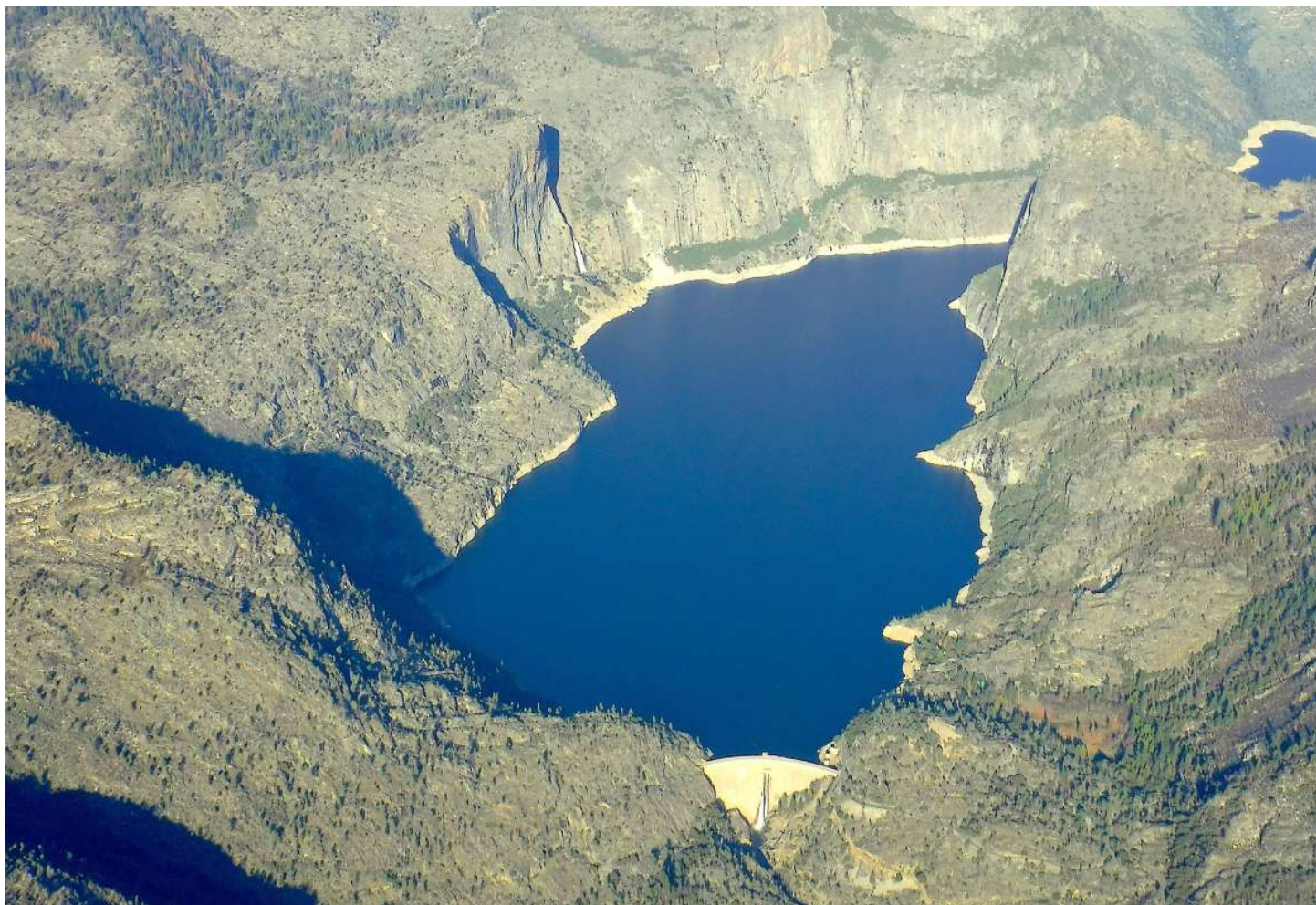


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# Reservoir

**Tom Stienstra**

Sep. 27, 2019 | Updated: Sep. 29, 2019 6:36 a.m.



Hetch Hetchy Reservoir, viewed from airplane, collects water from the Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne in Yosemite National Park

Photo: Tom Stienstra / The Chronicle

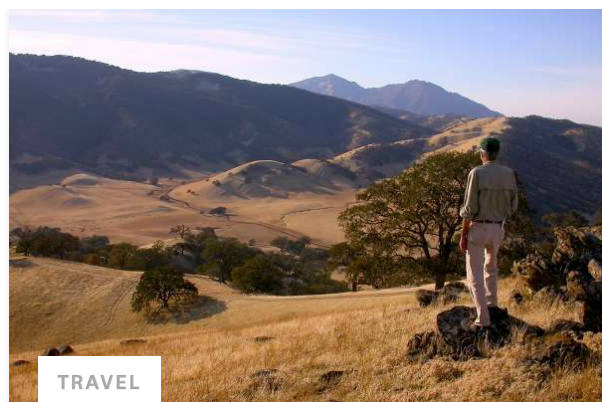
A landmark proposal to allow rental kayaks, canoes and electric-powered boats for the first time at Hetch Hetchy Reservoir in Yosemite National Park is being considered by U.S. Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt, who has oversight over the national parks system.

