

DREAM LAKE AND DAM
Lassen Volcanic National Park
Drakesbad Guest Ranch
Head of Warner Creek Valley
Chester vicinity
Plumas County
California

HALS CA-78
HALS CA-78

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
PACIFIC WEST REGIONAL OFFICE
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HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

DREAM LAKE AND DAM

HALS No.CA-78

Location: Lassen Volcanic National Park, Drakesbad Guest Ranch

Present Owner: National Park Service

Present Use: Natural Area

Significance: Dream Lake was a popular landscape feature at Drakesbad Guest Ranch, in Lassen Volcanic National Park. The lake, and the dam that impounds the lake, are contributing resources to the Drakesbad Historic District, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2003. The ranch is significant for its association with the development of recreation and tourism in and around Lassen Volcanic National Park between 1900 and 1952.

Historian: Christy Avery, National Park Service, Pacific West Regional Office-Seattle

Part I: Historical Information

Date of Establishment: 1932

Creator/designer: Roy Sifford

Builder/Contractor/Laborers: Roy Sifford and his employees cleared the area; Sifford hired outside employees to construct the earthen dam.

Original/subsequent owners/occupants: Alexander Sifford purchased the property in 1900 from Edward Drake, who filed a claim for the land and subsequently operated a rustic campground and hot spring. The Alexander Sifford family owned Drakesbad Guest Ranch when the lake was created. Roy Sifford assumed management of the property in the 1930s, and the family retained the ranch until the 1950s. The National Park Service purchased the property in stages, between 1952 and 1958. Dream Lake and dam were purchased by the NPS in 1958.

Periods of Development: The lake was created in 1932, and it remained largely the same until 2011, when the dam was removed and the lake was drained.

Changes and additions: In 2011, the National Park Service removed the earthen dam and drained the small lake. The area is, in 2012, slated for revegetation and meadow restoration.

Historical Context:

Edward Drake was the first person to develop the thermal area now known as Drakesbad into a rustic resort. Drake migrated to northern California from Maine in the 1860s. Like most migrants of this era, he initially mined for gold before moving on to other endeavors. He purchased 160

acres in the Warner Valley, south of Lassen Peak in the geothermal area known as Devil's Kitchen, in 1884. The next year, he filed a claim for an additional 160 acres, and he ultimately owned 400 acres; this included the wetland that would become Dream Lake. Drake made his living by charging summer visitors for access to the camp spots and hot springs on his property. By 1900, Drake constructed basic facilities such as latrines, and he had begun building a log hotel. The site became known as Drake's Hot Springs and Ranch. Tourists from nearby California towns such as Red Bluff camped, hiked and fished around Lassen Peak, and area homesteaders and ranchers such as Drake often earned additional income by offering campsites and serving as guides.¹

Alexander Sifford was one of these visitors to Drake's Hot Springs and Ranch. In 1900, the Susanville, California schoolteacher spent a week at the site, in the hopes of experiencing the supposed curative properties of the springs. Sifford suffered from "nervous exhaustion," and he endured a 45-mile trek over poor roads to the site. By the end of his week, he became convinced he and his family could develop the ramshackle spot into a profitable tourist destination, and he purchased the property from Edward Drake. He renamed the spot Drakesbad; "bad" was German for baths.²

Sifford had reason to be optimistic about his new venture. Camping was an increasingly popular activity in California the early twentieth century. San Francisco residents who sought a respite from the crowded, dirty city and Sacramento Valley residents who sought to escape the summer heat both increasingly ventured to California's mountains. Local chambers of commerce began to promote the Lassen area as a vacation destination during this time in an attempt to lure tourists from throughout California to the area. The area's hot springs proved a popular stop, but visitors also came for the hunting, fishing, and berry picking.³

During their first twelve years of ownership, the Siffords served up to 1,200 campers per summer. Between 1904 and 1907, the family developed a rough auto road to the site, but most campers arrived on horseback; the family primarily used the road to bring in supplies. They enjoyed the hot springs, and fished, hunted, or simply relaxed. The Siffords offered meals as well as a few lodge rooms. During this time, the family focused their improvement efforts on creating and maintaining recreational facilities, such as trails and the hot springs, for their guests. Their efforts paid off and they attracted increased numbers of guests, though providing campsites and allowing access to the hot springs proved to be less lucrative than the family had hoped.⁴

As Drakesbad's popularity grew, so did support for federal protection of the Lassen Peak area. President Theodore Roosevelt had designated the area as Lassen Peak Forest Reserve in 1905. Two years later, at the urging of Forest Service officials, local chambers of commerce and California politicians, Lassen Peak and surrounding geologic features were set aside as Lassen

¹ Amy Hoke and Len Warner, *Cultural Landscape Report for Drakesbad Guest Ranch, Lassen Volcanic National Park*, March 2005, Pacific West Regional Office-Seattle, 6-8.

