

El Capitan Reservoir

El Capitan Reservoir was created in 1935 after the completion of the El Capitan Dam. That same year, the reservoir was connected to the City of San Diego's water system via El Capitan Pipeline. Located approximately 30 miles northeast of downtown San Diego on the San Diego River, El Capitan has the second largest capacity in the City reservoir system, after San Vicente Reservoir. El Capitan Reservoir is owned and operated by the City's Public Utilities Department.

Questions & Answers

What is the purpose of El Capitan Reservoir?

The primary function of the City's reservoirs is to impound water and provide water supply for the City's water customers. Secondary functions at City reservoirs are to provide public recreational opportunities.

Who does the water in the reservoir serve?

Both the Helix Water District and the City of San Diego have water storage rights in and draft water from El Capitan. Water drafted by the City from El Capitan Reservoir is delivered to the City's Alvarado Water Treatment Plant for treatment and eventual distribution to water customers.

Why is the water level dropping at El Capitan Reservoir?

Water at El Capitan Reservoir is collected from rainfall runoff. The City drafts water from El Capitan to be treated and distributed to water customers. The cost of an acre foot of local water supply from our reservoirs is approximately \$400, compared to approximately \$2,300 per acre foot for imported water.

Our use of local water has increased from 10% in the early 2000s to more than 30% in 2025, as the cost of imported water has increased nearly 75% over the past decade. The City is committed to using as much of our most cost-effective water as possible. Through our use of local water, the City will be saving over \$100 million this year. This savings will help partially offset rising costs for both imported water and Public Utilities operations.

What does the decreasing water level mean for recreational activities?

At the current rate of drafting water from El Capitan, it is estimated that the water level will be too low to use the boat launch ramp beginning around August 31, 2025.

Where else can I go to launch a boat?

Boat launch ramps are available at several other City reservoirs, including San Vicente, Lower Otay and Murray. For more details, please visit sandiego.gov/lakes.

What recreation activities are allowed at El Capitan Reservoir?

Kayaking, canoeing, shore fishing and float tubing are allowed at the reservoir. Amenities include restrooms, barbecues and picnic tables. Each person 8 years or older will be charged a general admission fee to enter the reservoir property. Fees are listed on the El Capitan Reservoir web page:

www.sandiego.gov/reservoirs-lakes/el-capitan-reservoir.

How do I get to El Capitan?

The entrance to El Capitan Reservoir is 16850 El Monte Road, Lakeside, CA 92040. From State Route 67, take Maplevue Street east to Lake Jennings Park Road and continue to El Monte Road. Turn left on El Monte Road and follow signage to El Capitan Reservoir.

Additional Information

Have more questions or looking for additional information? We're here to help. Visit the El Capitan web page at www.sandiego.gov/reservoirs-lakes/el-capitan-reservoir. You can also call us at 619-668-2050 or email us at lakes@sandiego.gov.

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