

This Bud's for you (and from you), Lake Berryessa!

By Peter Kilkus



Even after many years at Lake Berryessa, the Budweiser recycling joke still makes me smile. Lake Berryessa is now, and always has been, the cleanest lake in Northern California.

Unfortunately, during the controversial Bureau of Reclamation Visitor Services Plan process, which led to the present multi-year shutdown of Lake Berryessa, it appears that some folks consciously tried to promote the concept that the resorts had polluted the lake.

They were so successful, with the help of local exclusionist environmental groups, local media, and others that people would call the Bureau of Reclamation headquarters at Lake Berryessa and ask if it were safe for their children to swim in the lake!

Anheuser Busch – Fairfield Brewery wrote a letter during that period supporting their long-standing scientific analysis that Lake Berryessa water was pure - contradicting the pollution story.

Scientific data from other sources, including local water agencies and the Lake Berryessa Watershed Partnership also corroborated this assessment. There has never been any documented evidence – ever – that Lake Berryessa water purity has been compromised.

Reliable water is rare in California and one of the most important elements in many manufacturing, food processing and biotechnology companies. Thirty years ago, when representatives from the Anheuser-Busch Inc. were looking for a West Coast home for its Budweiser distilling vats, it tested the water in Solano County and stipulated it would move to Fairfield if the city could guarantee to provide only Lake Berryessa water. Decades later, the Fairfield brewery uses more than 1,500 acre-feet of Lake Berryessa water per year to brew more than 4 million barrels of beer annually.

Anheuser Busch is also a major financial supporter of the Lake Berryessa Watershed Partnership (LBWP). On June 5, 2011, World Environment Day, 25 Fairfield brewery employees joined the LBWP for a cleanup along the Lake Berryessa shoreline. The LBWP promotes Lake Berryessa water quality through its mascot, Bilgee the Bilgee Pad, Clean Water Warrior, seen around the lake every weekend.) Bilgee is accompanied by his friends, LBWEP interns Sabrina Larsen and Jesse Hewson, who talk to boaters and other visitors about water quality, invasive species, and recycling.

According to Kevin Finger, General Manager of the Fairfield Brewery, “Water is vital to plant and animal life and it's a key ingredient in brewing beer, and one of five key ingredients used in the making of Budweiser – that's why they are committed to water conservation both inside and outside our breweries. Lake Berryessa is a consistent, high quality water source for our brewery. As with all our breweries, we carefully monitor our source water on a regular basis. The water we receive is tested and goes through additional purification processes to meet the exacting standards of our brewmasters.

Water is not only a key ingredient in beer, but also important in many other areas of a brewery. The majority of water used in a brewery is for cleaning, rinsing, heating, cooling and various other process areas. That's why we have long understood the importance of conserving water, and at the same time adhering to our strict quality standards. In fact, our U.S. breweries are some of the most water efficient in the world. Here in Fairfield, we've reduced our water use by 32 percent in the past 3 years.”

The Anheuser Busch brewery opened in 1976 and employs about 460 people. It is Fairfield's single biggest user of water at about 2 million gallons daily, 7 percent of the entire city's consumption. All of this is Lake Berryessa water. Brewery officials don't think the city's Delta water is good enough for Budweiser.

New equipment, including a bio-energy recovery system reclaims water from the brewing process. The bio-energy system also generates more than 15 percent of the brewery's fuel needs by capturing the nutrients in brewing wastewater for conversion into biogas. Use of the renewable fuel enables the brewery to decrease its use of natural gas.

Honored more than a dozen times for waste reduction, the Fairfield facility recycles more than 99 percent of its solid waste, including scrap aluminum and metal, glass, cardboard, wood, brewing grain, beechwood chips, stretch wrap, labels, electronic equipment and batteries, according to the firm. Anheuser-Busch has been salvaging material from its brewing process since the late 19th century when the company started offering used grain as cattle feed.

