

The State of the Lake



Nature . Water . Recreation

a report by the Lake Merced Task Force
July 12, 2006

Photos courtesy of Anna-Marie Bratton

The State of the Lake Report

Steering Committee

Purpose

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 plans for the future. The steering committee has updated last year's report, and it is presented below.

Last year we worked 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 San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) and the Recreation and Parks Department (RPD) and begin raising money to fund it constitutes the most important work of the task force since the Stewardship Plan was completed. The SFPUC has now budgeted \$200,000 to move this project forward. The resources committee applied for and received a grant of \$5,000 from San Francisco Beautiful to complete a gap analysis report and launch the work of the master plan. The SFPUC has announced that the plan will be called the Lake Merced Watershed Plan. The task force has formed a committee to work with the SFPUC to help incorporate our views and to help facilitate public comments as well.

Nature Committee

Current Conditions

Water levels are up to the maximum allowed by the interim lake plan and impacts to shoreline vegetation are beginning to show. Ongoing studies and monitoring will assess vegetation changes over the next year to inform the plan for ongoing lake levels and adaptive management.

The erosion damage caused by several winter storms continues to be of concern. A study funded by Daly City and the SFPUC to provide answers to future solutions to this problem has been completed and these solutions are currently being discussed.

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 performed under the Lake Merced Coastal Conservancy grant. West Nile Virus is still expected to arrive at Lake Merced in the summer of 2006. The Nature Committee is investigating the most efficient and environmentally sensitive way to control mosquito populations around the lake. Increased water level has resulted in more potential fish habitat but also has decreased shore access and caused some changes in shoreline vegetation.

The RPD has completed the Significant Natural Resource Areas Management Plan which includes suggested actions for Lake Merced.

SFPUC has started renovation of the Sunset Circle Parking lot which includes swales in the design.

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 Committee

Current Situation

At this time the level of the lake is approximately 24.5 feet on the Gauge Board (7 City Datum). This is an increase of 5 feet on the Gauge Board since October, 2002. This increase is due to a combination of factors including storm water additions from the Vista Grande Canal, abundant rainfall, a significant reduction in pumping from the Westside Basin Aquifer, and additions of Hetch Hetchy system water over the past three years. Although large addition of system water ceased in October 2003, in part due to Hetch Hetchy's conversion to chloramine water treatment the lake has maintained a reasonable high level.

While there may be some disagreement as to what exactly is keeping the lake so high at this time I think we can agree it is a positive and welcomed change.

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 and supplying water to several golf courses reducing their dependence on water from the Westside Basin Aquifer. 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. Agreement on a resolution for recommended lake levels for Lake Merced between 25 and 28 ft and that Hetch-Hetchy System water be used only as the source of last resort. Work on the ongoing ground water model for the Westside Basin. Work on modifications to the interim lake level management plan and agreement by the SFPUC to accept our lake level proposal.

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 Committee

Accomplishments

During the past year the recreation committee, working as members of the ADHOC master plan committee, completed a framework and gap analysis which will be used by the SFPUC to complete their Lake Merced Watershed Plan.

Caltrout celebrated the return of youth fishing with Troutday 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. This year's event took place on June 24th, 2006, was well attended and a terrific success.

A sub-group of the recreation committee continues to pursue 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. This sub-group also continues to work on traffic issues and has received a promise of at least one traffic light this year.

Ongoing Projects

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.

Caltrout will be working with partners to create opportunities for summer fishing programs in addition to Troutday 2007.

The Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at San Francisco State University will be offering sailing classes to both University students and the community year around.

Conclusions

The Lake Merced Task Force has continued to focus its efforts on improving the lake and surrounding areas.

We have provided significant leadership resulting in the current effort to develop a Lake Merced Watershed Plan (Master Plan) and played an important role in finding funding to insure it is completed.

Going forward we will continue to work together to find creative ways to restore and preserve this precious and irreplaceable natural resource, Lake Merced.

The steering committee wishes to thank everyone who contributed to this report.

and to the 2005-2006 steering committee members.

The 2005-2006 Steering Committee

Mondy Lariz, Chair

Tim Colen, Vice Chair

James Grant, Secretary

Mona Cereghino, Treasurer

Dee Dee Workman, at large

Lisa Wayne, at large

Suzanne Gautier, at large