



# MEETING SUMMARY

## Recreation Management and Visitor Use and Needs at Silverwood SRA

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### Meeting Details

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**Date:** 16 November 2017

**Time:** 1:00 PM

**Location:** Silverwood State Recreation Area Administrative Offices

**Objectives:** Gather information on recreation management and visitor use and needs at Silverwood Lake SRA

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### Attendees

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Lisa McCandless, Stantec; Kirby Gilbert, Stantec; Steve Hopkins, Supervisor State Park Peace Officer California State Parks

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### Summary

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As part of the recreation study, this interview was scheduled with State Parks manager Steve Hopkins, in order to get an overview of recreation management and visitor use observation and needs. Steve has worked at Silverwood Lake for over 20 years, and provided the following insights on: the types of visitors that come to Silverwood Lake, issues with crowding and how crowds are managed, what visitors and potential visitors inquire about, and access issues and constraints. Steve provided the following observations:

- Steve noted that Silverwood Lake levels do not fluctuate seasonally or annually, which makes it unique for recreation reservoirs. The water is part of the state aqueduct water (South State Water Project) and even drought does not affect overall lake levels and visitation.
- Silverwood is a destination recreation facility, wherein the people that visit expect to stay for the day, or duration of their planned visit. When the park fills up, this often means that those destination users will walk in from the outside, rather than local users who might turn back.

- The recreation area fills to capacity on major holiday weekends and other weekends, or typically when the weather is hot. There is not always a consistent pattern of when the weekends will “go to closure”, and usage varies from year to year. In periods of good economic conditions, usage trends have steadily increased in rate, and includes increases on Holiday weekends and during summer months.
- Steve recognizes a sense of visitor loyalty with the people that come to Silverwood. There is a big day use crowd that involves a lot of repeat visitors, and which is the most popular use area at the lake.
- From what he has seen, Steve believes that the majority of boaters come from adjacent high desert communities.
- Cleghorn is usually the last day use area to fill up, with parking lots 1-6 filling first. Steve noted that typically, cars file into Sawpit Canyon before going to Cleghorn. This excludes a slight minority of people who prefer Cleghorn, and preferentially park there first.
- When the recreation area fills to capacity it typically isn't until around 3:00 PM, which is the time that State Parks re-opens, in order to allow more cars in. This is not a one-in, one-out scenario. Parks waits until there are approximately 40 open spaces before re-opening to let more visitors in.
- Boats: Steve mentioned that Parks has reduced the number of reservations that are available for boat launching, in order to increase the number of first come first served available, and to avoid holding launch passes for people that are no-shows. There are 150 boat parking spaces (pull through long spaces). Parks monitor the boat parking lot closely to allow maximum entry on busy days. Steve noted that boat traffic is lighter on Monday holidays (Memorial Day and Labor Day).
- At full closure State Parks engages CA Highway Patrol for assistance. Parks has a system that has been in use for many years for managing the crowds on busy weekends. People line up very early in the morning outside of the entrance kiosk and along the roads, in order to enter the Recreation Area during peak times. Parks allow them to line up on the entrance road (near the kiosk) down to where the highway on and off ramps are. No parking is allowed on the highway off-ramp. Cars are allowed to line up on the shoulder of Highway 138, outside the white fog line, and do so from just beyond the off-ramp, to the north on Hwy 138 (southbound traffic).
- When the park fills to parking capacity many people walk in. Parks try to help people by directing them where to go. Steve mentioned that the location of where people want to go is all driven by where their family is located. Parks does not direct people to use the Silverwood bike path for walk-in lake access because

they know that it is not well equipped with signage, and do not want people to get lost.

- Caltrans will occasionally deliver sand for replenishing the swim beach.
- During peak season the park opens at 6:00 AM and closes at 9:00 PM. Through October 1 - April 1 or May 1, hours are reduced and the recreation area is only open from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM.
- There is an issue with crime on Highway 138. At night, fisherman that park on the highway and walk to the lake have been known to have their cars broken into and burglarized.
- Live Oak Landing and access near USFS Road 2N33: No camping is allowed in this area and tickets are issued. Signs located on the entry road indicate rules. Most regulatory enforcement in this area is done via boat, which results in a slower response. Many people that go to this area are locals.
- Steve discussed the need for facilities at the recreation area to be “hardened” (surfaces, resiliency, etc.) because of clientele and visitor tendencies.
- State Parks directs questions about water quality to DWR. This arrangement seems to work well.
- In the past, Parks had a sign at Highway 138 and Highway 15 informing people of park capacity, and if the park was full. Future attempts to increase communication with visitors could entail posting temporary signage at I-15 and Highway 138, in order to let potential visitors know if the park is at full capacity. This could be just prior to, or just after, it is known that the park will be closed. The Caltrans electronic Interstate signs are not an option, since they are only used for emergency amber alert type notifications, but a similar tool could be adopted.
- Boat Inspections: boats are required to pass the quagga mussel inspection before being allowed to launch on Silverwood Lake. When a boat is inspected at a southern California lake and is deemed free of quagga mussels, a wire seal with a special clasp goes onto the boat on its way out of the lake. Only the boats that have this seal intact are allowed to launch on the lake. If a boat does not have the seal then they may not be allowed to launch at Silverwood. Parks allows boat trailers to park on the road near the administrative offices if a boat does not pass the quagga mussel test. In that case, the visitors are allowed to park their boat outside of the recreation area and go in as day use.
- Steve mentioned that Parks is proposing the installation of new shade ramadas along the swim beach at Sawpit Canyon. It was noted that the group camps also need refurbishing, with updated barbeques and other facilities.

- Valle group camp is open year-round by reservation. All other group camps are closed October through April.
- New Mesa has full hookups available (water, sewer, and electricity) and are open year-round.
- The price for no-hookup camping is \$45 and full hookup camping is \$50. Since the difference isn't substantial, some people without RVs pay for the full hookup site. Steve thinks that this should potentially change, and that only RVs should be allowed in the full hookup sites.
- At New Mesa, generally, sites 1-65 are not allowed to have advanced reservations booked after October 1<sup>st</sup>. However, sites 66-95 are on a reservation system year-round. Typically, Parks does not like to turn away visitors. For camping, if it's a warm Holiday weekend, even if it's off-season, Parks will just keep opening loops as visitors come.
- 3 cars are allowed per campsite. Overflow parking is available at the visitor center or restrooms.
- No fishing tournaments are allowed at Silverwood Lake during the summer.
- Visitor Center: currently not functioning properly. This is due to construction issues, and no heating or air conditioning available. As such, it is not being used to its full potential. It is currently being used as a meeting center, and for the bald eagle tours.
- According to Steve, bikes are a growing trend at Silverwood. Kayak, canoe, and paddleboard use are also increasing, along with hiking.
- Steve has noticed a trend in terms of visitors bringing their own equipment. There is more use for equipment such as, kayaks, hike and riding bikes.
- Closing vehicle access to Serrano Landing was a management decision because of safety issues and the need for access by ambulance, fire trucks, and other emergency vehicles.