

# USC School of Architecture

University of Southern California School of Architecture

## Re-allocating the Silver Lake Reservoir

Arch 542b Landscape Architecture Design, 6 units // Spring 2019 Semester

Location Watt Hall (WAH), 3rd Floor, Landscape Studios  
University of Southern California

Time Monday / Wednesday / Friday  
2-5:50PM

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Department of Water and Power employees at Silver Lake Reservoir. | Photo: Courtesy of [Ken Hively](#)/Los Angeles Times/Getty Images.

### Silver Lake: From quiet infrastructure void to...

The Silver Lake reservoir stands a critical and especially contentious juncture. In 2006 the reservoir was decommissioned as a drinking water reservoir for thousands of municipal users. Stripped of its functional value amidst pressing concerns for limited water supplies in Southern California, such a giant reservoir might have then been sensibly drained. To its managers, the Los

Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP), its decommissioning quickly turned the reservoir from a resource, into a highly evaporative liability. However, almost immediately after the reservoir was constructed in 1906, its value as a landscape—tangential to its infrastructural function—became a powerful factor, limiting the LADWP’s actions. Its eponymous neighborhood and urban adapted animals long treasured it as a kind of limited landscape amenity. While for many years there was almost no legal access (since its WWII fencing) to either the waterbody or surrounding landscape area, it served as a striking scenic amenity—for the homes above or even when seen through the chain link fence along the roads that circumvented it. Meanwhile, it closing allowed some animals to prosper, largely undisturbed by human activity. It defined the small neighborhood with its awkwardly large and quiet watery, concrete-lined, expanse.

For many, in the small neighborhood of approximately 30,000 residents with limited road access, keeping the reservoir as a kind of scenic void, fenced off, and with a minimum of features to attract users from outside its hills, was ideal. Many felt that the traffic and parking situation was bad enough and that adding amenities in addition to the already popular encircling path and dog park would upset the neighborhood’s “precarious” balance. Some feared more traffic; others, more crime. Thus, for years many fought a series of gradual open space improvements, thankful that concerns for water quality and safety ultimately enforced limited access. Keeping their neighborhood and its reservoir, as it was when they moved in, seemed their right. They “paid” for it with their high house prices or rent and did not want much to change. Proximity to a large park was not worth dealing with its many (perceived) attendant problems. Of course, many in the neighborhood welcomed the addition of the “meadow” and other open space amnesties, but there were fierce fights!

So, when the LADWP decommissioned the reservoir as a drinking water system concerns for the future of the reservoir only heightened. For most, keeping their waterbody intact became a real concern. They felt threatened that the LADWP would stop filling it up and through intense lobbying the neighborhood forced the LADWP to agree to maintain water in the reservoir even though it comes at a potential potable water cost (the reservoir evaporates 5 feet each year) and has little infrastructure purpose other than some stormwater treatment and for occasionally filling fire-fighting helicopters. What is more—and practically in same breath—a vocal group in the neighborhood has continued to oppose any new open space amenities or access, due to a perceived threat of traffic and outsiders, feeling even greater concern due to the newly precarious, non-infrastructurally-justified, water situation. To appease the neighborhood and its water budget, the LADWP has begun a series of projects to find alternative sources of water to fill the reservoir, which due to its utilitarian concrete design does not look so great (to most) when empty. For now, the LADWP has agreed to fill up the reservoir, but it seems likely it will question this in the next multiyear drought. Currently the plan is to mostly use semi-contaminated groundwater to fill it up—water that might be treated for potable water use eventually—and some stormwater.

Meanwhile, now that the fence is no longer necessary for water quality concerns, many have begun to imagine a radical reconfiguration of the infrastructure as a new and important open

space, often to the terror of some local residents. Many plans have been proposed and today it represents one of the most exciting opportunities to improve open space in the city; perhaps only second to the Los Angeles River. As such, local residents are fearful that their neighborhood will be overrun with park users, clogging their streets with traffic and resulting in more crime. Yet, open space advocates argue that it is unfair to keep such a giant open space amenity, and one utilizing valuable water resources, locked up by a kind of fear for its popularity. Why shouldn't it be like the amenity-rich and popular Echo Park? Hearing this, some locals throw up their hands in outrage and cry "We aren't Echo Park! That is the last thing we want our reservoir to be!" Some have accused these open space opponents as being racist; that they unreasonably fear minorities would ruin their enclave (which is actually quite racially diverse, even if most of the anti-open space advocates appear old and white). Others, implicitly allied with anti-open space advocates, declare it is a valuable habitat, that (conveniently) must not be disturbed for the birds. Undoubtedly, many of their concerns are real. Traffic is a problem and the neighborhood would change if the reservoir became a major open space destination.

