

The San Diego  
**Union-Tribune.**

## Plan calls for lakes' wakes

A 'cable ski park' is being proposed in a Santee landmark

By Anne Krueger  
UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

September 13, 2006

SANTEE – It's just a quiet row of lakes now, but in a couple of years, Santee Lakes might be home to a park where wakeboarders skim along the water pulled by a cable from above.

Members of the Padre Dam Municipal Water District board are considering plans to turn one of the seven lakes at the Santee Lakes Recreation Preserve into California's first “cable ski park.”

The proposal is still in its infancy. A private company was selected to run the park, and preliminary plans have been submitted to the city, but the water board has not formally approved the project.

At a meeting last month, the board agreed to conduct traffic, noise and biological tests requested by the city of Santee. The \$25,000 cost of the studies would be paid out of the preserve's budget, which is separate from the rest of the district.

Santee Lake's manager, Allen Carlisle, is enthusiastic about the proposed park. He and Santee Councilman Brian Jones were able to try out a Texas cable ski park run by a company hoping to take over the facility at Santee Lakes.



MIKE STOCKER / South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Jillian Moss, 15, of Coral Springs, Fla., wakeboarded at Quiet Waters Park in Deerfield Beach, Fla.

“The great thing about the cable park is you can spend half an hour enjoying the sport without launching a boat and spending half your day just getting on the water,” Carlisle said. “It will open up the sport to a lot of kids.”

The water at Santee Lakes is reclaimed, meaning it's reused water that's gone through a treatment plant. Carlisle said the water meets the cleanliness standards for recreational use, so that a mouthful accidentally swallowed by a fallen skier won't be harmful.

“If you swallow some, no big deal, but you're not going to bottle it and keep it in your fridge,” Carlisle said.

Visitors to Santee Lakes and residents who live nearby had mixed reactions when told of the ski park plans.

Adam Sleeper of North Park, who was visiting the lakes for a few hours of fishing, said he thought the ski park would be a great relief from the summer heat in East County. He wasn't bothered by the thought of swimming in reclaimed water.

“It's not full of gnarly bacteria,” said Sleeper, 23. “It's not going to hurt anyone.”

But neighbors who live near the entrance to the preserve on Fanita Parkway were less enthusiastic.

“It would ruin the lake,” said Kevin Sheldon, who's lived nearby for three years. “I can't believe they'd let people swim there. I don't want to be looking at poles and cables.”

His neighbor, Celia Bernier, agreed.

If it adds more traffic, it means more noise,” she said. “No thank you.”

There are about 140 cable ski parks around the world, although only four in the United States: two in Florida, one in Texas and another in Kansas City, Kan.”

Cables would be strung around the edge of the lake, and up to eight riders at a time could zip around the water, with the more adventuresome ones flying off a jump. The speed can vary, topping out at 19 miles per hour.

The \$2.5 million park would be built and managed by Sudweeks Development of Canyon Lake, one of three companies that competed for the project. It would also include a 2,000-square-foot restaurant and pro-shop built by Sudweeks.

The developers have proposed a 30-year lease with the water district, although that hasn't been decided by the board. Sudweeks has estimated the park will earn more than \$1 million yearly in ticket sales, with a net income after expenses of more than \$253,000.

If the project is approved, the Padre Dam board must also decide whether it wants to be paid a straight cut of the ticket sales, a yearly fee, or some combination of ticket sales and a fee. During the busiest summer weekends, about 100 to 125 people are expected to visit the park each day, paying \$30 for a two-hour ticket or \$50 for a full day.

Swimming was offered at Santee Lakes in the 1960s, but it hasn't been allowed there for several decades, Carlisle said. Better treatment methods for the water flowing into the lakes makes aquatic recreation possible now, he said.

Carlisle said the biggest water quality problem isn't the reclaimed water, but the contamination caused by ducks and other wildlife once the water leaves the treatment plant. He said the water would be monitored weekly to ensure it is safe.

The ski park is the most ambitious among 15 projects planned to improve Santee Lakes. Other proposals include adding boulders and a ropes course to an island at another lake, and putting in a gazebo and picnic tables on another island.



UNION-TRIBUNE

---

■Anne Krueger: (619) 593-4962; [anne.krueger@uniontrib.com](mailto:anne.krueger@uniontrib.com)



The water district is considering a similar attraction at the Santee Lakes, pictured in this artist's rendering courtesy of Sudweeks Development.