

Fishing

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season

slows

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Fishing season at Loch Lomond Reservoir in Lompico may have opened with crowds and heavy traffic, but it is ending as one of the slowest seasons overall.

"It's not been nearly as busy as seasons have been before we closed," said Pat McDonald, customer service manager for the Santa Cruz Water Department, which runs the recreation area.

A record number of anglers visited the 32,000-acre preserve in the Santa Cruz Mountains when it reopened last spring for the first time in five years. Thousands of eager anglers, lured by hopes of hooking fish that had had years to grow, mobbed the preserve. Officials even had to turn people away.

Attendance called low

But as the fishing season winds down, water department officials say 1992 could set a record low for visitors. Attendance averages 40,000 to 45,000 a year.

So far this season, 26,225 people have visited the park. To rangers and nearby residents, who witnessed horrendous traffic jams on the roads leading to and from the park in April, it seemed like most came during the season's first few days.

‘We had a big boom to begin with. After that everyone was afraid it was going to be crowded and stayed away.’

— *Walt Cacace, ranger*

"We're still trying to recover from that opening week," Cacace said, joking.

Rangers, who blamed the initial crowds on the extensive media attention the reopening received, also attributed the overall low visitor totals to news reports on the opening day fishing frenzy.

"We had a big boom to begin with," said Walt Cacace, chief park ranger at Loch Lomond. "After that everyone was afraid it was going to be crowded and stayed away."

In 1987, more than 46,000 anglers came to try their luck at the reservoir, formed when Newell Creek was dammed more than 30 years ago. The next year the reservoir was closed after the drought dropped water levels too low for safe boat launches.

Trout thriving

A dearth of anglers has been a blessing for the trout population. In 1987, rangers estimated that 38,000 fish were caught, including more than 26,000 trout.

So far this year, 21,900 fish, including 12,880 trout, have been landed.

The bass population has not been as fortunate. So far anglers have caught 4,902 bass; in 1987 the take was 1,057.

"The fishing was kind of up and down this year," McDonald said. "Some fishermen complained bitterly, and others said it was marvelous."

The reservoir closes Sept. 15.

If Santa Cruz residents continue to conserve water, and the San Lorenzo Valley receives a decent amount of rain next winter, Loch Lomond will reopen March 1, Cacace said.