

San Luis Reservoir

State Recreation Area



Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at **(209) 826-1197**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact **interp@parks.ca.gov**.

CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

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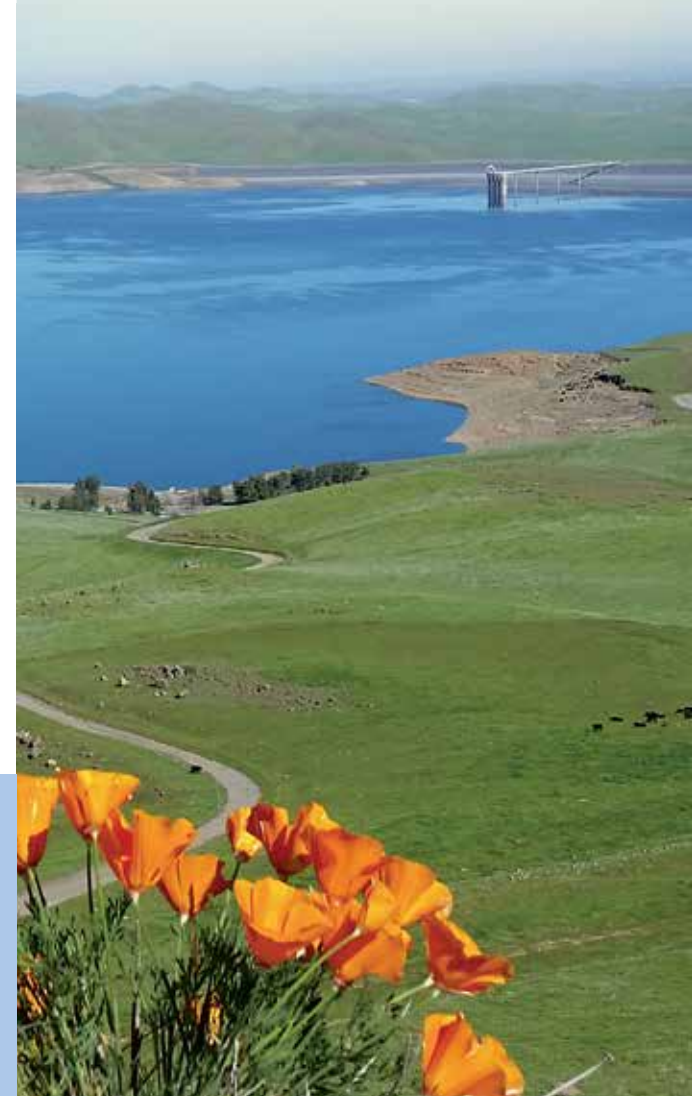
San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area

31426 Gonzaga Road

Gustine, CA 95322 (209) 826-1197

www.parks.ca.gov/sanluisreservoir

*Water
or its scarcity
has always played
a crucial role in
Central Valley history.*



Nestled in the western San Joaquin

Valley near historic Pacheco Pass, San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area is a popular summer destination for anyone seeking the perfect place to cool off. Spring rains bring acres of wildflowers to decorate the grassy hills at the reservoir. These oak-studded hills undergo a short cycle of spring green, followed by the golden browns of summer.

Summer temperatures in this part of the valley range from the mid-90s to above 100 degrees. Generally, evenings are cool and pleasant. Annual rainfall between November and April averages eight to nine inches. Winter temperatures seldom reach freezing, but heavy fog is common. Strong winds can come up suddenly.

PARK HISTORY

Native People

For thousands of years, the southern half of California's Central Valley was home to three distinct Yokuts groups—the Southern, the Foothill, and the Northern Valley Yokuts. The area that is now San Luis Reservoir was a borderland between the Northern Yokuts people and the Mutsun branch of the Ohlone tribe, whose territory

extended to the coast. The native people lived on salmon and other fish, waterfowl, large game such as pronghorns and tule elk, seeds, roots of the cattails that grew in the marshes, and a plentiful supply of acorns from groves of valley oaks.

European Settlement

In 1805 Spanish Army Lieutenant Gabriel Moraga and his troops—reportedly the first non-natives to enter this area—came to scout potential mission sites. The Yokuts were forcibly brought into the mission system at nearby Mission San Juan Bautista, drastically changing their lives. Indian resistance to the missions took the form of cattle raids; what is now Pacheco Pass provided raiders an escape route into the relative safety of the Central Valley.

