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COUNTY OF MENDOCINO
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20314-1000

The Mendocino County Board of Supervisors respectfully requests your assistance in improving staffing and management at Lake Mendocino, a locally and regionally important recreational facility located in Mendocino County. The continuing neglect of the recreational infrastructure at Lake Mendocino negatively impacts the visitor experience; the local economy; and threatens the long term deterioration of the facility. These conditions have reached a point where they can no longer be ignored.

The Mendocino County Board of Supervisors recognizes and appreciates the significant and enduring benefits to the upper Russian River area that have resulted from the construction of Coyote Valley Dam and the impoundment of waters which have created Lake Mendocino. The Board of Supervisors recognizes that Coyote Valley Dam was constructed and is primarily operated as a flood control project but it is equally true that Lake Mendocino is a valuable public resource that contributes significantly to local and regional recreational opportunities and the economy.

Over the past ten years funding and administrative support for recreation management at Lake Mendocino has significantly decreased. Reduced funding has been compounded by extended delays in filling both seasonal and permanent positions with some positions remaining vacant for years. Routine contracts for providing on-going services, including law enforcement, waste management, and operation of the fish hatchery, have been allowed to lapse. The lack of basic services has directly compromised public safety and resulted in the physical and aesthetic deterioration of recreational resources.

Instead of correcting the underlying problems that are the cause of the deteriorating conditions at Lake Mendocino, the United States Army Corps of Engineers San Francisco District staff has made it clear to the public and local officials that dam management is their priority and they are not able to adequately manage recreational facilities. Instead of prioritizing the restoration of basic services like law enforcement and waste management, District staff has threatened the complete or partial closure of recreational facilities.

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Complete or partial closure of facilities may seem like an easy way for the Corps to absolve itself of the responsibility for managing this important public facility, but that will by no means alleviate the problems. Lake Mendocino is accessible from multiple access points, both by motorized and non-motorized users. As such, simply posting a “campground closed” sign and walking away will not resolve the problems that result from the current staffing and management deficits at Lake Mendocino.

Despite the lack of a current contract, Mendocino County Sheriff Tom Allman is to be commended for unilaterally restoring law enforcement patrol services at Lake Mendocino. It is unfair to expect this service to continue indefinitely and unrealistic to think it will continue if the campgrounds are closed.

Likewise, community volunteers (and a Sheriff’s Office inmate crew) have assisted in litter and trash cleanup, graffiti removal, trail construction and maintenance, and other projects. The efficiency of these efforts has been impeded by a lack of staff to perform such simple tasks as opening a gate or approving litter removal in a particular area.

Lake Mendocino is an important recreational and economic asset to Mendocino County that attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors annually and contributes millions of dollars to the local economy. Lake Mendocino attracts visitors from a large service area who are able to engage in a wide range of recreational activities, including camping, swimming, kayaking, boating, fishing, hiking, biking and more.

Lake Mendocino provides a convenient and cost effective recreational opportunity that is of particular benefit to low income families who seek a temporary refuge from summertime temperatures that can exceed 110 degrees. There is no comparable facility in inland Mendocino County that can provide a fraction of the day use and overnight camping opportunities offered by Lake Mendocino.

In conclusion, the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors respectfully requests your assistance in restoring adequate staffing and management resources to the operation of recreational facilities at Lake Mendocino. In addition, we request your cooperation and timely assistance in exploring any viable alternatives that may result in improved and sustainable management and operation of the recreational facilities at Lake Mendocino.

Sincerely,

John McCowen, Chair
Mendocino County Board of Supervisors

cc: Lieutenant Colonel Rayfield, ACEO San Francisco Division
The Honorable Congressman Jared Huffman