



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Ranger Dave Brooks has watched Loch Lomond reservoir rise 10 feet since the rains rolled in.

## Loch Lomond may reopen this year

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SANTA CRUZ — As rain pounded the county Wednesday, area water officials predicted Loch Lomond could be open for recreation this spring for the first time since the drought began six years ago.

As of Wednesday afternoon, Loch Lomond, the city's water reservoir, had added 130 million gallons since Friday, according to water officials.

The reservoir, which holds 1.6 billions gallons, is 53 percent full, and rains were expected to continue through Saturday.

That is good news for water officials, particularly in Santa Cruz, which depends primarily on rainfall and runoff for its water supply.

Bill Kocher, city Water Department director, said Loch Lomond reservoir is currently at 549.5 feet above sea level; it must receive another 400 million gallons, reaching 560 feet, before it

could open.

If rains continue through March, Loch Lomond Rangers said it could open to fishermen April 1.

"When it finally opens, fishermen will be sleeping on the road waiting to get in," said Ernie Kinzli, of Ernie's Casting Pond in Soquel.

"The fishing was good there before they closed. The dream now is that the fish up there have gotten really big because nobody's been able to get up

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# Rain

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there in five years."

Meanwhile, steady rains were accompanied by bursts of heavy squalls throughout the afternoon and evening, bringing at least 2½ inches in mountain areas as of 6 p.m.

"In the last 24 hours we've received .87 inches of rain, almost one-half inch fell between 2 and 3:30 p.m. and the storm is just coming in," said local weatherman Ronald McDonald.

"The season is at 21.48 inches. Normal rainfall is 20.46. Last year we received only 6.60."

The Newell Creek watershed at Loch Lomond has received 12.81 inches since Feb. 9.

"This rain has been a godsend," Kocher said. "We've received four times more rain than we did last year at this time. It's still too early to say for sure, but if we continue to go in the direction we are, conditions look favorable to have all water rationing restrictions lifted this summer."

The community, he said, has proven that it's pretty good about water conservation in the past six years.

"Our preference would be to let people exercise their own judgment on rationing," he said.

Rain, heavy at times, is expected to continue through Saturday morning, clearing Saturday afternoon, according to the National Weather Service.

Empire Grade was closed in both directions for several hours Wednesday afternoon due to a fallen tree.

Confirmed road closures in the county include:

- Highland Way, three miles from Spanish House, due to slide.
- Murphys Crossing, closed for the rainy season.
- Lee Road at Struve Slough, due to flooding.
- Highway 9 south of Felton, due to a major slide.
- Trout Gulch, near Valencia Road, due to a downed tree.