

IV. The “Big Fail”: Napa Abandons Lake Berryessa (1975)

The early 1970s brought much controversy over the management of Lake Berryessa. Napa County was in conflict with the Bureau of Reclamation over how best to provide public recreation at the lake. A moratorium was placed on all construction and development in the concession areas, including remedial construction activities, by Reclamation in 1970. A Board of Supervisors Resolution, No. 71-133, Nov. 1971, refused to continue to allow the Reclamation imposed “moratorium” and resolved to allow construction activities of a remedial nature at Lake Berryessa.

Congressman Don Clausen, responsive to his constituents, visited the lake in 1972. He worked extensively with all parties involved. In mid 1973 there was a Lake Berryessa Conference called by Cong. Clausen. He analyzed the National Recreation Area Proposal which would acquire the concessions and burden taxpayers with \$25 - \$40 million. He concluded that it did not provide a solution and that an expanded, up-dated and restructured cooperative management agreement between the Federal government and Napa County would be the best and most realistic way to resolve the Berryessa question.

He attributed the failures to develop and manage day-use recreation facilities and activities to:

1. Failure of the Federal government to recognize the potential for public recreation when the Lake Berryessa -Solano Project was conceived and constructed.
2. Failure of the Federal government to provide for the development and management of day-use recreation facilities even when its potential was recognized.
3. Inability of the State of California to finance or cooperate in financing recreational resources at the Lake.

He then stated, “Private enterprise, working in concert with government, can do anything better than government alone can --- the only problem is, it was never really given a fair chance to work at Lake Berryessa!” He recognized that funds were necessary to develop the day use capital improvements, and vowed to pursue Federal funds. He felt that the public use plan developed by the National Park Service was an excellent guide in developing a comprehensive day-use recreation plan for the Lake.

The Conference led Cong. Clausen to introduce H.R Bill 11758, December 1973. The purpose of the Bill was to authorize the Federal government to direct the development, operation and maintenance of day-use facilities. It further authorized the Federal government to create rules and regulations for the administration of the lands and waters at Lake Berryessa, and to enter into agreements for the operation and maintenance of recreational use facilities in the area. It authorized funds to be appropriated which were necessary to carry out the provisions of the Act.

Supportive of HR Bill 11758, the Napa County Board of Supervisors passed a Resolution. The County considered the bill a solution which would provide for the establishment of much needed day use public recreational facilities at Lake Berryessa by receiving funding to provide recreational uses, while proposing reasonable solutions for the management at Lake Berryessa. But after fruitless years of discussion and debate regarding the management agreement, in 1974 Napa County withdrew as the management agency of Lake Berryessa through Resolution 74-444, April 1974:

“WHEREAS, since the inception of said recreation managerial effort by the County of Napa, the recreational public has been served through the development of seven separate concession complexes individually managed by private enterprise concessionaires under agreement with the County, as approved by the Bureau of Reclamation, and the volume of recreational uses by the general public has expanded to the extent that presently Lake Berryessa is providing more than two million recreational user-days per year; and

WHEREAS, the County of Napa has, during recent years, sought to negotiate certain amendments to the said management agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation for the purpose or providing the resort concessionaires at Lake Berryessa with the contractual interest that would permit their more readily obtaining commercial financing with which to accomplish desirable expansion and capital improvements within their respective concession areas; however, such efforts of County have thus far been fruitless; and ...

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Supervisors of the County of Napa, State of California, that it does herewith and hereby determine that the County of Napa shall relinquish and terminate its managerial functions and activities under that certain Agreement entitled “Management Agreement with Napa County for Lake Berryessa Area” and dated January 17, 1962, between the County of Napa and the United States of America, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, said relinquishment and termination to be accomplished at a date convenient to said Bureau of Reclamation but not later than June 30, 1975.”