

## **INCREASED WATER RELATED RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES AT LAKE CASITAS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Grand Jury conducted an investigation pertaining to the proposed expanded recreational water uses which could involve body contact at Lake Casitas.

The opening of the Marion Walker Pressure Filtration Plant at Lake Casitas on September 19, 1996, allowed the Casitas Municipal Water District (CMWD) officials the option of pursuing future increased uses of water recreation on the lake. This proposed increase in water related recreational activities ran the gamut from full body water contact to maintaining the status quo.

Since consideration of expanded water uses by the CMWD Board became a highly visible issue, we were interested in the Board's process for formulating an expanded use study, inviting public comments and how recommendations were developed and utilized in reaching a decision.

### **INQUIRIES**

Members of the Grand Jury attended the official Grand Opening of the Marion R. Walker Pressure Filtration Plant. This afforded them the opportunity to receive a first hand look at the facilities, and to communicate with the various officials involved in the development and future operations of the plant.

We conducted interviews with CMWD officials, obtained a listing of proposed, expanded lake uses being considered by the Board and attended meetings where we heard public testimony from citizens interested in the present and future uses at the lake.

Several articles, reports, opinions, and other informational documents were received and reviewed.

### **FINDINGS**

CMWD is a special, independent district, formed in October 1952, pursuant to the Municipal Water District Act, 1911 Water Code, for the purpose of acquiring, distributing, storing, treating, reclaiming and recapturing water. It is also responsible for constructing, maintaining and operating public recreational facilities. It delivers filtered tap water to 60,000 residents within the Ojai Valley and parts of Ventura.

CMWD is governed by an elected, five member Board of Directors representing the various areas served by the agency; they serve four year terms. The District employs a staff of approximately forty employees headed by a General Manager.

CMWD, faced with California Department of Health Services mandates that required them to comply with The Surface Water Treatment Rule, was confronted with a challenge in constructing an efficient, cost effective filtration plant.

The plant was specifically designed for current lake conditions, and not the additional pollution that could result from full body contact.

With the exception of occasional turbidity and an algae taste, CMWD has been able to provide good quality water to its rate payers. For this reason, they were not required to construct a large plant (\$30 million), but were allowed to construct a smaller one at a much lower cost (\$9.3 million).

A design/build delivery approach for competitive bidding and project delivery was selected by CMWD and resulted in completion of the project within a tight 19 month time frame. This allowed the Board to obtain the use of a low interest loan from the State Department of Water Resources.

The California State Health Department requires the filtration plant to be on-line for a period of one year before certification is allowed and additional uses can be requested.

In an attempt to decide which types of increased activities would be the most viable and widely accepted, the Board established a 22 member Citizen Advisory Committee to serve as a conduit for public input.

This Advisory Committee presented its findings to the Board on November 9, 1996. To address these findings the following recommendations were set forth:

- Incidental body contact sports with additional types of incidental sports such as catamarans, paddle boats, bike boats and other small boats which are still limited to time, place, club rules, weather conditions and crowds.
- Immersion body contact by providing outside-of-lake activities such as swimming pools, water playgrounds, water slides and fountains.
- Immersion body contact by in-lake activities such as swimming, wading, inner tubing, scuba diving, snorkeling, parasailing and windsurfing; limiting those activities to North Shore only, the number of people, the amount of time, and not allowing people in the habitat area.
- Water skiing limited to one cove, one boat at a time, a particular time of day, excluded from habitat areas, requiring dry suits and club limits.

CMWD identified seven general issues on which to evaluate alternative water uses proposed for the lake. These issues were water quality, fish and wildlife, noise and tranquillity, air quality, public safety, traffic, and economic and enhanced management.

At a CMWD meeting held in December 1996, following additional public testimony, the Board voted 4-1 in favor of allowing a limited number of smaller types of boats as the only additional activities permitted at this time.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. The Board and its staff expended considerable efforts in formulating a comprehensive evaluation of the alternatives to be considered by the Board and general public.
2. The Board provided members of the general public adequate opportunities to submit their comments for consideration in determining increased water activities.
3. The Board's decision to restrict expanded uses to include only a variety of smaller boat types at this time appears to be appropriate.

**COMMENDATION**

CMWD is to be commended for its foresight, commitment, and professional planning in delivering a state of the art water treatment plant at the lowest possible cost, and completing the project within the specified time frame and budgeted amount.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The CMWD Board of Directors should prepare a comprehensive Environmental/Economic Impact Report before considering any expanded water related recreational activity at the lake.
2. The Board should request and obtain a written opinion from the appropriate governmental agency to determine whether or not the lake should be deemed a navigable body of water. If the lake is considered a navigable body of water, CMWD may be faced with more restrictions and equity problems with the different types of body contact activities that will be utilized.

**RESPONSE REQUIRED**

Board of Directors, Casitas Municipal Water District