

## Changes to Fee Program at New Melones Lake May 1, 2008

**Decision:** The Bureau of Reclamation will implement changes to its fee program at New Melones Lake beginning May 1, 2008. As proposed in the “Initial Plan for Phased Implementation of the 2005 Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (Draft),” camping fees for standard campsites will be \$18 per night. Walk-in campsites will cost \$14 per night. The use of RV dump stations will be \$8 for campers registered in a New Melones campground and \$15 for other users.

Reclamation announced proposed changes to its fee program in 2008 for New Melones Lake in order to implement the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (REA), Public Law 108-774, Title VIII. REA authorizes Reclamation to issue special recreation use permits and participate in both a fee collection/retention program and the nationwide Federal Interagency Pass Program. Implementing REA marks the first time a Reclamation-managed recreation area may retain revenues collected on-site and use them to enhance recreation facilities and services. Prior to REA, all revenues collected at New Melones went to the Federal Treasury. Fee proposals were developed based on a market analysis of fees charged at comparable recreation facilities in the region, management objectives, and visitor and resource surveys.

**Public Involvement:** On February 15, 2008, Reclamation announced a public review and comment period on the proposed Phase I fee changes, with comments due by March 17, 2008. At the request of Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties, Reclamation extended the comment period to Friday, April 4, 2008.

Phase I had been proposed to begin on Tuesday, April 1, 2008; implementation was subsequently delayed until Thursday, May 1, 2008.

Reclamation asked for the public’s input on the new proposed fees for Phase I:

- Proposed camping fees of \$18 for standard campsites and \$14 for a walk-in campsites (a \$2 increase).
- Proposed RV dump station fees of \$8 for campers registered in a New Melones campground and \$15 for other users (new fee).

Comments received for Phase I are summarized below.

From April 7 to June 6, 2008, a public review and comment period is being held on the proposed Phase II fee program. During the Phase II comment period, the public is also being asked for their suggestions on how Reclamation should use the revenues generated at New Melones under REA. Implementation of Phase II is proposed to begin at New Melones on Wednesday, October 1, 2008.

**Summary of Comments:** The Phase I comment period closed Friday, April 4, 2008. Reclamation received 158 comments; of these, 3 were submitted by fax, 18 by mail, 115 were submitted by e-mail, 3 were submitted with names only and no comments attached, 1 was submitted by a visitor to the New Melones Office, 15 were submitted by telephone to the New Melones Office, and 3 local newspapers carried articles. Several submissions were made as groups and were counted as one comment; Oakdale

Sportsmen's Club submitted a comment with 11 signatures, California Striped Bass Association had four submissions with 47 signatures, and one letter had 57 signatures. The Board of Supervisors for the County of Tuolumne also submitted comments.

All comments pertaining to Phase I have been evaluated as part of the decision to increase individual camping fees and implement RV dump station fees. Several comments regarding the Phase II fee proposal were received but are not being evaluated at this time. All Phase II comments will be evaluated at the end of the Phase II comment period.

Phase I comments regarding camping fees were mixed, with approximately half of the comments supporting increased camping fees and approximately half of the comments opposing increased camping fees. Comments included a suggestion to raise the individual camping fees to \$25 per night so that any future day use and boat launch fees would not be implemented. Comments also cited the rising cost of gasoline as a reason not to increase camping fees.

RV dump station fee comments were mixed, with approximately half of the comments supporting a dump station fee and approximately half of the comments opposing a dump station fee.

## **General questions asked throughout the comments, and Reclamation's responses include:**

### **Q. Where did all of this change originate?**

A. H.R. 4818 Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2004, VIII Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, Sec. 803. Recreation Fee Authority (a) Authority of Secretary – Beginning in fiscal year 2005 and thereafter, the Secretary may establish, modify, charge, and collect recreation fees at Federal recreational lands and waters. On December 13, 2006, Reclamation Commissioner Robert W. Johnson approved the participation of Reclamation in the Federal Lands Recreation Act (Public Law 108-447), hereafter termed "REA" and named New Melones Lake as a "Designated REA site."

### **Q. Will boaters have to pay both a day use fee and boat launch fee?**

A. Under the Phase II proposal, if a visitor pays the proposed boat launch fee they would not be required to pay the proposed day use fee. The proposed boat launch fee would allow the visitor to use the boat launch and all of the day use facilities. As a daily fee this permit would expire at midnight on the date of the issuance. This proposed fee would not apply to registered campers.

### **Q. What is the minimum age to get a senior discount?**

A. U.S. citizens 62 years of age and older can purchase the Interagency Senior Pass. The Senior Pass is available for \$10 and is good for the lifetime of the holder. The previously issued Golden Age Pass will continue to be honored throughout the lifetime of the holder. The Senior and Golden Age Passes provide a 100 percent discount on standard amenity fees, which include the proposed daily amenity use fee and the proposed daily campers overflow vehicle/visitors fee. These passes provide a 50 percent discount on expanded amenity fees, which include individual camping fees, RV dump station fees, and the proposed daily and annual boat launch passes.

**Q. Has Reclamation considered a reduced annual pass for residents of Tuolumne and Calaveras counties?**

A. New Melones Lake is a Federal project managed by the Bureau of Reclamation. All visitors to New Melones are required to be treated equally, regardless of their county or state of residence. All visitors are eligible to purchase the proposed annual passes, which would provide unlimited visits for a 12-month period at a discounted rate.

**Q. Will visitors be required to pay \$6 entrance fees every time they wish to swim, bicycle, or walk their pet at the lake?**

A. Under the Phase II proposal, all visitors who enter the Glory Hole or Tuttletown Recreation Areas would be required to pay a daily use fee. This proposed fee would apply to visitors who arrive by all methods of entry, including by vehicle, on foot, or by bicycle. This daily permit would expire at midnight on the date of the issuance. Visitors who visit the lake frequently would be able to purchase the proposed annual pass at a discounted rate.

**Q. Where will the bulk of the funds that are collected go?**

A. Under REA, a minimum of 80 percent of the recreation use fees collected at New Melones Lake will remain available for expenditure at New Melones Lake. Fees collected under this program shall be used for: (1) repair, maintenance, and facility enhancement directly related to visitor enjoyment, visitor access, and health and safety; (2) interpretation, visitor information, visitor service, visitor needs assessments, and signs; (3) habitat restoration directly related to wildlife-dependant recreation that is limited to hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, or photography; (4) law enforcement related to public use and recreation; (5) direct operating or capital costs associated with the recreation fee program; and (6) a fee management agreement established under REA 6(a) or a visitor reservation service.

**Q. What is the price if I fish all night in my boat?**

A. Under the Phase II proposal, all visitors who enter the Glory Hole or Tuttletown Recreation Areas with a vessel would be required to pay a daily boat launch fee. This proposed daily permit would expire at midnight on the date of the issuance. Visitors who entered the recreation area, launched their vessel, fished all night, and left the recreation area the next day would be required to purchase the proposed daily boat launch pass for 2 days. Visitors who visit the lake frequently to launch their vessel would be able to purchase the proposed annual pass at a discounted rate.

For additional information, please contact Mr. Jeff Laird at 209-536-9094, extension 229.