

LOCH LOMOND SEP 10 1993
Reservoir S.T.N. M.N.

season nears end

Wednesday is anglers' last day to fish at Loch Lomond in '93

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Special to the Mercury News

The 1993 fishing season at Loch Lomond Reservoir will end Wednesday afternoon, and rangers are happy to say it was about average.

Chief Ranger Walt Cacace hadn't experienced an average season at the Santa Cruz Mountains fishing preserve in more than six years.

"It's great," Cacace said. "We've had normal crowds, like the good old days."

The reservoir's water level also hasn't been a concern, he said.

Almost 40,000 visitors

As of Monday, nearly 40,000 anglers had visited Loch Lomond Reservoir, which opened March 1, in search of trout or bass.

Before the drought began in the mid-1980s, the San Lorenzo Valley preserve averaged 40,000 to 46,000 visits by anglers each year.

The popular fishing area was closed to the public from 1988 through 1991. It reopened in April 1992 when water levels finally were high enough to safely launch boats.

The reopening brought a flood of eager anglers to the 32,000-acre preserve between Lompico and Ben Lomond.

The crush of visitors created horrendous traffic jams on the narrow, winding mountain roads leading to the park.

So many people descended on the preserve, which was created when Newell Creek was dammed in the early 1960s to provide storage for the Santa Cruz Water Department, that rangers were forced to turn hundreds away at the gate.

Many scared away

News reports of the initial fishing frenzy scared many would-be anglers.

By the end of the season, fewer than 27,000 people had visited the park. That was about 60 percent of an average year's total.

As visitor levels returned to normal this season, so did fish counts.

In 1987, the most recent average season, anglers hooked about 38,000 fish, including more than 26,000 trout. This year to date, rangers estimate, nearly 40,000 fish have been reeled in, including more than 32,000 trout.

Last year, about 22,000 fish were caught, including nearly 13,000 trout.

Most of the trout caught this year weighed about a half-pound, Cacace said. While the largest bass snared weighed in at 8 pounds, the average was 3½ pounds, he said.

If the San Lorenzo Valley receives adequate rainfall this winter, officials said, the reservoir will reopen March 1.