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## Lake Mendocino water levels continue to drop



Boating is one of the main recreational activities at Lake Mendocino and will remain absent until lake levels rise and the boat ramps re-open. (Nathan DeHart-Ukiah Daily Journal)

### GALLERIES

Photo Gallery

By Adam Randall

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Lake Mendocino's receding shores paint a picture of the drought's impact on the lake's well-being, as well as its effect on the outdoor enthusiasts who visit the lake.

The boat launches are closed and rightfully so. The water no longer comes up to where the floating launching docks once were. The docks now portray a memorial of sorts of what once was a thriving area to boaters. To find the water from the parking lot near the Coyote Valley Dam, one must squint into the distance and beyond the sun.

The walk to the water is long and desert-like. The ground below is crunchy, the earth which was once the bottom of the lake's sprawling floor, now a breeding haven for weeds, rocks and confused birds.

After meeting the water line, an illusion of the eyes appears, and you feel like you are standing in the middle of the lake. There, some visitors try to enjoy the lake on a hot summer day, seemingly miles away from civilization.

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Ukiah Local Guide

Tim Randall, a Santa Rosa resident, came to the lake with his family and his boat Saturday, only to find that the boat launches were closed. Randall said Lake Mendocino is the only place he brings his boat, and is the lake he most frequents.

"It's sad; I guess we're not going to be back the rest of the summer," Randall said. "The low water levels seem more political than actual drought."

In July 2013, the lake's reservoir storage, which is the amount of water, was at 50,356 acre-feet, compared with Saturday's reading of 41,542 acre-feet, according to water control data provided by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The lake was at 26,352 acre feet on Jan. 1, and 71,642 acre-feet Jan. 1, 2013.

"The water is obviously not as low as earlier this year, but the lake level is continuing to drop," said Chris Schooley, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Supervisory Ranger for Lake Mendocino.

Schooley said the lake has still averaged close to 500,000 visitors per year, and is on course to do so despite the drought. Lake Mendocino still provides recreational activities that draw in locals and people from outside of Ukiah, Schooley said.

Despite the boat launches being closed, guests can still utilize portable boats like kayaks and canoes, Schooley said. There is also a disc golf course and campgrounds, although the attendance at the campgrounds is down slightly, he said.

"We've seen lower camping numbers this year with the boat ramps closed," Schooley said. "In a normal year, our campground numbers are very robust. We were almost full during the Fourth of July."

Schooley said the boat launch closures are warranted based on safety concerns. He said the USACE will continue to monitor the situation on a weekly basis.

"If you launch a boat, you could theoretically hit the bottom," Schooley said.

There have been no wildlife issues specific to the drought, according to Schooley.

However, after hundreds of dead carp lined the shores of the lake the weekend of May 24, the lake had to be closed for swimming. The USACE believed at the time that the cause was the Koi herpes virus.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife tested samples of water and of dead carp, and all the necessary tests came back negative for viruses and toxins, and the water quality was also at an acceptable level, according to the USACE San Francisco District.

As of July 2, the swimming ban was lifted.

For the water level, Schooley said the operational control of the dam is used accordingly.

"We, along with our stakeholders and Russian River Operations, have control over the dam and how much water is let out," Schooley said.

On Saturday, the particular environmental concerns of the lake didn't seem to affect those who decided to come out for leisure, as the Kyen Campground was reasonably full. This side of the lake differs from that where the boat launches sit in full sun. There is a gentle breeze, campers prepare to swim or are grilling and conversing under the vast shade trees.

This is Joyce Villa's first time at the lake. She and her family made the trip from San Ramon and are not deterred by the constant uproar of what some believe is the gradual end of a once fruitful natural resource.

"I think it's absolutely beautiful," Villa said. "I'm sad to see the water

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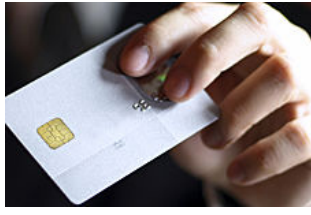
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