

# Turlock Lake State Recreation Area



## Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



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**Turlock Lake State Recreation Area**

**22600 Lake Road**

**La Grange, CA 95329**

**(209) 874-2056**

*With the river and  
lake environments so  
close to each other, this  
recreation area provides  
an ideal setting for  
water-oriented outdoor  
activities.*

**N**

## **estled in a narrow, woody pocket**

### **between the Tuolumne River and Turlock**

Lake in the rolling foothills of eastern Stanislaus County, Turlock Lake State Recreation Area (SRA) lures those seeking relaxation and clean country air. Open all year with camping, picnicking, fishing, swimming, boating and water skiing, this area offers visitors an opportunity to see the variety of native plant life that once flourished along the rivers of the San Joaquin Valley.

A warm, dry climate prevails in the Central Valley, with nighttime temperatures usually dropping to the high 60s. Precipitation falls mainly from October through April. Summer temperatures above 100 degrees are normal. Winter temperatures are well below freezing, but snow is very rare.

### **PARK HISTORY**

#### **Turlock Lake Miwoks**

For thousands of years, the Central Sierra Miwok hunter-gatherers who supplemented their main dietary staple of acorns with other seeds, edible plants, fish, and large and small game, built seasonal villages of bark or tule reeds along the banks of rivers and streams. With the coming of Europeans, the essence of their existence—the vitality of the land, family life, the seasonal cycle, ritual and social interaction—was soon destroyed, along with large numbers of Miwok who had no immunity to the diseases introduced by the Europeans.

Despite these drastic changes, descendants of the Central Sierra Miwok

still live in the area, practicing ancient cultural traditions and passing them on to the next generation.

#### **Gold Mining**

Gold was found along the Tuolumne River in Stanislaus County by French sailors in 1849. Their camp quickly grew into a settlement known as French Bar or French Camp, and eventually became La Grange. The easily obtained placer gold played out by 1856. Gold mining returned to the Tuolumne River when the La Grange Dredging Company formed in 1905 to extract gold from an eight-mile section of the river, now part of the park. Several million dollars in gold were extracted before dredging operations ceased in 1952.

#### **TURLOCK IRRIGATION DISTRICT**

Just as the Tuolumne River furnished water for mining, it also provided rich soil for agriculture, and by 1857 farms lined its banks. The farmers irrigated their crops with the spring floodwaters of the Tuolumne River, leaving them vulnerable to periods of drought.

With the backing of farmers, in 1887 Assemblyman C. C. Wright proposed a new kind of local government agency—an irrigation district—to help deal with the problem of crop irrigation. The first district to be established under the Wright Act was the Turlock Irrigation District. To control water for irrigation, this district and the Modesto Irrigation District together constructed La Grange Dam in 1893. Despite this the water needs of the farmers were barely being met. To solve the problem,

the Turlock Irrigation District built a 3,500-acre reservoir between La Grange and Waterford that became known as Turlock Lake.

#### **TURLOCK LAKE TODAY**

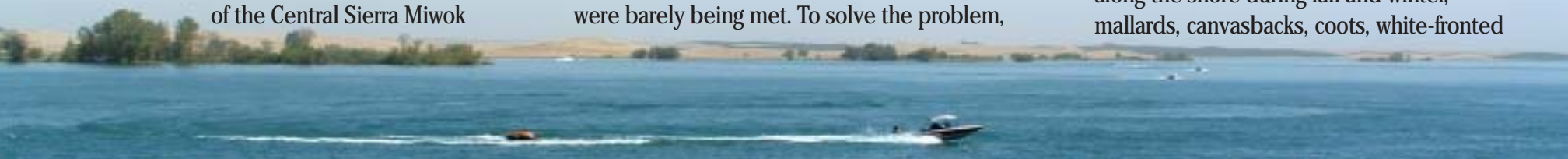
In 1950 the Turlock Irrigation District leased Turlock Lake, with its 26 miles of shoreline and 228 acres of foothill country, to the State of California to form Turlock Lake SRA.

From several lookout points, visitors can view the surrounding savannas and some of the cattle ranches and orchards nearby. Lake Road, which separates the campground from the day-use area, offers an excellent perspective of the campground, the river and sloughs, and miles of dredger tailing piles, the by-product of a half century of gold mining.

#### **WILDLIFE**

The rich riparian habitat along the Tuolumne River and adjacent sloughs with their forested banks and tangled underbrush provides a haven for many birds and animals.

Over 115 species of birds have been identified along the river. Woodpeckers, hummingbirds, orioles, western bluebirds and greenbacked goldfinches provide flashes of color along the riverbanks as meadowlarks, valley quail, bushtits, mourning doves and western mockingbirds fill the air with their songs. Hawks and turkey vultures dominate the wide-open sky by day, and barn and screech owls join in at night. On the water and along the shore during fall and winter, mallards, canvasbacks, coots, white-fronted



geese, several kinds of herons, grebes, gulls and terns are common.

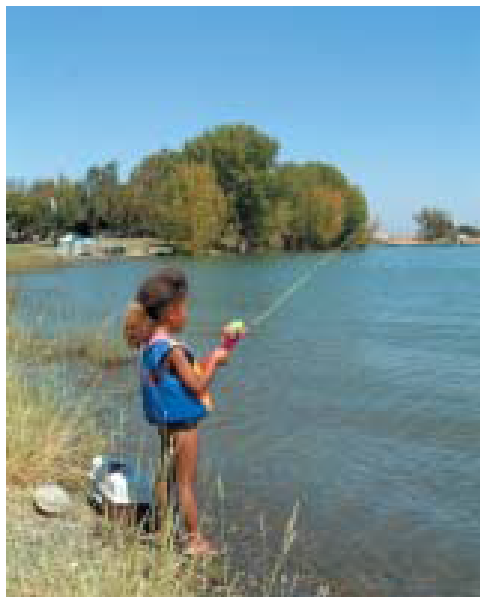
The riverbanks are home to the gray fox, beavers, muskrats, cottontails, wood rats, bullfrogs, and turtles, while coyotes, black-tailed jackrabbits, and an occasional deer wander through the savannas surrounding the lake.

