



**JOEL ANDERSON**  
SUPERVISOR, SECOND DISTRICT  
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

**AGENDA ITEM**

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

2021 NOV -4 AM 8:31

CLERK OF THE BOARD  
OF SUPERVISORS

**07**

**DATE:** November 17, 2021

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**SUBJECT**

**PURSUING PARTNERSHIPS TO INCREASE RECREATIONAL ACCESS TO  
RESERVOIRS (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

**OVERVIEW**

San Diego's reservoirs provide much more to the region beyond storing water. They give thousands of citizens an opportunity for recreation. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that outdoor activities are essential for everyone to enjoy exercise in a safe environment. The region's 24 reservoirs allow for fishing, boating, hiking, picnicking, and more.

Due to budget constraints, several reservoirs throughout the region that are owned and operated by various agencies other than the County of San Diego are not open to the public during several days of the week. For those that have a longer drive to access the Pacific Ocean, this presents a hindrance to enjoying the water resources of the region. For example, five reservoirs managed by the City of San Diego located within the unincorporated County have been closed an additional day each month since July 2019 due to budget reductions. This is in addition to the regularly scheduled days when they are not open. El Capitan Reservoir—located in the unincorporated Lakeside community and operated by the City—is closed to the public every Wednesday and Thursday, and the first Friday of each month.

Though it can be understood that municipal budgets are not unlimited, the nearby residents dependent on these public resources deserve to have reliable access to recreation. Access to publicly owned land is vitally important for the overall health of our communities. Outdoor recreation can provide stress relief, socialization, and nature appreciation through physical interaction with the natural world <sup>1</sup>. In times of crisis or disaster, outdoor recreation also provides an important means of coping. Loss of access to outdoor recreation opportunities inhibits

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<sup>1</sup> Scholte S. S. K. et al. (2018) 'Mapping Recreation as an Ecosystem Service: Considering Scale, Interregional Differences and the Influence of Physical Attributes,' *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 175: 149–160. [[Google Scholar](#)]

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individuals' abilities to engage with restorative natural environments and escape the pressures of the crisis <sup>2</sup>.

Today's action calls for the County of San Diego's Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) to begin discussions with the public entities that manage reservoirs in the unincorporated area to determine the feasibility of providing operational support for the recreational use of reservoirs on a permanent basis. This includes, but is not limited to, the City of San Diego, the San Diego County Water Authority, and the Sweetwater Authority. The County DPR team has an established track record of providing quality access to the region's recreational assets and is well equipped to begin the process of engaging our valued regional partners to determine how to maximize the use of these treasured recreational resources.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**SUPERVISOR JOEL ANDERSON**

1. Find that the proposed actions are not subject to CEQA per Section 15060(c)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines because the action is exploring the feasibility of operational hours of existing reservoirs used for recreation is not a project as defined in CEQA Guidelines Section 15378(b)(5). Pursuing partnerships for additional recreational activities is an administrative exercise, and any agreements, plans, funding, or additional approvals will be reviewed consistent with the CEQA Guidelines at the appropriate time.
2. Direct the County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation to coordinate with the City of San Diego, San Diego County Water Authority, Sweetwater Authority, and other valued regional stakeholders, to determine the feasibility and costs of the Department of Parks and Recreation providing operational support for the recreational use of reservoirs located in the unincorporated area on a permanent basis and report back to the Board in 180 days.

**EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Improving recreational access to the San Diego region's reservoirs will enhance the quality of life for County residents and visitors of all ages. Recreational access promotes health and wellness, safe communities, and civic pride for all walks of life within the region. Expanding the opportunity to access nature and recreational opportunities near water can improve the physical, intellectual, social, and emotional health for our residents.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

There are no fiscal impacts associated with this action. There may be future fiscal impacts associated with future recommendations included in the report back to the Board, resulting from the direction to staff to coordinate with the City of San Diego, San Diego County Water Authority, Sweetwater Authority, and other regional stakeholders, to determine the feasibility and costs of the Department of Parks and Recreation providing operational support for the recreational use of

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<sup>2</sup> Samuelsson K. et al. (2020) Urban Nature as a Source of Resilience During Social Distancing Amidst the Coronavirus Pandemic. Retrieved from: *OSF Preprints*. <10.31219/osf.io/3wx5a> [\[Google Scholar\]](#)

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reservoirs located in the unincorporated area on a permanent basis. Any such recommendations would need to return and be approved by the Board.

**BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

The proposed actions will help businesses and workers in San Diego County through the advancement of potentially expanded recreational programming opportunities at the reservoirs.

**ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

N/A

**BACKGROUND**

What are commonly referred to as lakes within the San Diego region are impounding reservoirs that are part of the water supply system. Most reservoirs have been available for public use for more than a century. The City of San Diego, for example, has offered public recreational use of its reservoirs since 1913, when the core of the present water storage system was purchased from private operators.

The County of San Diego (County), along with its valued regional partners, have been recognized as pioneers in multiple use (for recreation) of water supply reservoirs. The public is provided supervised recreational access for a variety of traditional outdoor activities including fishing, boating, hiking, picnicking, waterfowl observation, and more.

In May of 2020, the City had opened three reservoirs for public recreational use—Miramar, Murray, and Lower Otay. However, there were six reservoirs that remained closed located in the unincorporated County:

- El Capitan Reservoir
- Upper Otay Reservoir
- San Vicente Reservoir
- Lake Hodges Reservoir
- Sutherland Reservoir
- Barret Reservoir

On May 27, 2020, candidate for Supervisor in District 2 Joel Anderson called for the remainder of the reservoirs to be opened for access to the public for recreation. He presented a petition signed by more than 1,200 people requesting that the reservoirs be reopened immediately.

On June 23, 2020, the County's Board of Supervisors approved a cost-sharing agreement with the City to keep lakes and reservoirs open for the remainder of 2020. The City's Public Utilities Department also stated that they would be conducting a fee study and implementing the necessary adjustments to ensure a reliable funding strategy to keep the reservoirs open long term.

Numerous local agencies have been great stewards for recreation within these reservoirs for decades. However, because the majority of these reservoirs are located within the unincorporated

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County, it could make sense for the County's Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) to assume operational control of recreation at these reservoirs.

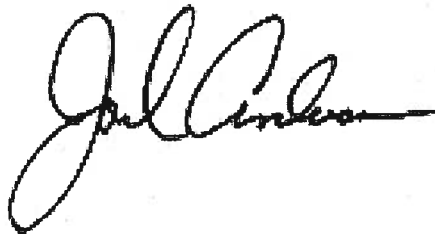
Lake Morena County Park is a prime example of what DPR can provide through management of recreation activities at a reservoir. In addition to the lake, the Park features 8 miles of non-motorized multi-use trails, a TRACK trail for kids, pavilion, and a playground. More than 45,000 people attend annually because of its adjacency to the Pacific Crest Trail and because it is regularly stocked with a variety of freshwater fish and includes partial RV sites. The park has a campground which includes 86 partial and full hookup RV sites, tent campsites, 10 cabins, and a group site. Most importantly, it is open for day use every day from sunrise to a half-hour before sunset.

This action would be the first step in understanding the economic and operational aspects of each of the reservoirs within the region. The County's Parks and Recreation Department is a nationally recognized leader in terms of programming healthy communities for the region and could assist the other jurisdictions in maximizing access for recreation. While the reservoirs will always be under the control of each jurisdiction for water supply purposes, the County formally partnering with other jurisdictions to operate recreational programming will help ensure long-term equity of access for all residents of the County.

**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

This action to seek more information on the potential of increasing recreational access to reservoirs directly supports the County of San Diego's 2021-2026 Strategic Plan's Building Better Health initiative. Increasing the opportunity for recreational activities would help to ensure that every resident has the opportunity to make positive healthy choices.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joel Anderson", with a stylized, flowing script.

**JOEL ANDERSON**  
Supervisor, Second District