² National Park Service, National Register Nomination, Drakesbad Guest Ranch Historic District, 2003.

³ Ibid..

⁴ Diane Crahe and Theodore Catton, *Little Gem of the Cascades: An Administrative History of Lassen Volcanic National Park*, 2010, Pacific West Regional Office-Seattle Files, 15.

Peak National Monument. Despite support from local boosters and politicians, attempts to designate the remote, little known peak as a national park failed until a volcanic eruption in 1914-1915 attracted widespread public and scientific interest. In 1916, Congress designated the area around Lassen Peak a national park. Drakesbad remained as a privately owned inholding within the park, one of many inside the park's boundaries.⁵ The public soon forgot about the volcanic events, however, and the newly formed park faded in public consciousness, though Californians continued to visit.⁶

Despite the site's popularity, the Siffords made little money off of their guests, most of whom spent money only for an occasional dip in the hot springs or a bottle of water. The family also charged for pasturage for horses and for meals, but Alexander Sifford lamented that they family was "gradually going broke." The Siffords decided to construct a full-service resort that would attract a wealthier clientele than they currently hosted, in order to attempt to turn a profit on the property. Between 1912 and 1920, the Siffords constructed a new kitchen and dining room, a pool and bathhouse, and wooden tent platforms with wood stoves for heat. The Siffords also began to offer a higher level of service and comfort than they had previously; for example, they served meals at tables set with linen tablecloths and quality silverware. They expanded their horseback riding business in the early 1920s; they built new stable facilities for the horses and increased their herd to thirty.⁷

The Siffords' improvements paid off. Guided horseback tours proved a particularly popular activity, and one of the most profitable for the family. The park's first superintendent noted that the resort offered "clean and comfortable accommodations with good substantial food." Business increased again after the construction of the Lassen Peak Highway in 1931, which made it easier for tourists to access the park in their cars. Access to the resort itself remained poor, since the Siffords refused to grant the right of way needed by the National Park Service (NPS) to improve the road from Chester, the nearest town outside the park, to Drakesbad. Despite this, more than half of the park's visitors entered the park via Drakesbad in the 1920s; the spot was the closest developed area to the mountain itself. Guests at Drakesbad and another resort at constituted most of the visitors to the undeveloped park in the 1920s.⁸

In a continuing effort to create additional recreational facilities that would attract more guests, the Sifford family created Dream Lake in 1932. Roy Sifford, Alexander's son, dammed a marshy area in the hillside above the south bank of Hot Springs Creek; he described the site as "a swampy pothole." He dynamited about ninety tree stumps from the site, and with the help of a couple laborers and some heavy machinery, Sifford constructed an earthen dam. Using soil from the south end of the area, which was set higher in elevation, he created an embankment of about 250' in length and between 6' to 16' in height. The soils that created the rudimentary structure were not compacted, aside from the compaction that occurred when vehicles and machinery used during construction drove over the dam. The dam created a body of water for boating and fishing, and Sifford named the three-acre pond Dream Lake. The new lake lay about one-third of

⁵ Crahe and Catton, 146.

⁶ Crahe and Catton, 56.

⁷ Hoke and Warner, 9.

⁸ *Idib.*, 56.

a mile southwest of the lodge. The lake was shallow; only about ten feet deep at the deepest. A footpath circled the water, and crossed the top of the dam.⁹

Dream Lake was stocked with rainbow trout, according to Sifford, in order to “keep it full of fish so the children and most anybody could go over there and catch a fish.” Sifford also built a fishing pier, and kept two boats on the lake. Like all Drakesbad facilities, Dream Lake was only accessible to ranch guests—visitors to Lassen Peak National Park were not entitled to use the amenities at what was still a private inholding. Non-guests could pay twenty-five cents to access their property, ostensibly as a charge for the trails the Siffords built and maintained. Park visitors, who were often not as well-to-do as Drakesbad guests, complained about the charge.¹⁰

The dam was poorly constructed, however, and it failed within the decade.¹¹ The dam was first destroyed in December of 1937, after fifteen inches of rain fell on existing snowpack and caused torrential floods. Numerous other buildings and structures at Drakesbad were destroyed as well. Repairs began the next year, and the dam was replaced. However, it washed out again in 1952 after a similar flood event. The dam’s structural integrity was also continually threatened by beaver activity. Every spring and fall, workers would remove beaver dams at the lake’s spillway in an effort to reduce the water pressure on the dam.¹²

