Millerton Lake
State Recreation Area

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Millerton Lake State Recreation Area
5290 Millerton Road
Friant, CA 93626
(559) 822-2332

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Millerton Lake State Recreation Area lies in the center of California's heartland, covering an area rich in historic importance.

Millerton Lake State Recreation Area is located in the heart of California, near the southernmost end of the Mother Lode gold region. Here, where the San Joaquin River flows out of the Sierra Nevada foothills and into the Central Valley, the 319-foot-tall Friant Dam was built across the river canyon in 1944 to form Millerton Lake. One of the most popular recreation areas in the San Joaquin Valley, the lake's 47 miles of shoreline are a magnet for families seeking high-quality recreational opportunities.

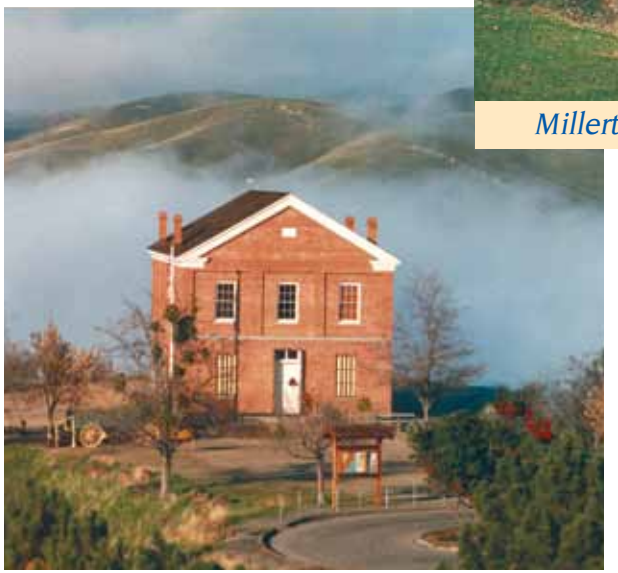
PARK HISTORY

For thousands of years, several groups of Northern Foothill Yokuts lived in the rolling grasslands and woodlands of the region. The women crafted beautiful baskets used for both utilitarian and ceremonial purposes. The men harvested acorns and hunted deer, quail and other game. The Yokuts were especially skilled at fishing for salmon, which they dried and stored for winter use.

The lives of the Yokuts were altered by the intrusion of settlers who brought diseases to which they had no immunity, depleted their food sources, and caused them to be displaced from their villages. Conflicts with the new arrivals ultimately led to the Mariposa Indian War, which ended in 1851 with the signing of a peace treaty at the U.S. military encampment known as Camp Barbour. An envoy had negotiated treaties with several California Indian groups, but Congress failed to ratify the treaties.

Camp Barbour, now beneath the lake's surface, was built in 1850. A tent city called Rootville, later changed to Millerton, sprang up and quickly prospered. It served as the Fresno County seat from 1856 to 1874. The area's only courthouse was built in 1867. In 1941 the courthouse was dismantled and reconstructed on its present site at Mariner's Point to protect it from rising floodwaters. The courthouse has been restored to look much as it did more than a century ago.

Millerton Courthouse in the spring



Today the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation maintains Friant Dam as part of the federal Central Valley Project to manage water for flood control, drinking water and irrigation. California State Parks has an operating agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation for the management of Millerton Lake.

WILDLIFE

Millerton Lake has the largest population of wintering bald eagles in the San Joaquin Valley, most having migrated more than 1,600 miles from summer breeding grounds in Canada. The San Joaquin drainage and other nearby lakes have several year-round nesting bald eagle pairs, sometimes spotted in the summer.

Other wildlife-watching opportunities include resident golden eagles, waterfowl, and both indigenous and migratory bird species that travel to and from the higher portions of the Sierra Nevada. Larger mammals such as deer, bobcats, coyotes and mountain lions inhabit the area. Smaller animals include foxes, badgers, skunks, raccoons, opossums, cottontail rabbits and ground squirrels.

PLANT COMMUNITIES

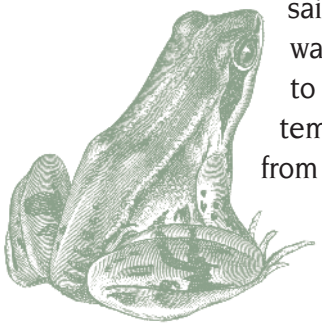
The first fall rains turn the hills green, and wildflowers reach their peak in April.

Friant Dam

During the summer, stately blue oak and live oak trees dot the dry brown hills. Up the river canyon, oaks and gray pine combine with manzanita, ceanothus and other chaparral to form a denser forest. Vernal pools above the upper river canyon provide a vital habitat for the short life cycles of frogs, toads, tiny fairy shrimp, prehistoric-looking tadpole shrimp, and specially adapted plants.

