



## San Benito County

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### Press Release

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## **SAN JUSTO RESERVOIR UPDATE ON ERADICATION AND RECREATION**

San Benito County, CA - On March 8, 2016, the Board of Supervisors requested staff to complete funding analysis for a control plan (i.e. recreational plan) at San Justo Reservoir to understand what recreation would cost. Chairman Rivas provided further direction by requesting that staff also focus on understanding realistic options, whether a control plan requires federal or state approval, and educating local residents and the Board as to how long that process takes.

The update given to the Board included the following:

- San Justo Reservoir is owned by the federal government, therefore, is not within San Benito County's jurisdiction
- San Benito County has no decision making authority over the area, but acts as a stakeholder and partner in recreational management
- San Justo Reservoir's primary purpose is for water storage and supply (for a thirty-five billion dollar agricultural industry and for drinking water for multiple jurisdictions)
- Eradication is paramount to avoiding infestations at neighboring water bodies
- Although recreation is a secondary use for San Justo Reservoir the US Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) approached the County in June 2015 to discuss recreation options and all entities are working jointly to reach this goal
- Because of the primary purpose of providing water, draining the reservoir is not operationally feasible

Some of the highlights and questions from the Board included:

### **The Importance of San Justo Reservoir Outside of Recreation:**

San Justo Reservoir's primary purpose is water supply, and that's what pays for the facility. During droughts, San Justo Reservoir is a major source of water for homes in the Hollister area.

Jeff Cattaneo, San Benito County Water District Manager, stated "the San Justo Reservoir is absolutely essential in ensuring that during drought periods we can weather it by storing water for water treatment plants."

## **Why not shore fishing, hiking, or equipment rentals only prior to Eradication?**

San Justo Reservoir is a federal facility with regional impacts and multiple stakeholders, including other water districts. The most expedient path is through eradication first, with a control or prevention plan that would define recreation. However, even with a control plan, the risks of further zebra mussel infestation may outweigh recreational use at San Justo. County staff is drafting a cost analysis to understand what the implementation of a control plan would cost (i.e. how much would inspections and control points cost). It will be up to the USBR - after engaging all stakeholders (NEPA process) - to determine if the control plan mitigates risk enough (i.e. hiking only, control points and inspections, shore fishing only, equipment rentals only) to allow recreation.

**WHY NEPA is important:** "The short answer is that it is a law. As a federal agency we have to follow the law. We have to look at impacts of our actions much like the state has to follow CEQA. "-Duane Stroup, USBR Southern California Deputy Area Manager

**WHAT IS NEPA?** "It is the National Environmental Policy Act. It mirrors CEQA. There has to be a public process to look at the impacts of our action as a federal agency. We have to inform the public and look at social justice, climate change, water, biological, natural resources, air quality, and more, much like CEQA. NEPA minimizes impacts to the public and the environment." - Duane Stroup, USBR Southern California Deputy Area Manager

After the meeting, Chairman Rivas stated that "there is no question that San Justo Reservoir is an important part of our local community and our history. Many of my neighbors have visited the reservoir over the years for fishing or to just spend time with friends and family. We want to get this problem fixed so that the community can once again enjoy the area. We must, however, recognize the danger posed by the infestation of zebra mussels. There is no easy fix to this problem and we must approach this issue carefully and work with the state and federal government to find a resolution that makes sense. Pointing fingers and making this a political issue only slows down the process to finding a solution. San Benito County officials are doing all they can to urge those responsible to find a solution and to build a common sense plan of action. Let's continue to work together to get things done."

**\*NOTE\*** The public may watch the March 8, 2016 meeting by using the link below and selecting the meeting date under "Playlists." The San Justo item begins at the March 8, 2016 Part 1 of 2 meeting, at the 72:00 minute mark.

<http://vp.telvue.com/player?id=T01268&video=10250>

Approved by Ray Espinosa, County Administrative officer  
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