Public Recreational Facilities Not Adequately Developed At Lake Berryessa, California-- A Bureau Of Reclamation Project

B-174172

Department of the Interior

UNITED STATES
GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

FEB. 22, 1972

UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

CIVIL DIVISION

B-174172

Dear Mr. Secretary:

This is our report on public recreational facilities not adequately developed at Lake Berryessa, California--a Bureau of Reclamation project. Our findings, conclusions, and recommendations are summarized in the digest of the report.

Copies of this report are being sent to the Chairmen, House and Senate Committees on Government Operations; House and Senate Committees on Appropriations; the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Public Works; and the Director, Office of Management and Budget.

Sincerely yours,

A. T. Samuelson

Director, Civil Division

The Honorable
The Secretary of the Interior

GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
REPORT TO THE
SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

PUBLIC RECREATIONAL FACILITIES
NOT ADEQUATELY DEVELOPED
AT LAKE BERRYESSA, CALIFORNIA--
A BUREAU OF RECLAMATION PROJECT
Department of the Interior
B-174172

D I G E S T

WHY THE REVIEW WAS MADE

The General Accounting Office (GAO) examined the development and use of recreational lands at Lake Berryessa, near Sacramento, California, as part of a survey of land acquisiton and utilization policies of Federal agencies involved in the construction of water resources projects.

Background

This lake was formed in 1957 by the completion of the Monticello Dam, the major feature of the Solano Project, a Bureau of Reclamation project designed to provide flood control and to supply water for irrigation and for municipal and industrial purposes.

Originally it was believed that the lake would not become an important recreational area because of an expected radical fluctuation of the water level. While the lake was being formed, however, the public began to use it, and it soon was apparent that Lake Berryessa would be desirable for recreation.

Except for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, the lake is the only large freshwater resource readily available to the residents of the San Francisco Bay area.

Recreation facilities were not available to accommodate the public, and the Bureau of Reclamation lacked both authorization and funds to develop and manage such facilities. Consequently the Bureau asked the State of California or local government agencies to assume the responsibility for public recreational facilities at the lake. The State expressed no interest, and in November 1957 it advised the Bureau that it had no funds for such development.

The Bureau entered into a management agreement with Napa County in July 1958 for the administration and development of recreational facilities at the lake. This agreement, rewritten in 1962, provided that the county, and all parties acting under its authority, would develop the Lake Berryessa area in accordance with a Public Use Plan prepared by the National Park Service in 1959.

The Public Use Plan stipulated the areas that should be developed and the number of boat launching, picnicking, camping, and other recreational facilities that should be provided in each area.

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Napa County adopted the policy that the recreational facilities would be developed and managed by private concessionaires--at no cost to county taxpayers--because users of the lake included many nonresidents of the county. The county established the Lake Berryessa Park Commission to administer and manage the lands around the lake. Subsequently Napa County entered into contracts with concessionaires to develop and operate recreational facilities at various locations at the lake in accordance with the Public Use Plan.

NDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Bureau lacked adequate control over the development of public recreational facilities at Lake Berryessa.

Napa County contracted with seven concessionaires to develop and operate specific recreational facilities by the end of calendar year 1966. None of the concessionaires provided all the required facilities.

The following table shows the type of development that has taken place at the seven concessionaire areas at the lake.

Rancho Monticello Concessionaire

Type of facility	Number required under Public Use Plan	Number in operation, May 27, 1971	Number over or under (-)
Picnic sites	150 to 300	37	-113 to -263
Swimming area	1	-	-1
Boat launching ramps	15	15	-
Camping sites	300	20	-280
Mobile homes	-	618	618

A summary of similar data for each concessionaire is presented as the appendix.

The principal development at all seven concessionaire areas has been the construction of mobile-home parks. The concessionaires rent most of the mobile-home spaces by the month or year and provide a limited number of spaces for short-term users.

There are about 1,700 private mobile homes located on Government-owned lands that are operated by the concessionaires. The mobile-home parks occupy some of the most desirable areas along the shoreline.

The homes range in size from small travel trailers to 24- by 60-foot mobile homes having elaborate redwood decking, aluminum awnings, and private boat docks. In one area the homes were placed on concrete pier foundations and had the appearance of permanent cabins.

The lack of control by the Bureau has resulted in a situation where access to and use of the lake by the general public is restricted severely because

of (1) extensive development by concessionaires of mobile-home parks along the shoreline and (2) failure to provide public recreational facilities in accordance with the Public Use Plan.

