

Napa County Board of Supervisors 1972 Position on Lake Berryessa

To: Regional Director, Bureau of Reclamation

Subject: Response to National Park Service Recreational Development Plan Lake Berryessa
[1972 Interim Plan Recreation Management]

The Bureau of Reclamation, as part of the construction of the Solano project which formed Lake Berryessa, issued a report that indicated there would be no recreational value to be anticipated from the lake for reasons of substantial water level fluctuation and the steep grade of adjacent terrain. Neither the National Park Service nor the State of California nor any other governmental agency was interested in any degree in the prospect of recreation development or management at this newly created lake. Out of desperation to provide some form of management, and in order to restore order to a chaotic and dangerous situation that was then developing on the shores of Lake Berryessa by the numerous visitors coming to the lake without supervision, the County developed certain recreation and sanitation facilities, and entered into a management agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation.

In [1959] as part of the management agreement, the National Park Service prepared a recreation development plan for Lake Berryessa and specifically delineated eight concession areas for development. The County of Napa and the Bureau of Reclamation, at an early stage both recognized the need for development by private enterprise in order not to unfairly burden the property taxpayer of Napa County, while yet providing the necessary improvements for a proper and orderly recreational development. Bare land concession agreement contracts were entered into with seven concessionaires who were required to construct all improvements necessary with private capital.

As an aside it should be noted that since the concession agreements were initiated, many millions [of dollars] worth of improvements have been constructed at Lake Berryessa area by private enterprise in these seven concession areas.

From 1958 until 1963, the California State Division of Housing was responsible for the inspection and approving of all mobile home and trailer parks in Napa County. Since 1963, the County has assumed the function of such inspection. During the early development years of Lake Berryessa, it was apparent to the concessionaires that the principle source of cash flow from their operations was by means of permit fees for the placing and using of trailer spaces. This approach was deemed acceptable to both the County and the Bureau of Reclamation, as it generated the revenues required by the concessionaires in providing camping and day-use areas with are recognized as being generally not self-supporting operations.

The recreational value of Lake Berryessa has become apparent to many individuals; currently there are in excess of 2,000,000 recreation users per year at Lake Berryessa. During the summer months, the daily population exceeds 22,000 while during the "peak periods" on weekends and three-day holidays more than 65,000 people typically enjoy a variety of recreational activities at Lake Berryessa.

In 1967, it became apparent to the Board of Supervisors of the County of Napa and to the Lake Berryessa Park Commission that the volume of recreational use of Lake Berryessa had grown. It was recognized that the accelerated construction and development of additional facilities and capital improvements for day use, camping, and trailer recreation facilities was necessary. In discussing these subjects with the concessionaires, it became apparent that as a result of the limited finances and financing capacities of the concessionaires that it was not possible for such developments and improvements to be financed from operating income alone, and the it was now essential for he concessionaires to be able to develop outside financing from private financial institutions.

In the Spring of 1970 the Bureau advised the County that prior to the execution of a new management agreement it would be necessary that the Bureau have a financial audit of the seven concessionaires' operations, as well as a clarification of the status of Lake Berryessa relative to alleged pollution, and the elimination of an aircraft landing strip on one of the islands on the lake...(Again it might be noted that this audit clearly established that the concessionaires are not making excessive profits on public lands...) Further, on the matter of the alleged pollution at the Lake, the County has retained the consultant services of Dr. William J. Oswald, an authority on pollution, a Professor at the University of California, and Dr. Oswald has submitted his report reflecting the absence of pollution at the lake, and his determination that all sanitation facilities are adequate at this time.

The National Park Service was retained by the Bureau to undertake the preparation of the recreation plan...the County and the Bureau were invited to review a preliminary draft...Meetings were held with the National Park Services representatives...In each instance the County responded with written comments to the draft presented at each meeting. The draft that was recently released and made public contained several major revisions from previous drafts reviewed by the County and the Bureau, and in fact advanced considerations not previously communicated to the County. The significant changes included in the public draft consisted of: increasing potential projected user-days from 5 million to 8.7 million recreational day-use; from the former acceptance of mobile homes in the recreational "picture" to the total phasing out of mobile homes, and the complete deletion of the County as one of the management alternatives. These changes came as quite a shock to the County representatives, particularly after so many reviews of earlier drafts.

While earlier preliminary drafts were generally acceptable to the County, the Public draft would be unacceptable to the County. It is evident that the present draft was written totally without consideration being given to the position and contributions of the concessionaires, or to the ability of the concessions to function under such conditions as outlined in the draft report. The draft has been specifically rewritten for the practical elimination or [of] private enterprise in the recreation scene at Lake Berryessa, it ignores the status of the existing valid concession agreements which extend up to forty years, and it has substituted major, if not total, funding of recreation by the taxpaying public.

The Board of Supervisors, therefore, cannot make any significant recommendations on the report as it is presently constituted if the provision for the total elimination of the County in the

management of the Lake is to stand. If the federal agencies desire to operate Lake Berryessa, the County would have no involvement.

The Napa County Board of Supervisors is convinced that continued County Management, and the utilization of the private concessionaires, coupled with the development of additional day-use recreation facilities using federal funds, would provide the greatest use for the greatest number of the recreation public at Lake Berryessa.

Regardless of uninformed expressions to the contrary, the County, as the management agent, has performed well in providing substantial recreational facilities at Lake Berryessa, which facilities have been enjoyed by substantial numbers of the public; this has been accomplished exclusively by private capital, without general taxpayer expense. The goals set forth by the County approximately four years ago for the further development of additional day-use facilities by the concessions is a sound and practical goal. The County and the concessionaires alike have been frustrated by this effort due to the inability of the Bureau of Reclamation to reach a decision on a new Management Agreement.

In the event the Bureau of Reclamation and the Department of Interior determine that the County should not continue its management role, but desire some other governmental agency to assume the management function at Lake Berryessa, it is the consensus of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Napa that the County should request the prompt termination of the existing management agreement between the County and the Bureau of Reclamation. This position is based on the realization that there would likely be an interim period between the time that the federal government elected to change the management of the lake and the time of actual implementation of such change or the funding thereof; such hiatus could extend for several years or more. In the meantime, the concessionaires would presumably be expected to continue to provide and operate the principal recreational facilities at Lake Berryessa and with the existent limitations and controls, an impossible situation would obtain.

The concessionaires would not have financible agreement such as would permit them to construct or improve facilities; they would be in a position of uncertainty as to their future; and, it may reasonably be assumed, they would be reluctant to continue any form of capital improvement or even long-term maintenance within their areas. No doubt there would be continued criticism from the same few sources that have placed the entire Berryessa recreational scene into its present confused position that has now aroused many agencies to an emotional and oftentimes unrealistic posture, in being critical of the lake.

The Board of Supervisors does not wish to continue to be party to such confusion, nor to be the recipient of such vilification as a result of the chaotic and unfortunate situation that would occur at Lake Berryessa during that interim time.

Therefore, in summary, the Board of Supervisors of the County of Napa are willing to continue the management of Lake Berryessa now that it appears clear that federal agencies and legislators are interested in the financing of day-use facilities and improvements at Lake Berryessa, and that such financing can be provided for construction and maintenance of additional facilities to be operated by the County. As the agency closest to the people and generally most responsive to

their needs, the County feels it can provide the necessary management in resolving the recreational situation at Lake Berryessa.