### PLANT COMMUNITIES

Turlock Lake has a 26-mile shoreline, with humpbacked islands and jutting peninsulas. Low, rolling, grassy foothills enfold the reservoir. Valley and blue oaks dot the undulating hillsides in small clusters. At the picnic area, cottonwoods, western sycamores and willows provide shade.

The Tuolumne River's rich riparian habitat boasts some 190 species of flowers, herbs, shrubs and ferns. Many native trees, including interior live oaks, cottonwoods, white alders, elderberry, ash and buckeye grow along the river's banks, providing a thick canopy of shade. The broader riparian shore features a thick tangle of oak, willow and fig trees intertwined with wild grape, blackberry, toyon, elderberry and mock orange.

Wildflowers decorate the grassland and hillsides with lupine, fuschias, sunflowers, monkeyflowers, larkspurs, wallflowers and Mariposa lilies. Woodwardia ferns grow in moist places along the cliff, and a multitude of other flowers, shrubs and ferns infuse color throughout the area.



*Fishing on the lake*

### RECREATION

Turlock Lake SRA offers a wide range of recreational opportunities, including camping, picnicking, fishing, swimming, boating and water-skiing.

#### Camping

With a sheer bluff rising on its south boundary and the Tuolumne River on the north, a secluded campground offers 60 campsites about one mile from the lake. Native trees provide shade, and the heavy growth of blackberries entice jam and pie fanciers from mid-July through October.

Each campsite has a stove, table and food locker, and piped drinking water is within a hundred feet. Hot showers and restrooms with flush toilets are nearby. Although no trailer hookups are available, trailers up to 27 feet can be accommodated in the campsites.

#### Day use

Along the lakeshore are two formal picnic areas, lots of shade trees, and an irrigated grassy area. Stationary barbecues are nearby. A boat launching ramp and ample parking for boat trailers and cars are also available. There are no lifeguards on duty, so swimmers should use caution. Trout, black bass, crappie, bluegill and catfish in the lake and river test the skills of fishermen.

### ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

- Picnic area: Two accessible picnic tables are located at the picnic area next to

Swim Beach and adjacent to designated accessible parking. Assistance may be required getting to water faucets or grills.

- The restroom near the beach is accessible.
- Depending on water levels, the boat dock is navigable for persons who can self-transfer to boats.

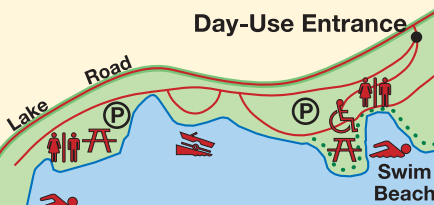
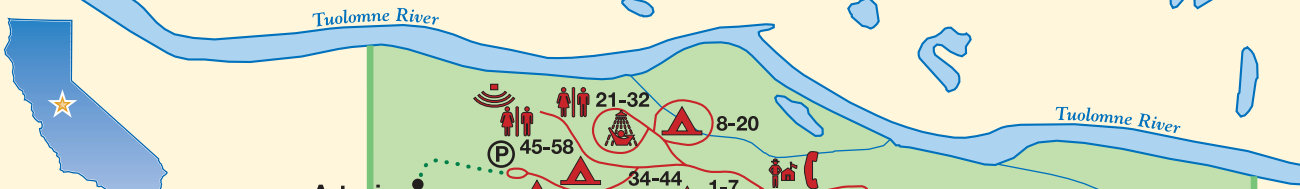
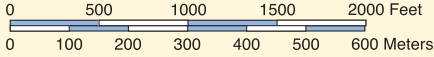
### NEARBY STATE PARKS

- McConnell State Recreation Area, 5 miles southeast of Delhi, (209) 394-7755
- George J. Hatfield State Recreation Area, 28 miles west of Merced, (209) 632-1852
- Great Valley Grasslands State Park, 5 miles east of Gustine, (209) 826-1197

### PLEASE REMEMBER

- Each campsite is limited to eight persons.
- Dogs must be leashed at all times. PLEASE CLEAN UP AFTER YOUR PET.
- Loud, disturbing noises and music are prohibited at all times. Quiet hours are between 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.
- Watch out for poison oak.
- Do not gather dead wood. Firewood may be purchased at the campground office.
- Bicyclists under 18 must wear approved helmets. Bicycles are not permitted on footpaths and must be equipped with headlamps and reflectors in compliance with vehicle code regulations.
- Campsites are vulnerable to theft at any time. Secure your valuables and equipment, and report any suspicious activity.
- Campground check-in time is 2:00 p.m. Checkout time is noon.

# Turlock Lake State Recreation Area



## TURLOCK LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA

Turlock Lake  
240 ft  
73 m

### Legend

- Road
- Trail
- State Park
- Accessible Feature
- Boat Launch
- Campfire Center
- Campground
- Parking
- Picnic Area
- Ranger Station
- Restrooms
- Showers
- Swimming
- Telephone
- Viewpoint