Even so, access and open space at the reservoir have slowly improved with few of the local fears coming true. The much feared new "meadow" open space is hardly overrun, and locals are likely its most predominant users. Still, the agencies involved in the reservoir's transition remain wary of upsetting the neighborhood and hope to find a way forward that does stir more controversy and backlash (and literal screaming matches). Thus, while many strongly believe that the reservoir represents an incredible opportunity to create a world-class open space, contentious meetings, limited access, opposition to construction disturbances, and no existing budget, among other real constraints, means that any improvements will need to be highly strategic, efficient, and likely proceed incrementally. For example, a plan that Studio-MLA prepared, that proposed to fill up much of the main reservoir with soil to create habitat and reduce water use, was quickly deemed impossible due to the extreme number of trucks that would be necessary to transport fill through already congested streets. While a basic plan for slowly opening access to the reservoir has been prepared (and backed by the local council person), LADWP has enlisted the Los Angeles BOE to shepherd a master plan for the lake, with Hargreaves as the landscape architecture master planning consultant. This plan will have just started when we finish our studio, providing us an ideal opportunity to influence its outcome...

### **Water and open space equity in an arid climate...**

Beneath the contentious surface of lake's future are difficult questions of infrastructure, open space, and water use equity. Since the reservoir's construction, its land and water have served the public good in a vital, existential manner, as a water supply. That the neighborhood also benefitted from the presence of its watery expanse was an efficient bonus but was not the water's and land's primary contribution to the public good; to create such a giant reservoir in Southern California for the scenic value of so few could hardly be justified.

Now that its infrastructural value and function has been stripped from the reservoir, the question of the lake's greater public value must be questioned and interrogated. While local

residents suggest (and have somewhat forced the LADWP to agree with) that they have the right to keep the reservoir more as less as it is, a blue evaporative watery expanse, with limited access, this can hardly last as the inequity becomes more apparent, particularly with more droughts and water scarcity. For example, while local residents should not suffer unjustly, clearly if the lake is to be maintained as a gigantic water expanse that utilizes vast amounts of water (potable or not—all water is valuable, regardless of its source), more of the public must benefit from it than the small number of adjacent landowners. Clearly, the public value of this resource must be reallocated, such that either it uses less precious public water or such that the water is uses maximizes its public value.

Thus, in this studio we will begin by calculating and representing the allocation of land, water user, and user value in this landscape now and historically in preparation for developing a new and strategic reallocation with greater public equity, all while remaining sensitive to local residents. These scenarios and the strategic reallocations they represent will be developed into preliminary and then final designs. Throughout, we will employ models to develop and communicate our proposals. We will begin with an allocation model for developing various resource distributions scenarios and follow with a large-scale physical representation model.

We may also develop an identity for the studio and join the variety of other organizations that contribute to the public discourse on the reservoir.

## **Exercises and Deliverables**

### **Part 1: Site & Scenario Research (collective)**

The first part of the semester will entail a series of individual exercises where students will collectively research the site and potential scenarios. Students will analyze the current site conditions and allocations of water use, land, and public value, etc. as well as potential scenarios, proposed and probable. We will also conduct site visits and field exercises and familiarize ourselves with the 3D printers.

### **Part 2: Reallocations Scenario “Board Game” (group)**

The remainder of the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the semester will entail a group exercise where students will develop a technique to explore multiple scenarios that readjust and communicate allocations of water and public value. Students will create a kind of scored “board game” that we will allow for the development of many different reallocation scenarios with different amount of public equity and cost. Each group will run a scenario charette with their game and from that develop deeper analysis of a few distinct scenarios. If this goes well, these tools might become part of the master planning process, following our studio.

### **Part 3: Scenario Development (individual)**

In the second half of the semester each student will develop a specific scenario in site design detail with detailed planting plans, a large-scale model, and other standard drawings.

## Schedule

(Detailed assignments will be passed out during the semester, as needed)

Week	Date	Content
1	1/7	Introduction / Quick Answers Archive Site Visit: Silver Lake Reservoir / 3D Print Warmup Quick Answers Archive Sharing / Site & Scenario Research
2	1/14	Site & Scenario Research Site Visit: Other Reservoirs Site & Scenario Research / Equity Charette
3	1/21	<b>MLK Day (No Class)</b> Site & Scenario Research Site & Scenario Research
4	1/28	Site & Scenario Research Pin Up Allocations “Game” & Scenario Analysis Pitch Allocations “Games”
5	2/4	Develop Allocations “Game” & Scenario Analysis Develop Allocations “Game” & Scenario Analysis Test Allocations “Game”
6	2/11	Develop & Fabricate Allocations “Game” & Scenario Analysis Develop & Fabricate Allocations “Game” & Scenario Analysis Allocations “Game” Charette
7	2/18	<b>President’s Day (No Class)</b> Final Drawings & Production Final Drawings & Production
8	2/25	Final Drawings & Production <b>Mid Review: Wednesday, 2/27, Harris 115A</b> Modeling Exercise
9	3/4	Site Visit Modeling Exercise Modeling Exercise
—	3/11	<b>Spring Break!</b>
10	3/18	Detailed Scenario Development
11	3/25	Detailed Scenario Development