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Summer temperatures can pass 100 degrees, so hikers should always carry drinking water. October brings a pleasant 50 to 80 degrees. In the spring, when sailing regattas and water skiers start to fill the lake, temperatures range from 40 to 65 degrees.

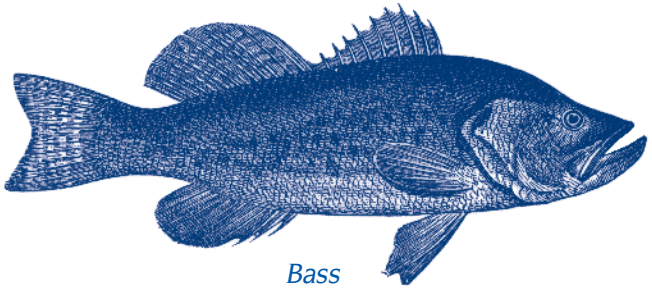


Picnicking–Picnic areas with barbecue grills and restrooms surround the lake. Groups of up to 100 may choose to reserve one of two Grange Grove picnic areas. South Finegold—reachable by car and boat—has tables, wood stoves and a shade ramada that can accommodate 150.

Boating–Millerton's shoreline has three launch ramps with parking nearby. Snacks, beverages, bait and gas are available at Millerton Lake Marina. Local boating groups stage sailboat races and regattas in June and July.

Hiking and Bicycling–Trails range from level hiking areas to challenging mountain bike trails. Markers along a ¼-mile interpretive trail at Fort Miller campground explain the natural and cultural resources. The strenuous, hiking-only Buzzard's Roost Trail at the north shore offers lake views. On the south shore, Blue Oak Trail provides a level, two-mile hike to Winchell Cove. An 11-mile trail follows the river canyon from South Finegold to the Bureau of Land Management's rustic Squaw Leap campground.

Fishing–The shoreline habitat provides hiding places for an abundance of bass and catfish. Fishing tournaments are occasionally scheduled through special events permits. A valid California fishing license is required.



Bass

Camping–The north shore has 148 developed sites among oak and gray pine woodlands, 27 with electricity hookups. Each site has a table, fire ring, and access to drinking water. Two group campgrounds can accommodate from 45 to 75 people.

Lake view campsite

Boat Camping–Temperance Flat has two dozen first-come, first-served sites reachable by boat. North Finegold can

hold 15 fully-contained boats. Register in advance at the south shore park entrance during park hours. Read the boat camping information sheet for details on shore campsites, registration, marinas, safety requirements, and self-contained sanitation devices. Boaters should complete a boating safety course before operating their boats at Millerton.

Channel boaters

INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

- Summer campfire programs
- Junior Ranger programs
- School groups can tour the Courthouse. Call (559) 822-2332 for appointments.
- Group boat tours to view the bald and golden eagles around the lake from December to February. Call the park in November for cost and reservations.

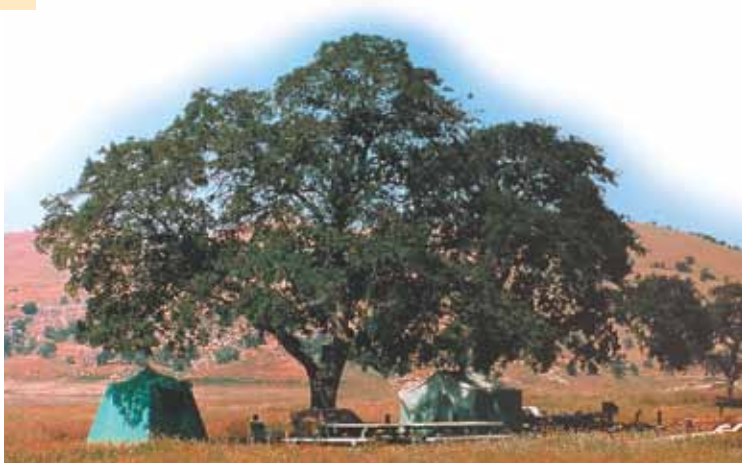
ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

- Family campsites, restrooms and picnic sites
- Level group sites; four picnic tables, restrooms. Terrain around all campsites is not level.

Accessible conditions are continually improving. For updates, visit **http://access.parks.ca.gov**.