The Mexican government granted El Rancho San Luis Gonzaga—a vast expanse of grasslands that included the present reservoir area—to Juan Perez Pacheco in 1843. At the site of an ancient water hole on San Luis Creek, Pacheco's men built a small adobe fortress to protect their lands from cattle raiders.

Fur trapper Jedediah Smith traveled through the valley in 1827; soon others were

trapping river otters, beavers, and other fur-bearers in the flourishing streams. After the 1848 gold discovery, California drew an estimated 300,000 gold diggers trying to get rich quickly.

Eventually, some of the miners—tired of heavy labor for small reward—settled in this area and became farmers. While the fertile east side of the Central Valley was ideal for farming, the west side, however, was extremely dry.

AGRICULTURE IN THE VALLEY

In the early years after the gold rush, agriculture on the dry side of the valley was limited to sheep and cattle grazing, and to what old-timers called “sky farming.” This precarious dry-land wheat farming depended entirely on the winter rainfall. When little rain fell, entire crops were lost.

In 1871 the San Joaquin and Kings River Canal Company built an irrigation canal from the Mendota Dam to Los Baños Creek that eventually grew to 180 miles in length.

By the mid-1880s, wheat had reached a harvest peak of nearly 18 million bushels annually. Farmers shipped their wheat to





Stockton and San Francisco by river steamers until the railroad came to the west valley in 1888.

Irrigation also made it possible for farmers to raise dairy cows and grow alfalfa, fruit trees, and row crops. Irrigation and flood control projects proliferated in the Central Valley in the 1900s, culminating in the State Water Project.

THE RESERVOIR

Ground was broken for construction of the San Luis Reservoir in 1962. The reservoir stores runoff water from the Delta for the federal Central Valley Project and the California State Water Project.

The water arrives through the California Aqueduct and the Delta-Mendota Canal, pumped from the O'Neill Forebay into the main reservoir during winter and spring. The separate Los Baños Creek Reservoir prevents storm runoff in Los Baños Creek from flooding the area.

Today, local farmers use water from San Luis Reservoir for high-tech drip irrigation; the area has become one of the most fertile, productive, and diverse farming regions in the nation. In addition to the huge dairy industry, major crops include tomatoes and almonds—thanks to the rich soil, favorable climate, and available water.

NATURAL HISTORY

Prior to European settlement, the valley had a diverse natural environment. Its maze of wetlands—creeks, rivers, vernal pools, tule marshes, and sloughs—supported large populations of wildlife. Extensive prairie grasslands and riparian habitat sheltered tule elk, mule deer, and kangaroo rats. By the 1920s, the California grizzly bear and the San Joaquin Valley pronghorn had been hunted to extinction, and only a few tule elk were left in the state.

In the early 1930s, state and federal governments established reserves and wildlife management areas in California to protect species in danger of extinction. Tule elk are now making a comeback.

Opossums, gray foxes, coyotes, bobcats, and snakes (including rattlesnakes) may be seen at the reservoir. Watch for overwintering bald eagles, as well as hawks, owls, white-tailed kites, and golden eagles. Migratory waterfowl include geese and several species of ducks.

RECREATION

Camping—San Luis Creek sites have water and power hookups. Reservations are recommended for developed family

or group campsites at Basalt and San Luis Creek campgrounds on warmer weekends and holidays. For details and reservations, visit www.parks.ca.gov or call (800) 444-7275. Campsites at Medeiros and Los Baños Creek campgrounds are first-come, first-served.

Picnicking—The San Luis Creek day-use area offers shaded picnic tables near sandy beaches. The OHV area also has picnic tables. Call (209) 826-1197 in advance to reserve group picnic areas.

Swimming—San Luis Creek's North Beach area is the only roped area designated for swimming. Swimmers throughout the park should be cautious of boats on the water.

No lifeguards are on duty. Scuba and other kinds of diving are not allowed.

Boating—All boats entering the park are inspected for invasive species. All watercraft must carry an appropriate size personal flotation device (PFD) for each passenger. Boats must remain at least 500 feet away from the dams and water structures. Watch for wind-warning lights and observe speed limits. Launch time reservations may be made at www.parks.ca.gov/sanluisreservoir or call (800) 444-7275.





- **San Luis Reservoir**—Wind-warning lights are located at the Romero Visitor Center, Quien Sabe Point, and the Basalt entrance. See map for details.
- **O'Neill Forebay**—Watch wind-warning lights at the southeast area of Medeiros, above the South Beach picnic area, and above the San Luis Creek group camp. Boaters may beach their boats at South Beach. O'Neill Forebay's winds make it excellent for board sailing.