12	4/1	Detailed Scenario Development
13	4/8	Detailed Scenario Development
14	4/15	Final Drawings & Production
15	4/22	Final Drawings & Production Pin Ups
	4/26	Pin Ups / <i>Last Day of Studio</i>
	5/6	<b>EXPO Final Review, Harris 115</b>

## Other Class Methodology

### In Class Pin-Ups

The class will predominantly consist of group pin-up reviews. After the second meeting, you will be expected to pin up all the work due / you want to discuss before class starts! Any work that is not ready (and pinned up) by then will not be discussed and considered late.

Carefully pin up your drawings using good pins and pinning and careful trimming (with a straight edge) when necessary. They should be straight (using a level) and evenly spaces (1" apart in general with 2" apart between students – measure!). The presentation of your drawings will affect your grade! Poorly pinned up drawings / poor quality pin-ups may not be assessed. No multi-colored pins!

You are encouraged to participate in the in-class pin-up reviews. This is a portion of your grade!

### Site Visits

There will be site visits. In general, no transportation will be provided. You will be required to take a Taxi or public transportation. Please bring suitable shoes (covered), water, and visit a bathroom prior!

### Limited Software Instruction

The class and instructor only provide instruction as related to the assignments. For basics and additional software instruction beyond what is provided in media courses, see the resources listed below (Lynda in particular is a great resource!).

### Studio Instruction Time

Following pin-ups, presentations, and class discussions you are expected to stay in studio (with necessary for bathroom / coffee, etc. breaks) and work until the end of class-time. Please consider whether the question can easily be answered by your peers prior to consulting a professor.

### Final and Mid Reviews

Outside reviewers will come to discuss and evaluate your work at mid and final reviews. Presentation orders will be posted. All students must be pinned up 30 minutes prior to the scheduled start time to participate in the review (and not be penalized). The entire class must be

present (and awake!) during the course of the review. Do not take your own notes –ask another student to make notes for you. Presentation durations will be specified.

### **Model Photography**

All models must be photographed by the standards and instructions presented in class. In general, this means that models must be naturally lit (outside) with a naturally lit solid color background (white be default). The background of model photographs should not be “photoshopped” out – white background or not!

### **Grading**

Grading is made through a synthesis of the following: completion of assignments, instructor assessment of work quality, outsider reviewers’ assessment of work quality, and participation in class.

**Midterm work (40%)**

**Final Review work (54%)**

**Participation throughout (6%)**

### **Equipment and Resources**

At minimum students will be required to use the AutoCAD, Adobe Creative Suite (Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign) and Rhino (Windows or Mac, OK). We will also employ the CNC machine and 3D Printing.

Lynda Software Tutorial (USC provided)

<https://itservices.usc.edu/lynda/>

### **Bibliography**

Architecture, Revealing Landscape. “Making Games for Environmental Design Education :” 4, no. June (2012): 60–83. <https://doi.org/10.4018/jgcms.2012040104>.

Block’hood, <https://www.plethora-project.com/blockhood/>

Corner, James, “The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention,” in *Mappings*, ed Denis Cosgrove. (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 214-252.

Games for Change, <http://www.gamesforchange.org>, <http://www.gamesforchange.org/game/catchment-detox/> (example game)

Hester, Randolph T. *Design for Ecological Democracy*. The MIT Press, 2006.

Hirsch, Alison Bick. *City Choreographer: Lawrence Halprin in Urban Renewal America*. University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Margerum, Richard D. *Beyond Consensus: Improving Collaborative Planning and Management*. The MIT Press, 2011.

Reisner, Marc, and Lawrie Mott. *Cadillac Desert: the American West and Its Disappearing Water*. Penguin Books, 2017.

Robinson, Alexander. *The Spoils of Dust: Reinventing the Lake That Made Los Angeles*. Applied Research and Design Publishing, an Imprint of ORO Editions, 2018.

Davis, Mike. *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*. Verso Books, 2020.

## **Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

### Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

### Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and micro-aggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

#### Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

#### USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>