

## **Sonora (CA) Union Democrat**

### **New fees at New Melones to begin Oct. 1**

***Published: September 4, 2008***

By JAMES DAMSCHRODER

The Union Democrat

New fees at New Melones Lake for day-use and boat-launch passes are set to take affect Oct. 1.

The fees will include \$6 for a day-use pass, \$8 for a boat-launch pass, \$40 for an annual day-use pass and \$60 for an annual boat-launch pass. A day-use pass is not needed if a boat-launch pass has already been purchased.

"The purpose of the increase is to use the fees right there at the site to improve it," said Michelle Light, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation spokeswoman.

Light added that the bureau's budget has been decreasing, and the fees give them a stable revenue source to improve and maintain the recreation areas.

Bob Squaglia, who often fishes at New Melones, said he doesn't have a problem with the boat-launch fee but disagrees with charging for day use.

"I don't agree with a fee to charge just to go look at the lake," said Squaglia, a Sonora barber. "Why should we have to pay to skip a rock?"

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which manages the federally-owned land, estimates that the latest fee hikes will generate more than \$718,000 in new revenue.

Previously, fees were only assessed for camping and waste-disposal services, both of which increased in the first-phase of fee hikes which were effective May 1.

The fee increases are part of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. Depending on the fee, the act says that 80 to 100 percent of the revenue generated has to be used in maintaining or improving the recreation area.

From April 7 to June 6, a public review and comment period was held about the increases. The comments included: "with the high price of fuel, this is not a good time to institute fees;" "new fees will impose a hardship on senior citizens;" and "it seems that mountain bikers, hikers, wildlife viewers and beach patrons are unfairly being asked to compensate for boaters."

Included in the increase is a senior pass for those over 62 for a one-time fee of \$10. The senior pass will work as a daily-use pass and provide a 50 percent discount on an annual boat-launch pass, camping fees and the RV dump station fees.

In May, the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors drafted a letter to the Bureau of Reclamation that appeared to find a legal loophole which would prohibit the fee increases.

The letter pointed to a section in the Flood Control Act of 1944, the legislation that authorized the creation of New Melones and other reservoirs across the country. The section states: "The water areas of all such projects shall be open to public use, generally, without charge, for boating, swimming, bathing, fishing and other recreational purposes."

The bureau sent a response stating that the act had been rescinded by the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965.

County Counsel Gregory Oliver said that the county can't do anything else to stop the fee increases.

The new fees and increases do seem to be on par with other area reservoirs. For instance, Don Pedro Lake charges \$20 for tent camping, \$6 for a day-use fee and \$7 for launching a boat.

The bureau's Light said that there hasn't been a study on if the fee increases will deter visitors.

Squaglia said it affects his barbershop customers.

"A lot of my customers use it for swimming," Squaglia said. "I bet 90 percent or more aren't going to pay just to jump into the water."

For more information on fees or related information, contact New Melones Visitor Center at 536-9543.