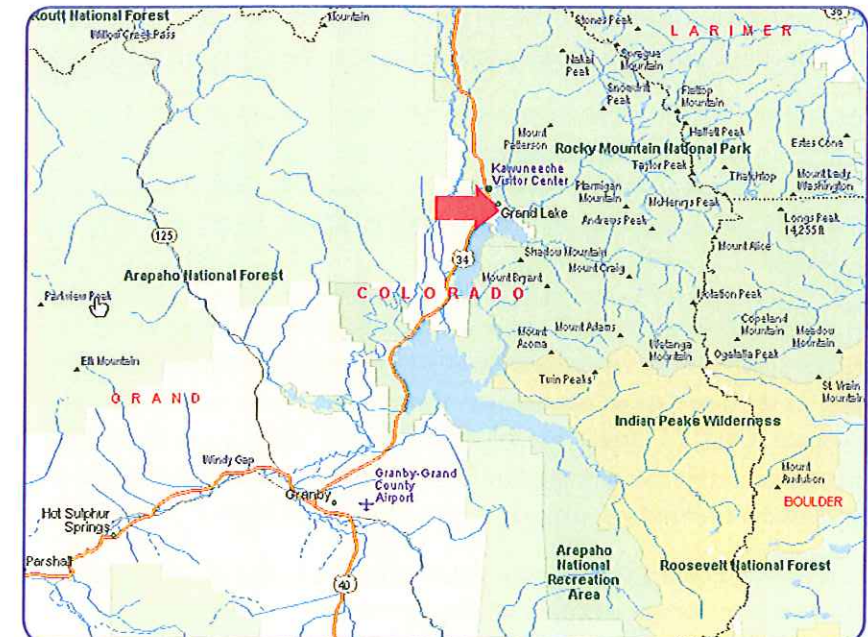


FIGURE 13

Grand Lake is surrounded on three sides by Rocky Mountain National Park