The Sifford’s guest ranch operation continued to be profitable throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Roy Sifford assumed management of the property during the 1930s. The Sifford family had paid off most of the property’s mortgage, so the ranch weathered the Depression without serious problems. It remained opening during World War II, and the Siffords began ranching cattle for extra income during the war.¹³

Lassen Volcanic National Park remained lightly visited compared to California parks such as Yosemite or Sequoia-Kings Canyon, but its popularity climbed throughout the mid-twentieth century. In 1939, the park reached 100,000 annual visitors for the first time. By 1951, that number had climbed to 200,000. Only three years later, due to the large influx of new residents to California, the boom in automobile travel, and postwar economic prosperity, that number had risen to 300,000. Yet, the park remained almost wholly undeveloped. Facilities at the various inholdings, such as Drakesbad Guest Ranch, provided the majority of services to the park visitor.¹⁴

The NPS had long considered private inholdings at Lassen antithetical to orderly park development, but attempts to purchase inholdings had long been met with inflated asking prices

⁹ U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Scoping Level Design Alternatives for Dream Lake Dam, October 2003. Denver Service Center Technical Information Center (eTIC).

¹⁰ Hoke and Warner, 11.

¹¹ Kennedy/Jenks Consultants, *Dream Lake Dam*, Lassen Volcanic National Park, May 2007, Denver Service Center Technical Information Center, 15.

¹² Amy Hoke and Len Warner, *Cultural Landscape Report for Drakesbad Guest Ranch, Lassen Volcanic National Park*, March 2005, Pacific West Regional Office-Seattle, 11.

¹³ Crahe and Catton, 125.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

or resistance from landowners. The Sifford Family repeatedly asked the NPS to buy their property for significantly more money than the property was appraised for, and the two parties could not come to an agreement until the early 1950s. Between 1953 and 1958, the agency purchased the Drakesbad property in separate parcels.¹⁵ The sales included twenty-eight buildings, including a lodge. The NPS had also acquired other park inholdings that contained privately run recreational facilities, and the agency shut down the businesses after the acquired them. At Drakesbad, however, they continued guest ranch operations, since it was successful and popular business.¹⁶ The NPS installed new water and sewer systems and constructed new cabins in the late 1950s, and a new pool and bathhouse in the early 1960s, but the resort remained largely the same as it had for decades. No changes were made to Dream Lake or the dam.¹⁷

The Siffords had battled beavers on Dream Lake for years, and the problems continued into the late twentieth century. In 1980, NPS staff noticed that beavers were damming the lake's outlet. The beaver dam threatened to raise the lake level by plugging the spillway; raising the lake level in this way could overtop and obliterate the earthen dam. Resort staff took measures to thwart the beavers, until the NPS forbade them to continue. Unsure of whether the beaver were a park animal worthy of protection or an invasive species that should be removed, NPS staff installed a "beaver deceiver" (a siphon buried underneath the outlet below the water) in the early 1980s that prevented the animals from raising the lake level any further.¹⁸ Sometime in the late twentieth century, the NPS removed the fishing pier, halted the fish stocking, and allowed the footpath around the lake to become overgrown with vegetation.¹⁹

The NPS debated removing the earthen dam and draining the lake in the late twentieth century, but Drakebad's patrons, many of whom returned year after year, objected to the removal of what they saw as a key ranch attraction. However, by the end of the century, the dam was in danger of failure. The dam contained holes and depressions, and suffered from erosion. Continuing beaver activity still threatened to raise lake levels so that the dam would become inundated by rising water. By 2003, the dam was about 10 feet high at the highest; it had been 16 feet high where originally built, but the soils compacted in the subsequent 70 years. The water level was only a few inches below the dam crest, and water was seeping through the embankment. Dam repair was not an option, due to the poorly compacted soils that made up the dam, so the NPS used sandbags to plug the holes and fill the depressions in the dam. After study, the NPS determined that draining the lake by removing the dam would have minimal impacts on the surrounding landscape. The lake was small, and hydrologists determined that draining it would not adversely affect surrounding streams and meadows.²⁰ The NPS removed the dam and drained the lake in 2011. In 2012, the area is slated for wetland restoration.

Part II: Physical Information

¹⁵ Ibid., 127.

¹⁶ Crahe and Catton, 85.

¹⁷ Ibid., 111.

¹⁸ Ibid., 299-301.

¹⁹ Hoke and Warner, 49. The date of the removal is unknown.

²⁰ Kennedy/Jenks Consultants, 21.