Trails—The five-mile San Luis Creek Accessible Trail runs along the O'Neill Forebay shoreline. The Basalt Campground Trail begins west of the campground road. The six-mile-round-trip Lone Oak Trail begins near the Basalt boat ramp.

Fishing—All anglers 16 and over must carry a valid California fishing license. See fishing regulation details at www.wildlife.ca.gov.

- **San Luis Reservoir/O'Neill Forebay**—Largemouth black bass, striped bass, crappie, shad, perch, and occasionally salmon and sturgeon are caught here. Overnight fishing is permitted in some parts of the San Luis Creek area. At Medeiros, only registered campers may fish after sunset.
- **Los Baños Creek Reservoir**—Crappie, bluegill, largemouth bass, catfish, and trout may be caught here.

Hunting—Federal and state game laws apply to in-season waterfowl hunting—including licenses. Only shotguns are allowed. Hunting is not permitted within 500 feet of campgrounds, picnic areas, boat ramp areas, or dam and water structures. View hunting regulations at <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov>.

Off Highway Vehicle Recreation Area—A square mile of fairly flat terrain is ideal for beginners. Two unloading ramps, picnic tables, and a barbecue are available.

PLEASE REMEMBER

Wind—Dangerous winds come up suddenly. When yellow warning lights are flashing on, be cautious of wind on the reservoir and forebay. When red warning lights are flashing, the lake or forebay is closed. **All vessels must immediately leave the water**; no boating is permitted when red warning lights are on. For weather and wind condition updates, call (800) 805-4805.

Drawdown and other hazards—Lake levels fluctuate, uncovering islands and turning formerly deep areas shallow and hazardous. Check for current water levels by visiting <http://cdec.water.ca.gov>. In the Most Popular Pages menu to the right, choose Real-time Data, then enter ONF for the O'Neill Forebay, SNL for San Luis Reservoir, or LBS for Los Baños Creek Reservoir.

Speed limits—5 mph restriction on boats within 200 feet of shoreline and on all of Los Baños Creek Reservoir. The main reservoir and the O'Neill Forebay have 10 mph zones (see map).

Pets—Dogs must be kept on a leash no more than six feet long. They must not be left unattended and must be kept in an enclosed tent or vehicle at night.

Fires—Fires are permitted only in grills or fire rings. Do not leave fires unattended. In the summer, this area becomes tinder-dry; high winds can add to the fire hazard.

Vehicles—Stay on paved roads and paved parking areas.

Quiet hours—Sound should not carry beyond your campsite at any time. Quiet hours are from 10 p.m. to 8 a.m. Generator use hours are between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m.

Park features—All natural and cultural features of the park are protected by law and may not be disturbed or removed.

Wildlife—Do not feed wild animals or leave trash out.

EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

Visit www.parks.ca.gov for schedules of campfire, interpretive and Junior Ranger programs, guided walks, activities, and special events at San Luis Reservoir SRA.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

The Romero Visitor Center, several campsites, picnic tables, restrooms, the San Luis Creek Accessible Trail, routes of travel, and vault toilets are accessible. For updates, see <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

San Luis Reservoir
State Recreation Area



NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Pacheco State Park
20 miles west of Los Banos on Highway 152
(209) 826-1197 or (209) 826-6283
- McConnell State Recreation Area
5 miles east of Delhi on McConnell Road
just off Highway 99, Ballico 95303
(209) 826-1197 or (209) 394-7755
- George J. Hatfield State Recreation Area
4394 North Kelly Road, Hilmar 95324
(209) 826-1197
- Great Valley Grasslands State Park
Entrance on Hwy. 140, west of Hwy. 165
Stevenson 95374 (209) 826-1197

This park receives support in part through the nonprofit
Four Rivers Association
31426 Gonzaga Road
Gustine, CA 95322
(209) 826-1197

Legend

- Freeway
- Paved Road
- Unpaved Road
- Hiking Trail
- Accessible Trail
- Restricted Boating Area

- Accessible Feature
- Boating
- Boat Launch
- Campfire Center
- Campground
- Group Campground
- Group Picnic Area
- Locked Gate
- Parking
- Picnic Area
- Ranger Station
- Restrooms
- RV Sanitation Station
- Showers
- Swimming
- Wind Warning Light

