

# County ordered to lower Lake Gregory as part of plan to retrofit dam

**Jim Steinberg, San Bernardino Sun, 12-15-16**

CRESTLINE -- After years of study, San Bernardino County officials have been ordered to lower Lake Gregory to relieve pressure on its seismically unfit, nearly 80-year-old earthen dam.

The state Division of Safety of Dams, a unit of the California Department of Water Resources, has ordered the county to lower the dam level by 2 to 3 feet by Jan. 1.

The lowering is part of a larger plan to retrofit the dam, potentially protecting campers, hikers and county property, including roads, from a potential breach following a major earthquake in that area, state and county officials said.

The buttressing of the dam will cost \$8 million, said David Wert, a county spokesman.

Valves were replaced because they wouldn't turn, so that the lowering could be accomplished, said Rick Dinon, chairman of San Bernardino County Supervisor Janice Rutherford's Lake Gregory Improvement Committee.

The seismic rehabilitation of the Lake Gregory dam is scheduled to begin at the end of summer 2017 and take an estimated 18 months to complete.

Once the work is done, the county can seek state approval to restore the lake to its normal level, Wert said.

The water draining from Lake Gregory will go down the north side of the San Bernardino Mountains into Lake Silverwood, Dinon said.

The levels of both Lake Gregory and Lake Silverwood have been reduced because of the drought, as have Lake Arrowhead and Big Bear Lake.

Despite the 1992 Big Bear magnitude 6.5 earthquake, the Lake Gregory Dam "has not experienced a significant seismic event," said Chris Dorsey, a senior engineer with the Division of Safety of Dams.

Based on the expanse of Lake Gregory and the dam's size, the structure is rated as a "high hazard dam," Dorsey said.

A higher level of risk is called "extreme hazard dam," he said.

The dam's earthen construction has nothing to do with the state's concern.

"Most of the dams in California are built that way," Dorsey said.

The concern is the unsound nature of its original construction, he said.

"What we've pieced together" is that there were two contractors in the dam's construction. One of them failed to compact the dirt it piled up on the dam hard enough, resulting in the seismic flaw, Dorsey said.

Although the water lowering will shrink Lake Gregory's shoreline, the operator of the lake's recreational attractions expects the beaches and swimming areas to continue serving as major attractions, minimizing any effect on tourism and revenue, Wert said.

"I am disappointed that the state is mandating the lowering of Lake Gregory, but I understand the state believes it is necessary for public safety," Rutherford said in a statement.

"When I came into office in 2010. I immediately made the dam a priority and we've been pushing the state since then to approve a repair plan," she said.

"During my discussions with state officials, there was talk of lowering Lake Gregory by as much as 20 feet, so I'm thankful the mandate didn't go even further," Rutherford added.

The county is working with CalParks to adapt amenities to the new lake level, and the Lake Gregory Improvement Committee will continue meeting with county staff to ensure the dam repair project stays on track and that the community remains informed about its progress, said Rutherford, whose district includes the area from Crestline to Running Springs.