

Loch Lomond spills over

Reservoir 2.8 billion gallons full

By MAY WONG
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LOCH LOMOND — The sound of rushing water spilling over from Loch Lomond reservoir Friday at about 36,000 gallons per minute was music to the ears of water officials.

It was a beautiful strain that had not been heard for seven years.

"This is wild. I love it," said Santa Cruz Water Director Bill Kocher.

The latest storm brought enough runoff to the Santa Cruz Mountains that by early Friday morning, the reservoir had exceeded its 2.8 billion gallon capacity.

At 8 a.m. Thursday, the reservoir was at 95.6 percent capacity, and the excitement grew as rain continued to pour during the day.

By 11 p.m., Walt Cacace, chief ranger at Loch Lomond, made his last water level check for the evening and said the reservoir was six inches shy from spilling over.

Water officials say the last time Loch Lomond breached the dam and flowed into Newell Creek was in 1986, also in February after Valentine's Day.

Before then, before the drought began, the reservoir spilled over at least seven years out of 10.

"The sound of a waterfall is great," said Santa Cruz Water Commissioner Toby Goddard. "It certainly will take a lot of the uncertainty out of next year."

With the reservoir full, officials say summer water-use restrictions that Santa Cruz customers had become accustomed to during much of the drought will not be imposed this year. Nor will they likely be imposed in 1994 either, they say.

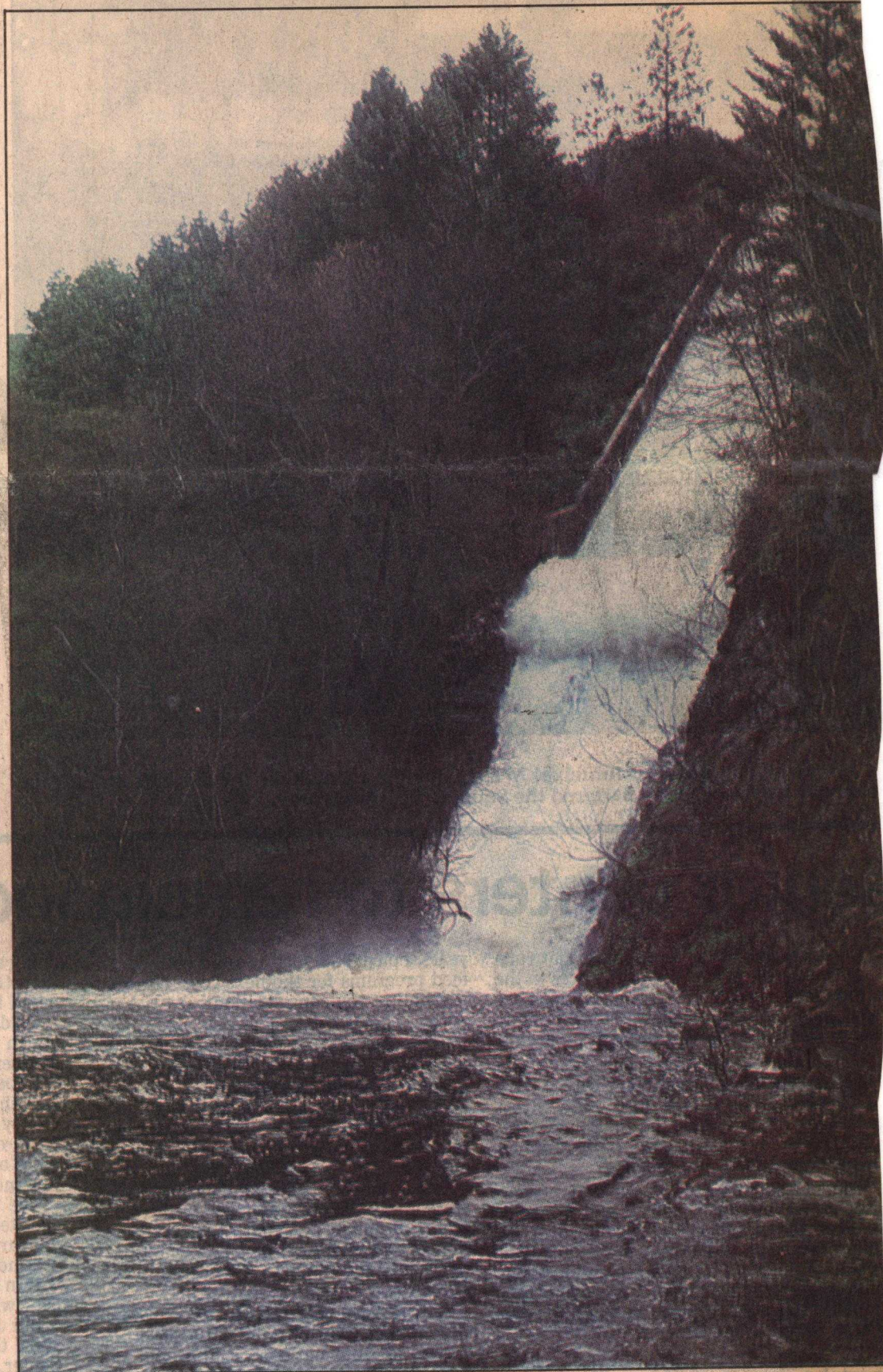
"The short-term drought is over. For the moment, we're fine," Kocher said. "But the drought taught us we don't have a lot of storage, that we've got to use water judiciously."

The reservoir provides between 20-30 percent of the water supply to 85,000 people the Santa Cruz Water Department serves. When full, it can supply two-thirds of the customers' yearly demand.

Loch Lomond was at its lowest point ever in 1989 when it was at 728 feet above sea level.

Last year, the reservoir opened up for recreation for the first time in four years. This year, water officials say the Loch Lomond Recreation Area will open to the public March 1.

The city has been monitoring movement along the eastern bank of the reservoir since 1980 as a precaution against the remote chance that a huge landslide there may create a huge wave. But no movement has been registered, Kocher said.



Dan Coyro/

Water rushes down the Loch Lomond spillway and into Newell Creek on Friday

REFERENCE

SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL
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