

Lake Elsinore & San Jacinto Watersheds Authority



City of Lake Elsinore • City of Canyon Lake • County of Riverside
Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District • Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority

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LAKE ELSINORE SUFFERS FISH DIE-OFF AMID SUMMER HEAT WAVE *Millions of dollars in improvements to lake's quality, supply over the past decade are credited with minimizing the extent of the unfortunate incident*

LAKE ELSINORE, CA — After nearly a decade of improvements to its water supply and quality, Lake Elsinore suffered its first fish die-off in several years over the weekend amid an extended heat wave, officials said Monday.

The lake lost a number of carp and shad, likely because of heat-induced low oxygen levels, which has long been a problem for Southern California's largest natural lake. The deaths were undoubtedly far fewer than would have occurred without the millions of dollars in improvements that the Lake Elsinore & San Jacinto Watersheds Authority has made to the lake in the past decade.

"This unfortunate situation runs counter to LESJWA's history of success in restoring the environment and economic health of Lake Elsinore," said Mark Norton, LESJWA's administrator. "We firmly believe this die-off would have been much worse had we not made so many improvements in recent years, although we recognize that we can't entirely control all the factors at work here."

Crews are in the process of cleaning up the fish, and scientists are studying the lake's oxygen and algae levels for data on what led to the die-offs. Many of the fish that died appeared to be undesirable carp and shad, which are destructive bottom feeders that contribute to unhealthy algae blooms and reduced oxygen levels.

LESJWA already has had 1.3 million carp deliberately removed from the lake in years past.

Fish kills plagued the lake for decades until LESJWA was created by the Safe Drinking Water, Clean Water, Watershed Protection and Flood Protection Bond Act in 2000. Since then, the joint powers authority has developed a myriad of comprehensive, long-term strategies for improving water quality at Lake Elsinore, which has not suffered a major fish kill since 2002.

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With \$15 million allocated under the 2000 bond act, officials have made multiple improvements to the lake to stave off or reduce problems. Among the improvements:

- Using lake-mixing fans and diffused air lines, LESJWA increased oxygen levels throughout the lake and reduced algae blooms, which limit oxygen supplies and lead to massive fish kills.
- LESJWA installed a 4,000-foot pipeline connecting the Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District to Lake Elsinore, replenishing lake levels with 5 million gallons of recycled water every day and improving water quality. A total of 10,592 acre-feet of water have been added since 2007.
- The water authority restored three island groundwater wells, providing more than a billion gallons of groundwater a year to help stabilize lake levels.
- The lake's new levels have enhanced fish and wildlife habitats and improved recreational opportunities, attracting fishers and boaters from across the region.

Local officials said there are numerous variables outside the control of LESJWA, including unpredictable precipitation, an arid climate and evaporation loss. The lake is dependent on Mother Nature and storm runoff from the upper watershed to maintain lake levels and actually went completely dry at times, such as in the 1950s.

“With LESJWA’s projects in place, the situation today is less severe than what history has shown it would be,” said Pat Kilroy, Lake and Aquatic Resources Director for the City of Lake Elsinore. “LESJWA has spent more than eight years improving the distressed Lake Elsinore. Many of these things take considerable time, but we believe we are on the right track.

LESJWA is made up of representatives from the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority, Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District, the City of Lake Elsinore, the City of Canyon Lake and the County of Riverside.

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