



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Anglers head out for a day of fishing at Loch Lomond on Wednesday morning.

WATER

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on other special-status species including native trout.

A city report said the changes contributed to a dramatic decline in visitors. Numbers hit a low in 2009 with about 24,000 visitors compared to the average of 45,000 visitors in 2008, and revenue from user fees, concessions and licenses significantly declined.

In May, the City Council adopted a development plan that officials hope will turn around the area's drop-off in visitors and restore revenue without compromising the reservoir's water quality.

"We got some great feedback in our community meetings about the concept of balancing the protection of the resource with the visitor

experience," management analyst Lydia Rossiter said. "What we got from the meetings is that people really love the Loch and they want it to be a great resource for many years to come."

STRIKING A BALANCE

The Water Department partnered with two consulting firms to conduct a study and recommend a plan to the council, which agreed to balance new programs and facilities with an environmental focus.

Among the plan's features are rental kayaks and canoes, a summer day camp, an outdoor wedding site, expanded educational programs and trails on the east side of the reservoir. The study predicts detailed signs and increased promotion will also will boost visits.

"The plan represents an attempt to return to histor-

ic visitation levels seen prior to the restrictions on outside private boats and fish stocking," said Chris Berry, watershed compliance manager. "What is exciting is that it gives us a new opportunity to serve Santa Cruz water customers, as well as our neighbors in the San Lorenzo Valley."

The city is compelled to maintain the recreation area to remain eligible for a state grant that helps fund the reservoir site. In addition, city leaders are interested in finding ways to preserve the city's drinking water, in quality and in cost. Berry noted that when visitor revenue declined, Santa Cruz ratepayers paid more to offset the cost of water service generally.

Now that the council has decided on an initial plan, master planning can begin — a process that could

take a year or more, Berry said. The Water Department will implement more basic improvements after concluding master planning but the more complex changes are likely several years away.

Meanwhile, private boats are still banned from the reservoir unless the boat owner pays for their boat to be inspected, cleaned and stored for an entire season for \$200 plus inspection and launch fees. The rental system for kayaks and canoes is intended as an option for the casual boater, and planners hope it will help draw crowds back to the lake.

"I think the community is excited about new boating opportunities," said Berry. "That was by and large the biggest thing people who responded to our user survey wanted was rental kayaks and canoes."