Bethany Reservoir

State Recreation Area

Our Mission

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Bethany Reservoir
State Recreation Area
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Pelicans and herons migrating along the Pacific Flyway find a quiet resting place at Bethany Reservoir State Recreation Area.

Tucked between rolling hills of annual grasslands and below one of many local windmill farms lies a secluded park known as Bethany Reservoir State Recreation Area. This 608-acre park's reservoir in northeastern Alameda County provides water recreation and a variety of bass and other fish for anglers to hook.

Strong westerly winds sweep the gently rolling hillsides year round, making the reservoir an ideal venue for sailing. Foggy or rainy winter temperatures dip into the 40s. Early spring brings a profusion of hillside poppies. Dry summers hovering in the high 90s segue into cooler autumns.

PARK HISTORY

Native Americans

Archaeologists believe that more than 7,000 years ago, this area was an oak woodland interspersed with pinyon and juniper trees. Many members of native groups known as the *Ssaoam* Costanoans and *Cholvon* Yokuts lived in these hills, using and conserving their rich natural resources.

European Arrival

Although California had been claimed by Spain in 1542, the first Spanish explorers in Livermore Valley camped here in 1776. Juan Bautista de Anza's 20-member party of soldiers, mule tenders, servants and a priest represented several races — all looking for a different life in the New World.

By 1820, Spanish soldiers who followed Anza had nearly exterminated the native people, either by violent means or by exposure to fatal diseases such as typhus and smallpox. Surviving descendants of both the Yokuts and the Costanoan (today called Ohlone) tribes labor to preserve their long-standing traditions.

THE PARK AND THE AQUEDUCT

Bethany Reservoir is jointly managed by three State of California agencies: the Departments of Water Resources, Fish and Wildlife, and Parks and Recreation.

This reservoir is the first stop on the 444-mile, north-to-south California Aqueduct of the State Water Project. Supplying water and power for California's agriculture, cities and industry, the aqueduct also provides flood control, recreational opportunities, fishing and wildlife viewing.

The California Legislature authorized the State Water Project in 1951. Construction on the aqueduct began in 1963; by 1973, water could flow deep into Southern California.

Rain and snowmelt from California's upper Feather River Basin runs into the water storage facility at Lake Oroville. This water is released from the dam in regulated amounts, streaming down the Feather and Sacramento Rivers, through the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, and into Bethany Reservoir.

Through a lengthy, complex system of pumping plants and power stations, that water eventually arrives at the aqueduct's southern terminus, above Lake Perris in Riverside County. Cost of the operation is borne by 29 Southern California water agencies supplied under contract with the Department of Water Resources.

Bethany Reservoir was named and classified a state recreation area in 1973; California State Parks took responsibility for the park's recreational management in 1974.

NATURAL HISTORY

Geology

A chalky marine formation (from 66 to 100 billion years old) interspersed with river-borne sediment deposits combined to form this hilly region. Two seismic faults, the Greenville and the Hayward, run nearly parallel to the Aqueduct. A great deal of earth was introduced, moved and compacted to form five earthen dams that were graded to create the reservoir, so very little native soil or vegetation remains.

Flora and Fauna

Visitors may spot a gopher snake, rattlesnake, Beechey ground squirrel, or fox (including the threatened San Joaquin kit fox). Coyotes prey on small rodents while Swainson's and red-tailed hawks, northern harriers, loggerhead shrikes or American kestrels seek them from above. Western burrowing owls emerge from holes made by ground squirrels or badgers.

Migratory waterfowl using the Pacific flyway stop here to rest and refuel. During their seasonal migrations, freshwater pelicans feed on the water's surface. Herons, cranes, and two freshwater duck species — mallards and goldeneye — visit semi-annually.

Centuries of cattle grazing in the area have resulted in hills awash in non-native grasses. Invasive weeds and thistles grow among these grasses. In spring, such prolific native wildflowers as California poppies, brodaiea, and lupine cover the hills. Introduced trees — an ancient cork oak and some eucalyptus and Aleppo pines — provide shade around the reservoir's picnic areas.

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Boating — Explore the six miles of shoreline surrounding 160 surface acres of water from your small boat, canoe or kayak. Speed limit is 5 mph. The launch ramp is near the park entrance. Boat access is forbidden near the dams at the northwestern and southeastern ends of the reservoir.

Bicycling — Hilly back roads outside park boundaries offer challenging bike climbs.

Fishing — A two-lane boat ramp provides easy launch for small fishing or self-propelled boats. A road from the boat ramp to a second picnic area allows some shore fishing access.

Anglers may catch five types of bass (spotted, white, smallmouth, largemouth, and striped), crappie, catfish and trout. Persons age 16 and over must carry a valid fishing license. For specific fishing regulations, visit the site at **www.dfg.ca.gov**.

Picnicking — Shaded picnic ramadas are located close to the boat ramp near the park's entrance.