Suitable accounting records were not prescribed, which would have enabled better controls over concessionaire operations.

Without Federal Government financial participation, the development of seasonal-type, day-use facilities for the general public at Lake Berryessa may not be economically feasible.

In June 1970 the Department of the Interior issued an Environmental Early Warning Memorandum on Lake Berryessa. This memorandum criticized the developments there and encouraged the Bureau to initiate an examination into the prevailing conditions.

Reports submitted by an assistant regional director of the Department of the Interior and by the Commissioner of Reclamation's Assistant on Ecology confirmed the conditions described above.

RECOMMENDATIONS OR SUGGESTIONS

The Secretary of the Interior should

--require the Bureau of Reclamation to act to ensure adequate development of public recreational facilities at the lake, as provided in the proposed revised Public Use Plan;

--require the Bureau to prescribe suitable accounting records to be maintained by the concessionaires operating the facilities; and

--consider the feasibility of obtaining Federal authorization and funding for capital improvements at the lake, to reduce the reliance on others for development of public recreational facilities.

GAO plans to review the actions taken or planned for the development of public recreational facilities at the lake.

AGENCY ACTIONS AND UNRESOLVED ISSUES

The Bureau of Reclamation indicated that it was aware of the problems at the lake and was considering various corrective actions, including taking over the management of the lake.

By letter of November 15, 1971, the Commissioner of Reclamation stated that the situation at Lake Berryessa as described in this report with respect to recreation development was fair and accurate.

Public Recreational Facilities Not Adequately Developed At Lake Berryessa, California A Bureau of Reclamation Project (B-174172)

DOI

UNITED STATES - GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

February 22, 1972

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The GAO examined the development and utilization of recreational lands at Lake Berryessa as part of a survey of land acquisition and utilization policies of agencies involved in the construction of water resources projects.

Lake Berryessa was formed in 1957 by the completion of the Monticello Dam, the major feature of the Solano Project, a Bureau of Reclamation project designed to provide flood control and to supply water for irrigation and for municipal and industrial purposes for portions of Solano County, California. At normal water levels, the main body of water is approximately 10 miles long and 3 miles wide and has a shoreline length of about 170 miles.

The project, as authorized by the Congress, contained no provisions for recreational facilities. The Bureau of Reclamation believed that, because of the anticipated radical fluctuation of the water level, the lake would not become a major recreational area. While the lake was being formed, however, the public began to use it, and it soon was apparent that it would be a major water recreational area.

Because facilities were not available to accommodate the public and because the Bureau lacked both authorization and funds to develop and manage such facilities, the Bureau sought to have the State of California or local government agencies assume the responsibility of managing public recreational facilities at the lake. The State expressed no interest and, in November 1957, advised the Bureau that it had no funds available for such development.

In July 1958 the Bureau entered into a management agreement with Napa County for the administration and development of recreation facilities at the lake. This agreement, as rewritten in 1962, provided that the county, and all parties acting under the county's authority, would develop the area in accordance with a Public Use Plan for Lake Berryessa. The Public Use Plan was prepared for the Bureau by the National Park Service in 1959. The plan stipulated the areas that should be developed and the number of boat launching, picnicking, camping, and other recreational facilities that should be provided in each area.

Napa County adopted the policy that the recreational facilities would be developed and managed by private concessionaires, at no cost to county taxpayers, because users of the lake included many nonresidents of the county. The county established the Lake Berryessa Park Commission to administer and manage the lands around the lake. The county loaned funds to the commission to construct a park headquarters but made no commitment of funds toward the development of recreational facilities.

Subsequently Napa County entered into contracts with seven concessionaires to develop and operate recreational facilities at various locations at the lake, in accordance with the 1959 Public Use Plan. Each concessionaire contract provided for scheduled completion dates for public recreational development and provided that all facilities be completed by the end of calendar year 1966. **These development costs were to be recovered by charging the general public admission fees.** In addition, the contracts with the seven concessionaires provided for the county to receive 3 percent of the concessionaires' gross proceeds as a franchise fee. These funds were to be used by the county to finance the Lake Berryessa Park Commission. Any excess funds were to be used for public-use development at the lake.

CHAPTER 2

INADEQUATE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC-USE FACILITIES

AT LAKE BERRYESSA

Contrary to the requirement of the Public Use Plan for Lake Berryessa which stipulated the various public recreational facilities to be developed at the lake, access to and the use of Lake Berryessa by the general public was restricted severely because of (1) extensive development by the concessionaires of mobile home parks along the shoreline and (2) failure to provide public recreational facilities.

