

The State of the Lake



Nature . Water . Recreation

a report by the Lake Merced Task Force
June 15th, 2005

Photos courtesy of Anna-Marie Bratton

The State of the Lake Report

Each year the steering committee has the responsibility to report on the state of Lake Merced. The report includes information on the current condition of the lake as well as work underway by the task force and plan for the future. Last year the three standing committee of the Lake Merced Task Force reported on the state of Lake Merced and the report was compiled by the steering committee.

This year your steering committee has updated last year's report and it is presented below.

Overall we have been working together on a project to get a master plan for Lake Merced. We formed an ADHOC master plan committee with the help of a professional facilitator and produced a framework for a master plan.

The fact that we were able to begin this work, have it recognized by the SFPUC and the Recreation and Parks Department and begin raising money to fund it constitutes the most important work of the task force since the Stewardship Plan was completed.

At the time of this writing it has been reported that the City of San Francisco will be providing up to \$150,000 to move this project forward. The resources committee has been reactivated to find \$5,000 for the completion of a gap analysis to help launch the work of the master plan.

Nature

Current Conditions

Water levels are up to the maximum allowed by the interim lake plan and impacts to shoreline vegetation are not yet evident. Ongoing studies and monitoring will assess vegetation changes over the next few years.

The erosion damaged caused by several winter storms continues to be of concern and we are looking forward to the study funded by Daly City and the SFPUC to provide answers to future solutions to this problem.

Significant habitat loss continues to occur in wetland and scrub communities around the lake. Invasive species, such as Cape ivy, are the primary threat to the lake's remnant native areas and biodiversity. Habitat restoration efforts by volunteers, Friends and RPD gardeners continue to address these threats.

Accomplishments

Work continues on Cape ivy removal from around the lake. The Nature Committee is involved in overseeing the upcoming restoration efforts to be preformed under the Lake Merced Coastal Conservancy grant.

West Nile Virus is still expected to arrive at Lake Merced in the summer of 2005 or 2006. The Nature Committee is investigating the most efficient and environmentally sensitive way to control mosquito populations around the lake.

Increased water levels have resulted in more potential fish habitat.

Future Directions

The following are high priority projects for the next year:

- Advocate for better interagency coordination on erosion control, water and recreation projects
- Advocate for a regional solution to the continuous erosion at the Lake, especially from the Vista Grande

Canal

- Oversee the restoration efforts of the Lake Merced Coastal Conservancy Grant
- Review lake level monitoring data and analysis provided in the EDAW study.
- Improve communication and collaboration with other committees, specifically Water and Recreation.

WATER

The Current Situation

At this time the level of the lake is approximately 23.5 feet on the Gauge Board (5 City Datum). This represents an approximate increase of 5 feet on the Gauge Board since October, 2002. This increase is primarily the result of large additions of Hetch Hetchy system water over the past approximately two years. Addition of system water ceased in October 2003, in part due to Hetch Hetchy's conversion to chloramine water treatment.

Some storm water additions were made from the Vista Grande Canal and rainfall also contributed to the lake this year.

Accomplishments

- In March 2002 one of the key recommendations of the 2000 Water Committee report was accomplished. Three private golf courses in the lake's vicinity signed a long term Contract with Daly City in which they agreed to buy and use recycled water for most of their irrigation needs. The Daly City tertiary water treatment plant is now online.
- Conjunctive use as recommended by the water committee continues with Daly City and should be expanded.
- In late 2003 and early 2004 individual committee members became involved in a proposed pilot stormwater diversion project. This project continues.

Yet to Do

Notwithstanding the foregoing accomplishments, there remains critical work ahead. SFPUC staff and their consultants have suggested that, "It would likely take a combination of widespread pumping reductions, of at least decades, to return [the Westside Basin aquifer] to sufficiently high ground-water levels that would cause Lake Merced to rise." Consistent with that position, SFPUC has recommended, and is studying, four alternative sources of water additions to the lake to raise and maintain it to an acceptable level:

- 1) stormwater,
- 2) recycled water,
- 3) system water, and
- 4) water to be pumped from the deep aquifer.

Presently, there remain unresolved technical, legal and political problems with respect to all four.

Not all Committee members are in agreement with the conclusion quoted above. However, it is generally agreed that if one, or a combination, of the four alternatives can be shown to do the job, then that combination of alternatives should be adopted as a policy by the SFPUC. However, regardless of whether such a strategy is shown to be effective, the further development and use of the Groundwater Model for the Westside Basin should continue as a high priority in order to study the alternatives identified above, analyze the predicted results of their implementation, and investigate other viable alternatives which arise in the future.

- Therefore the first "To Do" is to insure that aquifer management (i.e. the possibility of further limitations on pumping from the aquifer) remains under active consideration until and unless one, or some combination of the four alternatives described above, has been proven to be effective.
- Second, the Task Force should remain vigilantly involved in the work being done on the four alternatives proposed by SFPUC. The Task Force should insist upon verifiable evidence that whatever solution is ultimately proposed is sound from a technical, legal and political viewpoint. That involvement should include active participation in the application of a model currently under development when the model is used to analyze various scenarios relating to the aquifer and the lake.
- Third, the Task Force should encourage SFPUC to consider other possible alternative solutions. For example, historically there have been high water tables and high water production in the East Side Groundwater Basin along Geneva Avenue and Alemany Boulevard. The investigation of that water source for addition of water to Lake Merced should be given a high priority.

RECREATION

Accomplishments this past year

During the past year recreation committee members met with City representatives to provide input to the master plan effort being undertaken by Rick Thall of the Department of Public Works in cooperation with the Recreation and Park Department. Marvin Yee has represented the Recreation and Park Department. This effort was very recently put on hold due to loss of funds. Recreation committee members also provided guidance for the Trails study and the planned Lake overlook site which is on going and funded by a generous grant from the Coastal Conservancy. Lisa Wayne and Mary Tienken, from the Recreation and Park Department, provided staff support for these efforts.

The parking lot, seating and picnic areas, and landscaping on John Muir Drive and a replacement fishing pier were constructed. The recreation committee reviewed conceptual plans for this project the previous year. While the parking lot is full each day the fishing pier awaits fish stocks and perhaps additional removal of tulle snags. Alternatively, an increase in water levels will solve the tulle growth in the area in front of the pier.

Caltrout celebrated opening of trout season with Caltrout Day at Lake Merced. It was a family event with plenty of fish, kids, equipment, and volunteers with fishing enthusiasm to make the day a success. Caltrout donated a new fishing pier to Lake Merced following the event. This event will be repeated on June 11th of 2005.

A sub-group of the recreation committee has pursued enforcement of parking violations around the lake particularly with regard to commercial trucks stored in the public right of way and tractor-trailer rigs illegally parked on City property adjacent to Vista Grande canal. This work has lead to some relief and no parking signs have been posted. Enforcement has also increased.

Projects for the coming year

The Recreation Committee's primary focus during the coming year will be to fill the void left by the lack of a specific recreation plan for the Lake. The planned reconstruction of the Boathouse will catapult this effort forward as the recreation Committee reacts to Recreation and Park Department plans. The goal of the Recreation Committee is to move from a reactive mode to a proactive mode. One item suggested by committee members is a survey of opinions regarding the Lake and recreational uses.