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Rosekrans then teamed with Curtis Knight of California Trout, Inc., who proposed allowing limited boating access — “environmentally sensible access” — in a formal letter to Bernhardt. When Bernhardt was contacted this past week, he did not have a public response.

Hetch Hetchy is the jewel that fills what many call a second Yosemite Valley. Since it was first filled with water in 1923, the public has been forbidden from boating on it. The San Francisco Water Department and Public Utilities Commission operates the dam and manages water releases.

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TRAVEL

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TRAVEL

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**Fall at Sh  
wildlife 1**

For the past century, San Francisco water managers have taken a firm position to bar public access at its lakes, including Upper and Lower Crystal Springs, San Andreas and Pilarcitos in the 23,000-acre Crystal Springs Watershed on the Peninsula, and at Calaveras and San Antonio reservoirs near Sunol. Other water districts have followed suit, and across the region, the public is banned from boating at more than 40 lakes, a lack of public access believed to be unique in America.

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## Change in the air

After those meetings, Interior raised entry fees at many national parks to create a new fund for park infrastructure repair. In August, Bernhardt issued a directive that ordered national parks to develop rules that would allow electric bicycles wherever mountain bikes are permitted; in California, that is mostly on roads.

The Chronicle obtained a copy of the letter to Bernhardt, which was also addressed to San Francisco Mayor London Breed and copied to Ann Moller Caen, president of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission; Michael Reynolds, superintendent of Yosemite National Park; and Wade Crowfoot, California Secretary for Natural Resources. Since the letter was sent, there have been no on-the-record discussions about the proposal, Rosekrans said.

“The public has been shortchanged,” writes Rosekrans and Knight. “Promises of access and improved recreation have never been realized. The time has come to welcome the American public back to Hetch Hetchy.”

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## No boats allowed

Water districts in the greater Bay Area region prohibit boating of any kind at the following lakes, unique among water districts in California:

**Alameda County:**No boating: Anza, Cull Canyon, Don Castro, Jordan Pond, Shinn Pond, Temescal. No access: Upper San Leandro (hiking by permit from EBMUD only), San Antonio.

**Contra Costa County:**No boating: Briones. No access: Antioch Municipal, Clifton Court Forebay. Rental boats only at Los Vaqueros.

**Marin:** No boating: Alpine, Bon Tempe, Lagunitas, Kent, Phoenix, Nicasio, Stafford and Soulejule.

**Napa County:**No access: Lake Curry, Milliken and Rector.



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Arastradero, Chesbro, Coyote (temporary closure, low water levels), Cottonwood, Grant, Guadalupe, Sandy Wool, Uvas, and Vasona. No access: Boronda (Palo Alto residents only), Calaveras, Elsmar, Felt.

**Santa Cruz County:** Loch Lomond Reservoir (resident boats only).

**Solano County:** No access: Lake Madigan.

**Sonoma County:** No access: Laguna Lake.

— *Tom Stienstra*

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National parks with major lakes where boating is permitted include the Grand Tetons. That is significant because the National Park Service's acting deputy director of operations David Vela worked for years as the superintendent at Grant Tetons, where kayaking and boating tours are popular at Jenny Lake.

### Past, present, future

Hetch Hetchy is nestled in a deep granite valley where Kolana Rock rises up in a massive glacial-sculpted dome and Hetchy Dome juts up at a 45-degree angle. It is fed by three waterfalls, including 1,400-foot Wapama Falls, which pounds through a gorge and then cascades into the lake. A trail is cut into the rock that traces along a brink above the far shore, past Wapama Falls (at a hiker's bridge) and then cuts inland to Rancheria Falls.

A study released in August showed that draining Hetch Hetchy and removing the dam to create a second Yosemite Valley as a visitor destination could create an economic value that could exceed \$100 billion.

The idea of a crusade for boating access at Hetch Hetchy emerged when Rosekrans realized that Americans are being excluded from a public waterway in a national park.

"Boating on Hetch Hetchy Reservoir would be an attractive option for those unable to hike Yosemite's trails, including military veterans disabled while serving our country,"

Rock, Hetch Hetchy Dome and the head of the lake where the Tuolumne River emerges from the Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne.

Fishing is already permitted at Hetch Hetchy, but its steep sides make for difficult access. The lake has a significant population of brown trout and a sprinkling of rainbow and brook trout. They are supported by a rich aquatic food chain with a small minnow-like baitfish called a roach.

Researchers with Restore Hetch Hetchy studied the 1913 Raker Act, which allowed San Francisco to build the dam at Hetch Hetchy, and found that it promised to improve public access, Rosekrans said.

“Boating on the reservoir would comply with both the letter and spirit of the Raker Act, which promised improved public access,” Rosekrans and Knight wrote Bernhardt. “San Francisco received its benefits long ago, but the American people have not.”

*Tom Stienstra is The Chronicle’s outdoor writer. Email: [tstienstra@sfchronicle.com](mailto:tstienstra@sfchronicle.com) Twitter: [@StienstraTom](https://twitter.com/StienstraTom)*

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