

Loch Lomond will open on March 1

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SANTA CRUZ — Fears that the Loch Lomond reservoir would not be able to open this season because of low water level were quelled, or rather doused, this weekend as storm run-off raised the water level more than nine feet.

City Ranger Walt Cacace reported Friday that the level had risen from 548 feet to a safe 557 — two feet more than the minimum needed to allow a traditional March 1 opening.

"The water level was at 557 (Thursday night), so we'll open March 1," Cacace said. "At this point, with this storm, it should be okay for the season," which runs through Sept. 15.

The storm added two feet to the reservoir Thursday night and four feet the night before, and Cacace predicted that the level would rise at least two more feet per day through the weekend. "The level should be at 560 feet no problem for March 1," he said.

If the water level had not risen

the reservoir would have been closed for the first season since the drought of 1977.

Earlier this month Water Commissioners accepted a recommendation from Water Department Director Morris Allen to close the reservoir for the season. The Municipal Code gives him authority to open or close the reservoir to the public.

The chief concern contributing to the recommendation to close Loch Lomond was safety and the city being held liable for possible accidents.

Adding to the safety problems are exposed tree stumps and exposed, steep banks. The low water level means the distance between the end of the dock and the water's edge is 30 to 40 feet with a six- or seven-foot drop in elevation.

The city's "precarious" situation with liability insurance — with skyrocketing rates and minimum coverage — "makes it imperative to minimize the city's exposure to public liability," Allen said in a report to water commissioners.