

POLITICS

San Diego spending \$9M on repairs to structurally vulnerable dams — El Capitan, Lake Morena



The dam at El Capitan Reservoir in Lakeside is capable of storing over 36 billion gallons of water. (Gregory Bull / Associated Press)

Short-term repairs are precursor to more comprehensive upgrades that could include replacement

BY DAVID GARRICK

SEPT. 12, 2023 1 PM PT

SAN DIEGO — The San Diego City Council approved \$9 million Tuesday for short-term repairs to two city dams found to have cracks and other structural problems during state-ordered assessments in 2019.

The repairs will be completed by Orion Construction on the Morena Dam, which is 63 miles east of the city near Campo and the Laguna Mountains, and El Capitan Dam, which is 7 miles east of Lakeside.

While the dams are outside city limits, they are part of San Diego's vast water network that includes nine reservoirs and dams located across the county.

The state ordered evaluations of many dams across California after the 2017 failure of the Oroville Dam near Sacramento. The dams in San Diego's network deemed most similar to Oroville are Morena, El Capitan, Hodges and Lower Otay.

San Diego officials say they plan to present a comprehensive long-term repair plan for the city's dams to the City Council's infrastructure committee this fall. But they said it was necessary to approve these \$9 million in repairs before that.

The repairs will keep the two dams functional while city and state officials come up with design plans and funding for more comprehensive repairs — or replacement dams.

The city has taken a similar approach on Lake Hodges Dam. It was recently reopened

after a year of renovations focused on short-term repairs. City officials plan to spend \$275 million building a new dam 100 feet south of the existing dam by 2034.

The work on Morena Dam will include vegetation and debris removal from the spillway chute, filling holes, sealing joints and cracks and putting concrete patches on exposed defective areas. It was built between 1895 and 1912, with remedial improvements in 1917, 1923, 1930 and 1946.

The work on the El Capitan Dam will be similar. It will include concrete repair and non-native vegetation trimming. The concrete work will consist of filling holes, sealing joints and cracks and patching breaks. It was built from from 1932 to 1934.

No timetable for completion of the repairs was provided by city officials.

City efforts on its dams are being overseen by the state's Division of Safety of Dams, which approved the repair plans for Morena and El Capitan.

The city's other dams are Murray, Barrett, San Vicente, Sutherland and Miramar.



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