

What is an Interlake Tunnel and What Does it Mean for You?



Monterey County Water Resources Agency (MCWRA) is proposing building a tunnel to divert water from Lake Nacimiento into Lake San Antonio.

The Nacimiento Regional Water Management Advisory Committee (NRWMAC) is concerned how the tunnel might affect Lake Nacimiento lake levels, recreation activities, property values, and water availability.

This document briefly explains the tunnel project, potential benefits, and questions that land owners and lake enthusiasts may have.



Here is what has been said by Monterey County Water Resource Agency

INTERLAKE TUNNEL PROJECT Technical Memorandum

The proposed Interlake Tunnel is a gravity flow water conveyance tunnel approximately 12,000 feet long connecting Nacimiento and San Antonio reservoirs in San Luis Obispo and Monterey Counties respectively. Conceptual design of the tunnel project envisions a reinforced concrete lined tunnel with an inside finished diameter of 10 feet and a slope from Nacimiento to San Antonio of 0.4%. The tunnel will have an invert elevation in Nacimiento Reservoir at approximately 745' MSL* with an inlet structure equipped with debris racks and stop logs to facilitate tunnel maintenance. The outlet structures in San Antonio will include a valve facility housing and a spherical valve for operation of the tunnel. The outlet structure will terminate in San Antonio reservoir with an energy dissipation structure.

Project	Original Cost	Current year cost @ 5% escalation	Average Annual Controlled Releases (AFY)	Cost AFY
Nacimiento Dam (1957)	\$7 mil	\$113 mil	140,444	\$800
San Antonio Dam (1966)	\$12.9 mil	\$134 mil	60,964	\$2,200
Interlake Tunnel		\$48 mil	16,237	\$2,956
Interlake Tunnel with SA Raise		\$63 mil	20,686	\$3,046

Table 7 – Capital Cost Comparison per acre foot of controlled release

*MSL refers to Mean Sea Level

NRWMACs Primary Goals for Lake Nacimiento Water Management

NRWMACs primary goals for lake Nacimiento water management:

1. Maximize water levels up to the ideal level 790 ft, which stores more water for recreation & agriculture.
2. Maintenance of constant lake levels from May 1 through September 30 to enhance the habitat for fish.
3. Maintain year to year elevations through prudent management of transfers and releases.
4. Utilize transferred water from Nacimiento, being stored in San Antonio, prior to releasing water from Nacimiento.

Recreation water elevation at Nacimiento:

People around the lake feel that the minimum lake level for good useable recreation is 780 feet msl

- Below 760 ft-msl many ramps are not useable
- Areas of the lake become narrow for boats to pass

NRWMACs Concerns for the Tunnel Project

Questions for MCWRA tunnel project

Physical Design:

What design requirements or thoughts drive the size, location, elevation, shape, of the tunnel, the inlet and outlet works?

What is the priority of these requirements?

What are the design drivers for:

1. Location of the invert (tunnel inlet and exit)?
2. Elevation of the invert?
3. Size of the tunnel?
4. Size and Shape of other features?

Operational Design:

Is there a prescription or rule for the transfer of water from one lake to the other?

Any information on timing, amount of transfer, flow rate, or other parameters?

What logic was used to model the flows between the lakes?

A concern of NRWMAC is why would MCWRA want the tunnel so deep? If the objective is to capture the 27,000 to 35,000 acre feet of potential annual spill, it can be accomplished with the tunnel at the higher elevation. There appears to be no reason for transferring water to San Antonio when Nacimiento is only at 35% capacity (elevation 745).

Operationally, an agreement needs to be in place that clearly outlines the rules of operation of the lakes after the tunnel is installed. NRWMAC must be certain that new operational rules protect Nacimiento from unnecessary transfers.

NRWMAC fully supports the Interlake Tunnel Project as long as the transfers and releases benefit recreation.