The Public Use Plan included provisions requiring the development of overnight camping areas and improved swimming beaches at most of the concessionaire areas and of improved picnic sites at all seven areas. During visits to the seven concessionaire resort areas, we noted only limited development of such facilities.

The following table compares the facilities developed by one concessionaire with those to be developed in accordance with the requirements of the Public Use Plan. Such development is typical at the seven concessionaire resort areas at the lake.

Rancho Monticello Concessionaire

Type of Facility	Number Reqd. by Public Use Plan	Number in Operation as of May 27, 1971	Number..... Over(+) or Under (-)
Picnic Sites	150 to 300	37	-113 to -263
Swimming Areas	1	0	-1
Boat Launch Ramps	15	15	as planned
Camping Sites	300	20	-280
Mobile Homes	0	618	+618

A summary of similar data for each of the concessionaires is presented as the appendix.

The Public Use Plan provided for one of the areas at the lake to be developed into a major public-use area by Napa County. It was to contain up to 50 boat launching ramps, 4,000 picnic sites, 600 camping sites, and swimming areas. During a visit to this area, commonly known as Bums' Beach, we noted that there were no boat launching ramps, no developed picnic sites, and no camping sites. The only improvements in the area were trash cans and temporary chemical toilets. The area was posted as a hazardous swimming area and had no improved swimming beaches. Visitors were required to vacate the area 1 hour after sundown. Bums' Beach was the only area at the lake available to the general public on a no-charge basis and was Napa County's contribution toward public recreational facilities.

The major development effort at all seven concessionaire areas has been the construction of mobile home parks. About 1,700 private mobile homes are located in mobile home parks on concessionaire operated, Government owned lands around Lake Berryessa. These mobile home parks occupy some of the most desirable areas along the shoreline of the lake. The mobile homes range in size from small travel trailers to 24X60 foot mobile homes having elaborate redwood decking, aluminum awnings, and private boat docks. In one area the homes are on concrete pier foundations and have the appearance of permanent lakeside cabins.

The concessionaires at Lake Berryessa rent most of the mobile home spaces by the month or year and provide only a limited number of spaces for short-term users. In addition, although there are no sign restricting the public from using the beaches where the mobile home parks are located, the proximity of the mobile homes to the water and the presence of private docks are a deterrent to public use of the area. Furthermore, although limited public day-use and camping facilities have been provided, these improvements don not satisfy the requirements of the earlier or the proposed revised Public Use Plan.

The Bureau of Reclamation has 34 recreation areas in its Region 2. Our review of recreational facilities at reservoirs within the region showed that only Lake Berryessa and Lake Cochuma had mobile home parks. Unlike the mobile home parks at Lake Berryessa, the mobile home park at Lake Cochuma is located in an area which does not restrict public access to the shoreline. Also Bureau officials informed us that the Lake Cochuma mobile home park was to be phased out and converted to short-term, travel trailer facilities when the current concessionaires's lease expired.

We noted that a major difference existed in the development at Lake Berryessa compared with development at the other lakes in the region. The development and construction of picnicking and overnight camping facilities at the other lakes had been carried out by the managing agency. Upon completion may of these facilities were turned over to private concessionaires for operation and management. At Lake Berryessa all development, construction, and management had been left to concessionaires who had to finance the costs of these activities.

We discussed with Napa County officials the reasons why they considered that the development of long-term, mobile home parks was necessary at Lake Berryessa. They informed us that the rentals from the long-term leases of the mobile home parks provided the concessionaires with steady year-round incomes which could not be realized from seasonal picnicking and overnight camping facilities. They stated that public use facilities, such as picnic and camp sites, did not provide an adequate return on investment and that the concessionaires had developed the mobile home parks to help cover the costs of developing and operating seasonal type, public use facilities.

CHAPTER 3

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION ACTIONS

As a result of the inadequate development of public use facilities at Lake Berryessa, the Bureau has received numerous complaints and inquiries from concerned individuals and organizations. Most of the complaints relate to the public's limited access to the lake and to the development of permanent type, mobile home parks. Until recently the Bureau maintained that the development of facilities at Lake Berryessa by private concessionaires was unique at a Bureau lake and that the concessionaires were doing a reasonable job under the circumstances.

