

Residents, boaters dive into Klondike Lake debate

INYO REGISTER -- Friday, 15 May 2009



By Mike Gervais
Register Staff
5-14-2009

"Don't mussel us off Klondike Lake," the Save Klondike Committee said Tuesday before the Inyo County Board of Supervisors and representatives of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

The fate of motorized recreation at Klondike Lake is uncertain because of the looming threat of a quagga mussel infestation in local waters.

The LADWP has decided to close Klondike, at least temporarily, to motorized use beginning Friday, but a dedicated group of lake users and water sports enthusiasts are trying to keep the lake open as much as possible this summer.

The Save Klondike Committee, comprised of several local residents who use the lake for motorized recreation, recently asked the board to consider ways to keep the lake available for traditional uses, such as boating, water skiing and jet skiing.

"The county is not in control of anything with Klondike Lake," Third District Supervisor and Board Chair Beverly Brown said.

Russ Markman, owner of Bishop MotorSports, asked the board to "operate Klondike as a concession, as you did with Diaz. The money coming in from the recreational users would support the county. The county does run Diaz, so there is already a blueprint for Diaz."

The Save Klondike Committee said it estimates that it would take approximately \$16,000 to \$20,000 to get a concessionaire started at the lake, but the board was quick to point out that the state's financial situation is having an impact on Inyo County, which was already strapped for cash.

"We are the taxpayers and we are asking the board to spend our money on something we want," Markman said. "We would like to see (LADWP) take this on all together, but DWP doesn't work for us, the Board of Supervisors does. If we have to find people who will help us to run for the Board of Supervisors, we will."

The Save Klondike Committee requested a town hall meeting in Bishop where all concerned residents can get involved. The board moved to elect Second District Supervisor Susan Cash and Fourth District Supervisor Marty Fortney to an ad hoc committee to work with LADWP, Save Klondike Committee members and the public on the Klondike closure issue.

After the principals have had time to get together and discuss options that could keep the lake available for motorized use, a town hall meeting will be scheduled.

The Save Klondike Committee did have some suggestions, such as hiring a volunteer staff to monitor use and conduct quagga inspections, or hiring a concessionaire to do inspections on a limited basis.

Clarence Martin, the LADWP assistant aqueduct manager, said his department would probably be

resistant to handing the Klondike operation over to volunteer staff. "Would you hand a million-dollar asset to volunteers?" he asked, adding that if mussels did get into Klondike on the volunteer watch, it could turn into a multi-billion dollar problem.

Supervisor Brown pointed out that Mule Days, a multi-million dollar event, is run almost completely by volunteers.

Martin said Mule Days is a different scenario because it is a short, week-long event, not a constant summer job.

The problem with the suggestion of hiring a concessionaire to handle inspections at Klondike is that the county does not have money available to get the ball rolling on that and the LADWP is unwilling to invest that much in the lake.

State government collects a property tax on residents who own boats, and Markman said that the county could take some of that money to use on the lake. County Counsel Paul Bruce explained that Inyo gets 28 cents on the dollar of those tax revenues.

"Well, you're going to have to pay the Sheriff's Department to monitor that lake, so why don't you use that dollar to keep it open," Markman said.

Even if the county and LADWP got on board with the concessionaire option as a joint effort, the legal maneuvering and Memorandums of Understanding and insurance issues would take time to sort through, and the operation would probably not be feasible until next year.

The Save Klondike Committee asked Martin if LADWP would back its closing date for Klondike from May 15 to a little farther down the line to give everyone a chance to come up with another viable option that would keep the lake open.

Martin said the department would probably not push back the closure date, but said that it is possible to lift the closure if a feasible alternative is agreed upon and implemented. "The greatest threat for exposure to quagga mussels is right now," Martin said.

Supervisor Cash said that it is imperative that the agencies work together to solve the Klondike Lake issue and remember that "the bad guy in the room is the quagga mussel," not any of the agencies working together to fight them off.

Anyone who is interested in participating in further discussions about saving Klondike Lake can call Kyle Markman at 872-4717 or Paige Van Velzer at 872-6917.