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Mid-Pacific Region, New Melones Unit

History

Located in the lower Sierra Nevada foothills in Calaveras and Tuolumne County near Sonora, Calif., New Melones Dam and Reservoir are managed by the Bureau of Reclamation's Mid-Pacific Region, Central California Area Office.

Congress authorized the construction of New Melones Dam in 1944 to prevent flood damage caused by rain and snowmelt to the lands and communities downstream on the Stanislaus River. Congress modified the authorization in the 1962 Flood Control Act to include irrigation, power, wildlife and fishery enhancement, recreation and water quality as other reasons for construction of the dam.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began construction of the dam in 1966, but public concerns over damage to cultural resources and the environment delayed completion until 1978. After the spillway and powerhouse were completed in 1979, the Corps transferred New Melones to Reclamation for integrated operation as the New Melones Unit of the East Side Division, Central Valley Project.

The waters of New Melones Lake cover the original Melones Dam, which was built in 1926 by the Oakdale and South San Joaquin Irrigation Districts to provide water for agriculture. New Melones Dam is located about 0.75 miles downstream of the original dam. The old reservoir could store 112,500

acre-feet of water; today, New Melones Lake has a capacity of 2.4 million acre-feet.

The two irrigation districts that built the original Melones Dam own and operate the downstream Goodwin Diversion Dam, which diverts Stanislaus River water into the district's canal, and Tulloch Dam, Reservoir and Powerplant, located immediately downstream from New Melones Dam. Tulloch Reservoir provides Afterbay storage for reregulating power releases from New Melones Powerplant under a contract between Reclamation and the two districts. The powerplant has a generating capacity of 322,596,000 kWh.



New Melones Dam on the Stanislaus River

Recreation

The lake's beautiful blue water and more than 100 miles of shoreline provide recreational opportunities to some 800,000 visitors annually. Facilities include day use areas; boat launch ramps; over 300 campsites; hiking, biking and equestrian trails; and the New Melones Visitor Center and Museum. The museum offers exhibits on the area's geologic past, Mi-Wok Indians

and early human history, the California Gold Rush, mining techniques, ranching, natural history, and the New Melones Unit. The Visitor Center/Museum is located ¼ mile south of the Highway 49 Stevenot Stanislaus River Bridge that spans New Melones Lake.

New Melones Lake is open year-round and offers the public a number of easy, moderate and challenging hiking, biking and equestrian trails as well as several recreation areas (some are closed in the winter):

- Tuttle town Recreation Area includes the Eagle Point Group Picnic Area; Heron Point and Lupine Day Use Areas; Acorn, Chamise and Manzanita Campgrounds; Oak Knoll and Fiddleneck Group Camps; and the Tuttle town Launch.
- Glory Hole Recreation Area includes the New Melones Amphitheater; Ironhorse and Big Oak Campgrounds; Osprey Point, Buck Brush and Black Bart Day Use Areas; Angels Creek and Glory Hole Point Launches; and New Melones Lake Marina which offers boat rentals, camping supplies and fuel.
- Mark Twain Recreation Area offers a picnic area, fishing and a boat hand launch.
- Natural Bridges Recreation Area offers hiking trails and picnicking.
- Camp Nine Recreation Area offers hiking and fishing.
- Peoria Wildlife Area offers hiking, biking and equestrian trails; fishing; and hunting in season.



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New Melones Lake also offers a large variety of special activities and events throughout the year, including the annual “C.A.S.T. for Kids” fishing event for disabled and disadvantaged children, a “National Public Lands Day” volunteer day to improve and enhance public lands, Spring and Fall Speaker Series, History and Nature Walks, School and Group Programs, and Summer Evening Campground and Junior Ranger Programs at the Ironhorse Campground Amphitheater located in the Glory Hole Recreation Area (music, stories, slideshow presentations and activities on the cultural and natural history of New Melones Lake).

Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (REA) Public Law 108-774, Title VIII

REA authorizes Reclamation to participate in a fee collection/retention program and the Nationwide Federal Interagency Pass Program. Currently, New Melones Lake is the only Reclamation-managed recreation area to participate in REA. Fees collected at New Melones under REA stay at New Melones to help with such things as enhanced law enforcement services, additional cleaning services, etc.

Additional Information

- New Melones Recreation and Resources Branch, Administrative Office, 6850 Studhorse Flat Road, Sonora, CA 95370 – 209-536-9094
- New Melones Visitor Center and Museum – 209-536-9543
- New Melones website – <http://www.usbr.gov/mp/cao/newmelones/>.
- Federal Interagency Pass Program – <http://store.usgs.gov/pass/general.html>