In June 1970 the Department of the Interior issued an Environmental Early Warning Memorandum on Lake Berryessa. This memorandum was critical of developments at the lake and encouraged the Bureau to initiate an examination into the conditions at the lake. Subsequently visits to the lake were made by an assistant regional director of the Department of the Interior and by the Commissioner of Reclamation's Assistant on Ecology. Reports submitted by both officials confirmed the unsatisfactory conditions at Lake Berryessa with respect to the lack of outdoor recreation facilities and the uncontrolled spread of mobile homes.

As a result the Bureau has imposed a moratorium on additional developments at the lake and is considering the following actions.

1. Completing long range plans on the handling of pollution at the lake.

2. Limiting the number of mobile homes, landscaping in concessionaire areas, and per capita use of the sewage systems.

3. Requesting the Federal Aviation Administration to prohibit the use of an unsafe airstrip located on Big Island in the lake.

4. Studying the possibility of assuming full managerial control of the lake.

5. Using Federal funds for the development of public recreational facilities at the lake.

In addition, the office of Survey and Review, Audit Operations, Department of the Interior, was requested by the Commissioner of Reclamation to review the financial operations of the seven concessionaires operating the facilities at Lake Berryessa. The Department of the Interior auditors were not able to verify total expenses and gross receipts of any of the seven concessionaire operations. The results of these audits indicated that an accurate evaluation of the financial operations of the concessionaires would not be possible. The audit reports noted that, on the basis of the accounting records maintained by the concessionaires, the auditors could not express an opinion on the financial records or on the overall results of the concessionaire's operations at the lake.

The concessionaires' contracts with Napa County state that the concessionaire shall maintain such accounting records as may be prescribed by the park director. We noted that six of the seen audit reports specifically mentioned that the Napa County Park Director at Lake Berryessa had not prescribed the accounting records that were to be maintained by the concessionaires.

The Department of the Interior auditors also reviewed concessionaires' operations dealing with the sales of mobile homes. The audit reports stated that mobile homes were being sold by two concessionaires, as follows:

Rancho Monticello - This concessionaire sold mobile homes to individuals who located the homes either in the concession area or at locations throughout Northern California. County auditors stated that the gross receipts derived from mobile homes sold for use outside the concession area were not subject to the county franchise fee.

The Department of the Interior auditors, however, expressed the belief that all receipts derived from sales at the lake were subject to the franchise fee.

Steele Park Resort - The Lake Berryessa Development Company, a California corporation, operates the concession known as the Steele Park Resort. The Mobile Homes Division of the Lake Berryessa Development Company is located an operated on private property outside the concession area. As a result the receipts of this division were not subjected to the franchise fee. The resort bookkeeper informed the Department of the Interior auditors that generally the mobile homes sold by the division were located by buyers at the Steele Park Resort. In addition, the concessionaire, in a letter to the Napa County Park Director in October 1970, stated that the Mobile Homes Division would become essentially inoperative when the proper balance of mobile homes was reached at the resort. The Department of the Interior audit report stated that mobile home sales operations at the resort should have been examined by Napa County with a view toward possibly making such sales subject to the franchise fee.

Proposed revised Public Use Plan

After completion of our examination the National Park Service in September 1971, at the request of the Bureau, prepared a proposed revised Public Use Plan for recreational development at the lake. This plan acknowledged that the Public Use Plan originally prepared by the Park Service in 1959 had not been adhered to and that all concessionaires had concentrated development at the lake on mobile home parks, which were for permanent or semipermanent occupancy. The revised plan states that such occupancy at the lake constitutes private or quasi-private residential areas, contrary to the overall public recreational interest.

The revised plan states further:

–That mobile home development has been carried on almost to the exclusion of other types of recreational facilities, both in land area use and in responsiveness to the public need. Steep lands have been utilized, resulting in raw land cuts, which degraded the visual environment, caused excessive erosion, accelerated the eutrophication of the lake, and reduced its water storage capacity.

–That much of the lake is restricted for public recreational use because of poor management practices and a lack of public facilities.

–That land use practices in some development areas are accelerating the pollution of the lake and bringing much closer the day when the lake will die and not longer be a desirable recreation resource.

–That the lake is public property and that its public use should be paramount.

The revised plan provides for phasing out the mobile homes and indicates that a schedule for the removal of the mobile homes will be forthcoming. It states that public access to the normal water elevation should be established around the entire lake.

In outlining the objectives of the recreational program at the lake, the Park Service revised plan states also that (1) the public character of the area should be recognized, (2) the highest priority should be given to the provision of facilities which meet the public needs, and (3) a balanced variety of public recreational opportunities should be provided to the optimum extent possible.

