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UPDATED: August 2, 2019

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Fishery Management Survey Underway in Lake Elsinore to Help Improve Habitat and Water Quality

Hands-on tag and release events to survey the fishery and identify short and long-term projects to improve water quality

LAKE ELSINORE, CA – Three fish capturing survey events are planned in Lake Elsinore as part of the latest project by the [Lake Elsinore & San Jacinto Watersheds Authority \(LESJWA\)](#) to improve the overall health of the lake and enhance its fishery.

On **Wednesday, September 4**, Wood Environment & Infrastructure Solutions along with volunteers will begin efforts to net, capture, measure, tag and release fish as the next step for LESJWA's Fishery Management Plan. Two additional fish capturing events will take place on September 24th and on an additional pending date. Volunteers are being sought to assist with netting, counting, tagging, and releasing fish.

The project builds on our efforts over the last two decades to invest in the future of Lake Elsinore – a destination for fishing and recreation in Southern California.

Historically, efforts to develop a healthy, viable fish community in Lake Elsinore have been hampered by: 1) inadequate habitat and water quality conditions for fish and zooplankton reproduction and survival; 2) limited fish food resources; and, 3) multiple detrimental effects caused by abundant Common Carp and Shad.

The upcoming fishery survey events are being conducted to update information on the aquatic communities within Lake Elsinore. As part of the surveys, researchers will also collect fish tissue samples for analysis of organic and nutrient concentrations. Scientists will use the fish community data collected to propose recommendations to: 1) improve the Lake Elsinore fishery and habitat to support efforts to implement proposed revisions to Lake Elsinore's Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) for nutrients; 2) determine the need for additional harvesting of nuisance fish, like Carp and Shad, that can negatively impact the water quality; and 3) determine the appropriate fish species for future fish stockings in the lake.

The goal of LESJWA's new Fishery Management Plan is to identify ways to improve trophic conditions to a more desirable state in the lake, such as nuisance fish control, zooplankton

community structure enhancement, aquatic and emergent vegetation enhancement, fish habitat improvement, and fish community structure improvements through stocking.

This plan will be an update/expansion of LESJWA's first comprehensive Fisheries Management Plan prepared by EIP Associates in 2005, which was the last time a survey was used to quantify the fishery. Similarly, the principal goal of the original plan was to develop a program that would create a balanced, self-sustaining and valued sport fishery that will complement the water quality rehabilitation efforts in Lake Elsinore.

Based on recommendations from this plan, in the late 2000s, LESJWA and the City of Lake Elsinore removed more than 1 million pounds of carp from Lake Elsinore. Carp stir up nutrients on the lake bottom (called bioturbation), which can lead to harmful algae blooms. These efforts proved successful for many years by reducing the frequency and size of fish die offs in Lake Elsinore.

However, after receiving a significant amount of rain and water flows the last few years, officials have seen an increase in the number of carp and shad in the lake. These fish are more susceptible to fish die offs and are detrimental to the water quality and fishery. Therefore, this current Fisheries Management Plan will provide LESJWA and its partners the information needed about what fish species are in the Lake so as to plan both short and long-term efforts to enhance and rebalance the fishery.

Since 2016, the City of Lake Elsinore has committed to ensuring a healthy sports fish population by spending more than \$173,000 on stocking a variety of sportfish including Redear Sunfish, Blue Gill, Black Crappie and Channel Catfish into the lake.

As Southern California's largest natural freshwater water lake, Lake Elsinore has historically suffered from water quality related challenges, partially due to being a terminal lake (no regular outflow) located at the end of the San Jacinto Watershed. In 1994, the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board proposed a nutrient Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) to regulate the amount (load) of nutrients that could be released into the watershed in an effort to improve in-lake water quality. Shortly after, the Lake Elsinore and Canyon Lake (LECL) TMDL Task force was developed to improve water quality and wildlife habitats in Lake Elsinore, Canyon Lake, and the San Jacinto Watershed.

Since 2001, LESJWA has led efforts to improve water quality in both Lake Elsinore and Canyon Lake.

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*LESJWA is a joint powers authority entrusted with state and local funds to improve water quality and wildlife habitats in Lake Elsinore, Canyon Lake and the surrounding San Jacinto watershed.
For more information about LESJWA, please visit www.mywatersheds.com.*