

ENVIRONMENT

# San Diego releases water from Lake Hodges to fix crumbling dam



The lower water levels people might be seeing at Lake Hodges are not drought-related but instead due to the ongoing work repairing the 100-year-old Lake Hodges Dam. (Don Boomer/For The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Residents living along the river should not be impacted by flooding,

according to city officials. Releases will continue for about two days.

BY JOSHUA EMERSON SMITH

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Following recent rains, the city of San Diego started releasing water from Lake Hodges this week. The move, mandated by state safety officials, is part of ongoing maintenance at the reservoir's deteriorating century-old dam.

About 250 million gallons of water will flow into the San Dieguito River using valves in the dam, according to city officials. Residents living along the banks of the river should be aware of the situation, although officials said they don't expect flooding.

"Visitors to this area of the San Dieguito River Park and generally along the San Dieguito River should take precautions as the water level in the creek will rise," said Juan Guerreiro, director of the city's Public Utilities Department. "The City will continue to monitor weather forecasts, rainfall and the water level at Hodges Reservoir to determine if additional water releases need to be planned during the rainy season."

The city has coordinated with the Santa Fe Irrigation District and the San Dieguito Water District to divert some of the flows into drinking water systems. Officials are also consulting with the region's wholesaler, the San Diego County Water Authority.

The move will lower the lake's water level by about 2 feet as crews [continue repairs](#) expected to continue several more months. Recently discovered cracks in the dam located south of Escondido have raised alarms at the state's Division of Safety of Dams.

The city hopes it can avoid emptying the reservoir under state order by patching what local officials have called “superficial concrete defects.” Repairs were slated for completion this fall, but newly discovered defects have pushed that timeline into the spring.

For safety, the reservoir’s water level must remain no higher than 275 feet, 40 feet below the spillway elevation. As a result, the lake has been closed to boating and fishing at least through February. San Dieguito River Park trails and facilities have stayed open.

The city plans to build a new reservoir downstream, but officials have said that the \$180 million project won’t be completed for at least another decade. Concerns about the Hodges Dam, which was built in 1918, heightened after defects in the Oroville Dam near Sacramento prompted evacuations in 2017.

The city started conducting risk assessments of its older dams last year. Officials have said they expect to uncover as much as \$1 billion in needed repairs and upgrades. The city’s dams are among the oldest in the country, with El Capitan and Lower Otay also in poor condition.



Joshua Emerson Smith