DAM AND LAKE FACTS

Type of structure: concrete gravity
Dam height: 319 feet
Lake width: from one to three miles
Reservoir surface elevation:
471 feet to 578 feet above sea level
Reservoir total capacity at 578 feet:
520,500 acre-feet (642,036,750 cubic meters)
Water surface: 4,900 acres when lake is full
Main purposes: reclamation, flood control, irrigation, and recreation
Outlets: Friant-Kern Canal, Madera Canal, and the San Joaquin River
Maintained by: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Operated by: California State Parks



View of Big Bend area and backcountry

PLEASE REMEMBER

- All natural and cultural features are protected by law and may not be disturbed or removed.
- Be alert for rattlesnakes, mountain lions and poison oak.
- Lifeguards are on duty only during summer. Park staff recommend that children wear approved life jackets.
- Alcohol consumption is prohibited on the beaches. Operating a boat under the influence of alcohol or drugs is against the law.
- Vessels with non-conformant two-stroke engines may not launch or use the lake. For details, see **http://www.dbw.parks.ca.gov/PDF/MillertonLakeTSNotice.pdf**.

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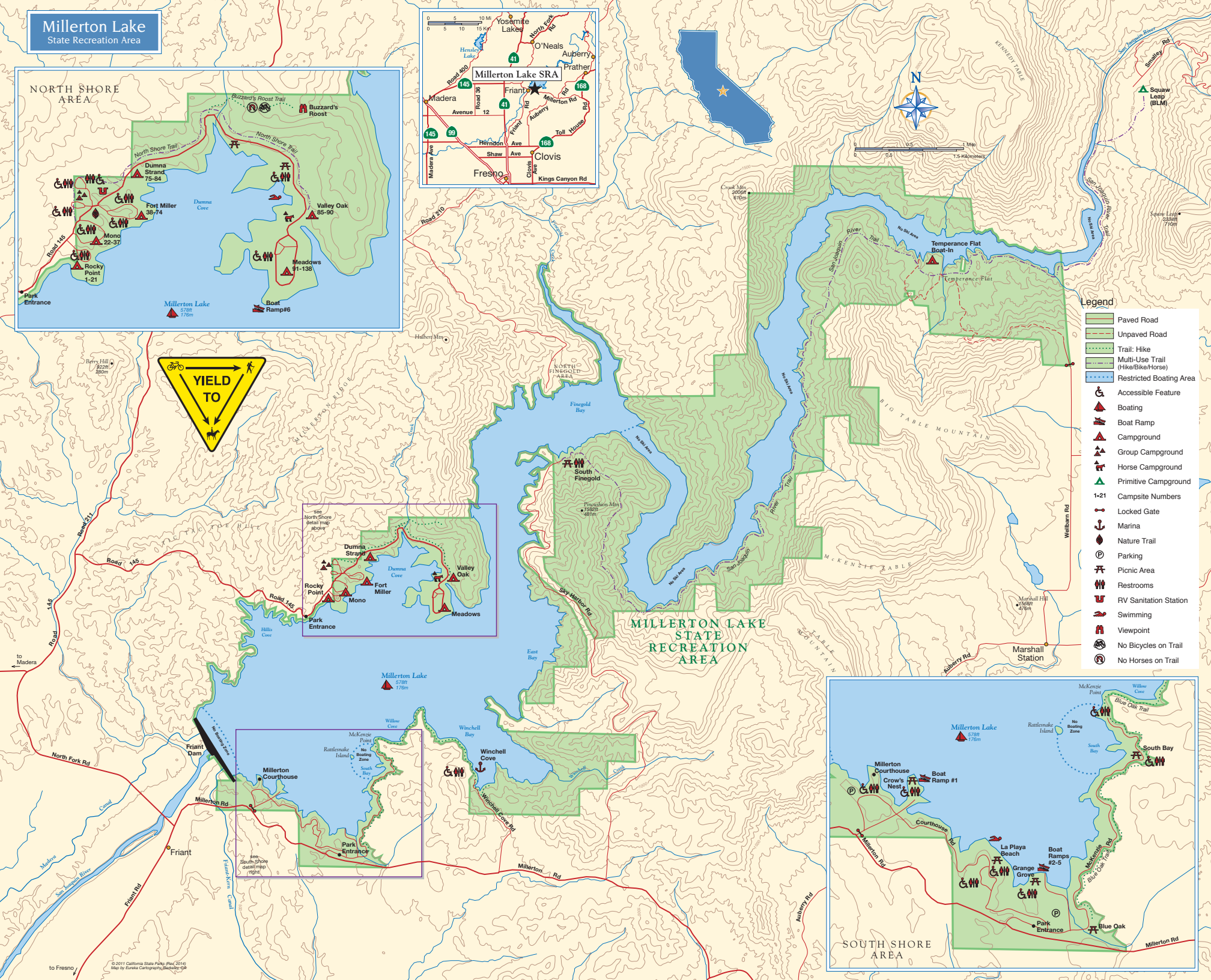

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