

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 AS OXYGEN LEVELS DROP

Depleted oxygen supplies in lake prompt deaths of undesirable baitfish

LAKE ELSINORE, CA — Depleted oxygen supplies led to the deaths over the weekend of more than 10 million threadfin shad, an undesirable baitfish that overpopulates the lake, officials said Monday.

The threadfin shad are small fish that compete with other more desirable fish for food and further deplete the lake's taxed oxygen supplies. The Lake Elsinore & San Jacinto Watersheds Authority has been working aggressively in the past few years to remove shad and carp, a destructive bottom feeder, and rebalance the lake's fish population.

"The majority of fish killed in this unfortunate incident are threadfin shad, which means Mother Nature actually has gotten us closer to our goal of creating a more balanced fishery in the lake," said Mark Norton, LESJWA's administrator. "We will continue to work to find ways to minimize fish die-offs, although the region's arid climate and warm temperatures make it exceptionally challenging this time of year."

Evaporation is a common problem at the lake during the summer, leading to less water and oxygen for the fish. Oxygen in the lake has dropped to extremely low levels in recent weeks, prompting a fish die-off in July and the latest one over the weekend.

"The aeration system, one of many tools used to improve the lake's water quality, has been operating as designed, but can't entirely compensate for Mother Nature," said Pat Kilroy, Lake and Aquatic Resources Director for the City of Lake Elsinore. "We're studying what happened this weekend and will use the data to enhance our efforts."

Crews are working to clean up the fish and expect to have the job done in the next few days, with workers from the City of Lake Elsinore and the Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District on site along with inmates from the Cal-Fire Conservation Camp. The lake remains open to all recreational users as usual.

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This summer marks the first time in seven years that the lake has suffered a die-off, which demonstrates how successful LESJWA has been at improving water quality at this long-troubled lake.

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 had not suffered a major fish kill since 2002.

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.

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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