The revised plan points out that a 1968 report, entitled "Recreation on and Around San Francisco Bay," by the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, a California agency, emphasized that the recreational development of water resources for such activities as boating and water skiing could result in the exclusion of important socioeconomic groups of residents from the use of public water resources. The report states that the development of such activities as fishing, picnicking, and swimming appears more desirable in the overall public interest because they (1) are participated in by all economic groups, (2) require limited capital outlays, and (3) will continue to be participated in even while income levels increase.

The revised plan states also that, except for the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta, the lake is the only major freshwater resource readily available to the people of the San Francisco Bay area. It points out that nearly 30 percent of the socially and economically deprived population in the State of California (about 600,000 persons) is located within a 2-hour travel distance to the lake.

To correct the conditions at the lake, the revised Public Use Plan states that designating the area as a national recreational area and including it ion the Federal Government's system of parks and recreational areas appears to be the most desirable course of action in view of the significance of the area and the opportunities for recreation inherent at the lake (Berryessa).

The plan states further that such an area could be established, on the basis of a study by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, at the request of the Bureau of Reclamation, It notes that a national recreational area would best complement the existing regional recreational opportunities for residents of the San Francisco/Stockton/Sacramento area. The revised plan notes also that, in the interim, concessionaire contracts should remain in effect but that expansion of existing resort areas should be curtailed and that the Bureau should obtain Federal appropriations to develop public use facilities in accordance with the revised Public Use Plan.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS:
The Bureau's failure to control adequately the development of public recreational facilities at Lake Berryessa has resulted in a situation where access to and use of the lake by the general public has been severely restricted because of (1) extensive development by concessionaires of mobile home parks along the shoreline and (2) failure to provide public recreational facilities in accordance with the Public Use Plan.

The concessionaires generally have developed their resorts as mobile home parks, to the detriment of the overall public interest and contrary to the requirements of their contracts with Napa County. Although there are no signs restricting the public from using the beaches where these parks are located, the proximity of the mobile homes to the water and the presence of private docks are a strong deterrent to public use and discourage public access to the area. In addition, this type of development severely limits the number of people the resorts can accommodate. Although limited public day-use and camping facilities have been provided, it is our opinion that these improvements do not satisfy the requirements of the earlier or the proposed revised Public Use Plan.

Because the State of California and Napa County indicated that funds for the development of the lake were not available, the major investment in and development of facilities were the responsibilities of the concessionaires. It appears that, without Federal Government financial participation, the development of seasonal-type, day-use facilities for the general public may not be economically feasible.

The Bureau of Reclamation is aware of the problems at the lake and currently is considering various alternatives, including the possibility of taking over management of the lake.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR:
We recommend that the Bureau of Reclamation be required to take appropriate action to ensure adequate development of public recreational facilities at the lake, as provided in the proposed revised Public Use Plan. Also the Bureau should prescribe suitable accounting records to be maintained by the concessionaires operating the facilities. We recommend also that the Secretary consider the feasibility of obtaining Federal authorization and funding for capital improvements at the lake, to reduce the reliance on others for development of public recreational facilities.

GAO plans to review the actions taken or planned for the development of public recreational facilities at the lake.

By letter dated November 15, 1971, the Commissioner of Reclamation commented on a draft of this report and stated that the situation at Lake Berryessa as described in our report with respect to recreation development was both fair and accurate.

APPENDIX I

ANALYSIS OF ACTUAL DEVELOPMENT AT LAKE BERRYESSA AS OF MAY 1971
COMPARED WITH DEVELOPMENT SPECIFIED IN THE PUBLIC USE PLAN OF 1957

Concessionaire	Picnic Sites PUP * ACTUAL	Camping Sites PUP ACTUAL	Mobile Homes PUP ACTUAL	Swimming Areas PUP ACTUAL	Launch Ramps PUP ACTUAL
Markley Cove	100 17	0 6	0 59	0 0	8 7
Lake Berryessa Marina	300 14	0 13	0 157	1 0	10 15
Putah Creek	300 0	150 125	100 85	1 0	10 15
Rancho Monticello	150-300 37	300 20	0 618	1 0	15 15
South Shore (Pleasure Cove)	100 0	0 58	0 222	1 0	10 15
Spanish Flat	700 20	250 40	0 192	1 0	15 15
Steele Park	+/- 900 40	300 210	0 337	3 1	25 15

* Public Use Plan

The actual GAO audit indicates that some of these numbers are approximations and may have dual use. However, this chart is accurate from the standpoint of indicating how far from the 1957 Public Use Plan the actual conditions had strayed by 1971.