Sailing — Sailboarders or catamarans will find plenty of propulsion on most days, with a mean wind speed above 7 and gusting to 12 mph.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

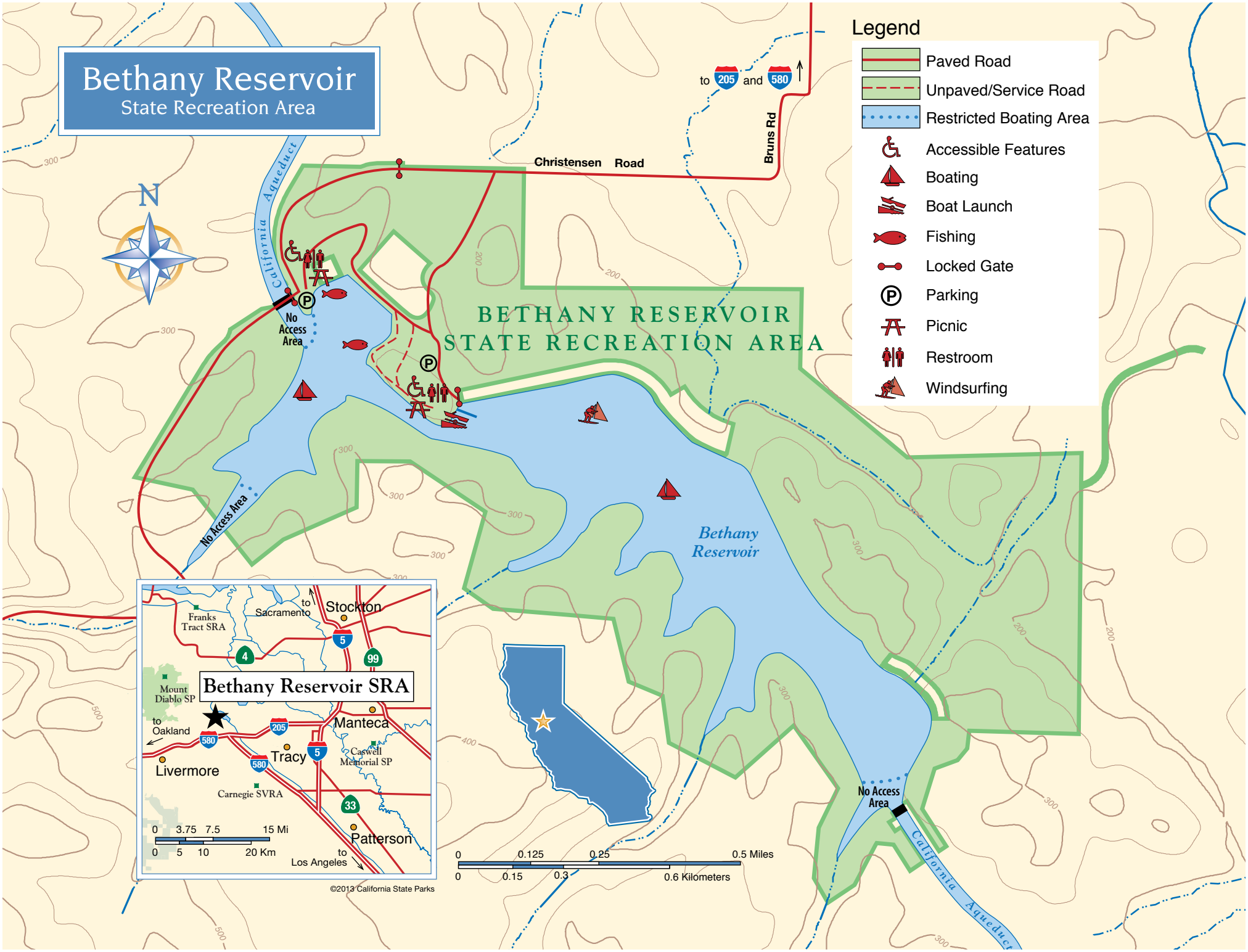
The upper and lower reservoir's fishing platforms are accessible, as are the boat ramps, shaded picnic tables and no-flush restrooms. Accessibility is continually improving. For updates, visit the site at **http://access.parks.ca.gov**.

PLEASE REMEMBER

- Pay day-use and boat launch fees in the main parking lot.
- Speed limit is 5 mph on the reservoir.
- Please do not litter on the ground or on the water.
- Dogs must be on a six-foot-maximum leash under human control at all times.
- All natural and cultural features are protected by law and may not be removed or disturbed.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Caswell Memorial State Park
  28000 South Austin Road
  Ripon 95366 (209) 599-3810
- Carnegie State Vehicular Recreation Area
  18600 W. Corral Hollow Road, Tracy 95376
  (925) 447-9027


Bethany Reservoir
State Recreation Area
Legend
Paved Road
Unpaved/Service Road
Restricted Boating Area
Accessible Features
Boating
Boat Launch
Fishing
Locked Gate
Parking
Picnic
Restroom
Windsurfing
N
to 205 and 580
Bruns Rd
Christensen Road
California Aqueduct
No Access Area
BETHANY RESERVOIR
STATE RECREATION AREA
Bethany Reservoir
No Access Area
No Access Area
California Aqueduct
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Franks Tract SRA
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to Oakland
Livermore
Carnegie SVRA
Manteca
Tracy
Caswell Memorial SP
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0 0.125 0.25 0.5 Miles
0 0.15 0.3 0.6 Kilometers
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