Chair Solis, Board Members and General Manager of Sweetwater Authority:

I’m the editor and founder of [www.EastCountyMagazine.org](http://www.EastCountyMagazine.org), which has won 141 journalism awards and averages 10 million hits/250,000 visits each month across our region.

I’ve just learned that today, Sweetwater Authority has begun draining Loveland Reservoir below minimum pool level and eliminated all fishing, essentially ruining this treasured lake for the foreseeable future. This severely and negatively impacts recreational uses across the southeast portion of our county, including hikers, birdwatchers, fishermen, joggers, etc. It may also negatively impact firefighting responses in our region, as well as wildlife habitat.

*Access to Loveland Reservoir has not been curtailed. The public is still welcome, free of charge, to hike and perform other activities as outlined in the easement granted to the Forest Service. Fishing is unavailable at this time due to low water levels. The easement granted to the Forest Service does not require a “minimum pool” or otherwise allocate or take water-rights from Sweetwater Authority. The water-rights belong to the customers the Authority serves. Water transfers have been taking place on an as-needed basis since the reservoir was constructed in the mid-1940’s.*

I understand that due to the Brown Act you cannot hit “reply all.” However, **I am asking each of you individually to respond to these questions that impact customers of your district and all recreational users of the Loveland Reservoir.  I also request a Zoom interview ASAP with Chair Sotelo-Solis on this urgent matter** **and with any member(s) concerned enough to fight to halt this draining and/or restore the water level and fishing/recreational access at Loveland in the future.**

*The water levels will be restored naturally, once there is a surplus of rain/run-off.*

I am aware there’s a dispute over a land swap with the Forest Service and whether or not Sweetwater is still obligated to provide fishing and recreational access or not.  Ultimately courts may determine whether your position is legally tenable or not.  But regardless of the legal requirements, there is a moral and ethical issue here.

*We are not aware of any dispute over the land-swap. Sweetwater Authority received land from the Forest Service in return for an easement that grants the public access to Loveland Reservoir, not a guarantee that there will always be water available.*

Why has your board not voluntarily served your constituents and others by protecting recreational access and fishing at Loveland and instead chosen to ignore the recreational needs of this Southeast County region, where there is a lack of other recreational opportunities?  Other local water districts faced with drought have managed to avoid such actions, at least those districts where the lake resources are within the areas that can vote to elect the officials on their boards.

*The Sweetwater Authority Board of Directors has always been supportive of recreational activities; however, the Authority’s main mission is to provide water to the Authority’s customers. Access to the reservoir has not been denied, there is simply not sufficient water available at this point to allow fishing. Sweetwater Reservoir is open 4 days a week for fishing.*

Why has your board acted completely out of step with what other water districts with reservoirs in East County and the San Diego region have done to protect and enhance recreation at reservoirs, even though they, too, faced drought challenges?  For example, Helix Water, at its Lake Jennings, has added canoeing and tipi camping, and has ample fishing opportunities but is far away from Loveland.  Padre Dam’s Santee Lakes is nationally recognized for its many recreational opportunities from camping and rock climbing to pedal boats and a water spray park for kids, as well as fishing and floating cabins.

*All water agencies have their own needs and operational constraints; the Sweetwater Authority Board of Directors is acting on the best interest of the Authority’s customers.*

San Diego Water Authority, faced with years of drought, invested in the largest dam raise in the nation at San Vicente Reservoir in Lakeside – actually deepening and enhancing the reservoir, not draining it.  Why aren’t you doing the same at Loveland or other reservoirs in your district, so that recreation at all reservoirs are preserved? Why isn’t enhancing recreational opportunities at this reservoir a priority for your board?

*Unfortunately, there are no pipelines that can deliver imported water to Loveland Reservoir; the water must be replenished naturally. The County Water Authority uses its reservoirs to store imported water and deliver it to its customers.*

There is one notable exception, or rather bad example, of a water district oblivious to public concerns or the wellbeing of wildlife. One of the nearest reservoir to Loveland, Lake Morena, was also been drained to near oblivion by the City of San Diego a few years ago, which left residents contending with dead fish and algae blooms in recent years. Where is the equity in this?

*Matters of equity come into play when our customers would likely have to pay higher rates so a group of few people can fish.*

Firefighting is also a serious concern.  What will you say to residents if a wildfire occurs and firefighting helicopters must be diverted to water sources farther away, due to the low levels you’ve created at Loveland?  Did you consult with Cal Fire, San Miguel Fire, Alpine Fire and other fire authorities on how important this reservoir is to their firefighting needs, before making this drastic decision?

*There were no concerns expressed by CalFire regarding lack of water at Loveland Reservoir. As indicated earlier, all water-rights from Loveland Reservoir belong to the Authority’s customers.*

Why do the cities of San Diego and Chula Vista simply take water because they can (as a San Diego city water representative once told me), depriving rural residents of recreational opportunities, instead of investing in increasing water storage sufficient to avoid such a nightmare and requiring your own users to conserve water?

*The Authority customers already are the lowest water users in the County.*

Please per the CA Public Records Act provide a list of all steps Sweetwater Authority has taken to enhance local water storage, if any.  I would also like to know if there are any current requirements for your Sweetwater Authority customers to reduce water consumption, and if there are no such mandates, why would your board NOT issue such requirements before resorting to the very extreme step of ruining a beautiful reservoir that backcountry residents enjoy?  It was also the only reservoir, I believe, that offered FREE fishing/recreational access in an economically disadvantaged area.  Where is the equity in this action?

*This will be considered a Public Records Act request and a response will be provided in accordance with the Public Records Act.*

How long will the water drained from Loveland meet water needs – I’ve heard only two months. Is that accurate?

*Sweetwater Reservoir has less than 2% of its total capacity available for treatment. We expect about a 6-month water supply, assuming we successfully transfer 4,000 acre-feet.*

Why is this draining proceeding despite the recent rains? Could not a delay be granted to see if the wet weather continues temporarily while a longer-term solution is sought?

*The recent rains only brought about 70 acre-feet of water to our reservoirs.*

What steps will you, individually, as an elected board member (and/or water district manager)  do to reverse and mitigate this damage? Will you support any long-range plans to restore Loveland in the future – such as deepening that reservoir to store more water, or take any other actions to ultimately refill this precious resource for our region and fully restore recreational activities including fishing?

*There is no current mechanism to deliver water to Loveland Reservoir. The purpose of Loveland Reservoir is to hold water for use as needed by the Authority customers.*

We will be publishing your responses (or refusal to respond, if anyone doesn’t reply) on our popular news site, the second most-read news site in San Diego County. We will also be sharing this information with our news partners including ABC 10 TV, NBC 7 TV, and Times of San Diego.

I also would like to convene a regional online forum in the future and include officials from every water board, county supervisors, state and federal representatives and recreational lake users to discuss how better to protect and restore reservoirs in our region while also assuring water supplies for residents in the future. Surely there are better ways to meet these goals than the destructive action that Sweetwater has just done.

*No comment at this time. Please forward additional information once the regional online forum is established.*

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