Landscape Character and Description Summary

Dream Lake is a 2.7 acre reservoir, impounded by an earthen dam, in the south-central portion of Lassen Volcanic National Park. The park includes 106,372 acres of mountainous terrain in the southern Cascade Mountains, in northeastern California. It is dominated by Lassen Peak, the world's largest plug dome volcano, which rises to 10,457' in height. Several other lava peaks occupy the western portion of the park as well. Volcanic activity has shaped the park; the most recent eruptions occurred in 1914 and 1915. Dream Lake lies in the Warner Valley at an elevation of 5,500'. The Warner Valley is one of the six developed areas in the park, and one of the most remote. The valley includes geothermal features such as mud pots, hot springs and steam vents (fumeroles).

Drakesbad Guest Ranch, which comprises 440 acres, is one of the oldest developed areas in the park. The ranch occupies the area on both sides of Hot Springs Creek; Dream Lake lies to the south of the creek. The creek flows from the east, above the thermal area known as Devil's Kitchen, and through the level expanse known as Drakesbad Meadow. Guests have been drawn to Drakesbad for the hot springs as well as the hiking, fishing, and other recreational opportunities since the nineteenth century. Besides Dream Lake and Dam, the ranch includes a lodge, cabins, trails, a pool, a kitchen and dining room building, and various other resort structures. The ranch operates seasonally, late spring through early fall, as heavy snowfall prevents winter access.

Character Defining Features

Dream Lake is a 2.7 acre reservoir located in Lassen Volcanic National Park, at the base of Sifford Peak. The lake is impounded by the Dream Lake Dam, an earthen embankment on the north side of the lake. The lake and dam lie to the south of the Drakesbad resort complex; a large meadow, called Drakesbad Meadow, separates the lake from the resort development.

Natural Features

Topography

The lake is situated near the floor of the Warner Valley, which is relatively flat and lined by springs and streams. The valley, which runs from east to west, is set on the edge of an extensive lava plateau. Steep, forested mountainsides rim the valley; Flatiron Ridge rises abruptly 500 feet above and to the north of the ranch. The lake is set below (and to the north of) the 7,408-foot mass of Sifford Mountain, a prominent basaltic /andesitic volcano that lies southwest of Lassen Peak. Nearby are the mud pots of Devil's Kitchen, the hot springs of Soda Springs, and 125-degree waters of Boiling Lake.

Vegetation

Conifer forest, including white fir, Jeffrey pine, lodge pole pine, incense cedar red fir, and sugar pine, occupy much of Warner Valley, including the area around Dream Lake. The 90-acre Drakesbad Meadow, which lies to the north, was used for cattle grazing for decades, and it remains grassy, with low growing herbaceous vegetation, though there is forest encroachment along the edges. A few stands of willow and alder grown among the grasses and forbs.

Water

Dream Lake is triangular in shape. It is 320 feet wide at the base and 525 feet long. The lake varies in depth from about 6 inches to a little more than five feet deep, near the dam. Four tributary streams drain into Dream Lake; they originate in hot springs at the base of Sifford Mountain. The stream flow varies from about forty cubic feet per second in the spring, to fifteen cubic feet per second in the late summer. The lake drains to the west into a meadow that is part of the Hot Springs Creek drainage; the creek is the primary stream in the Warner Valley.

Designed Features

Circulation

A little-used access road begins in Drakesbad Meadow, winds up the ridge in a southwesterly direction, and terminates at the northern edge of the dam. The access road is overgrown with vegetation and sometimes difficult to follow. Vehicular access is only permitted by resort and NPS staff; guests walked to the lake. Foot access is provided by a trail that begins at Hot Springs Creek and terminates at the lake. The dirt trail crosses a waterway created by outflow from the lake via a small wooden footbridge.

Buildings and Structures

The only structure on or around Dream Lake in 2011 is the 240-foot long earthen dam. The spillway is a Y-shaped cut into the ridge in the northern side of the lake, about 200' upstream from the right abutment of the dam. By 2000, the dam contained holes and depressions, and suffered from erosion. By 2003, the dam was about 10 feet high at the highest; it had been 16 feet high where originally built, but the soils compacted in the subsequent 70 years. A variety of trees, including willow, alder and pine, had established themselves on the dam by this time as well. Their root systems threatened the integrity of the dam, as did the lack of maintenance and the impact of beaver activity.

Part III: Sources of Information

Bibliography

National Park Service, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Drakesbad Guest Ranch Historic District*, 2003, Pacific West Regional Office-Seattle.

Diane Crahe and Theodore Catton, *Little Gem of the Cascades: An Administrative History of Lassen Volcanic National Park*, 2010, Pacific West Regional Office-Seattle Files.

Amy Hoke and Len Warner, *Cultural Landscape Report for Drakesbad Guest Ranch, Lassen Volcanic National Park*, March 2005, Pacific West Regional Office-Seattle

Kennedy/Jenks Consultants, Dream Lake Dam, Lassen Volcanic National Park, May 2007, Denver Service Center Technical Information Center (eTIC).

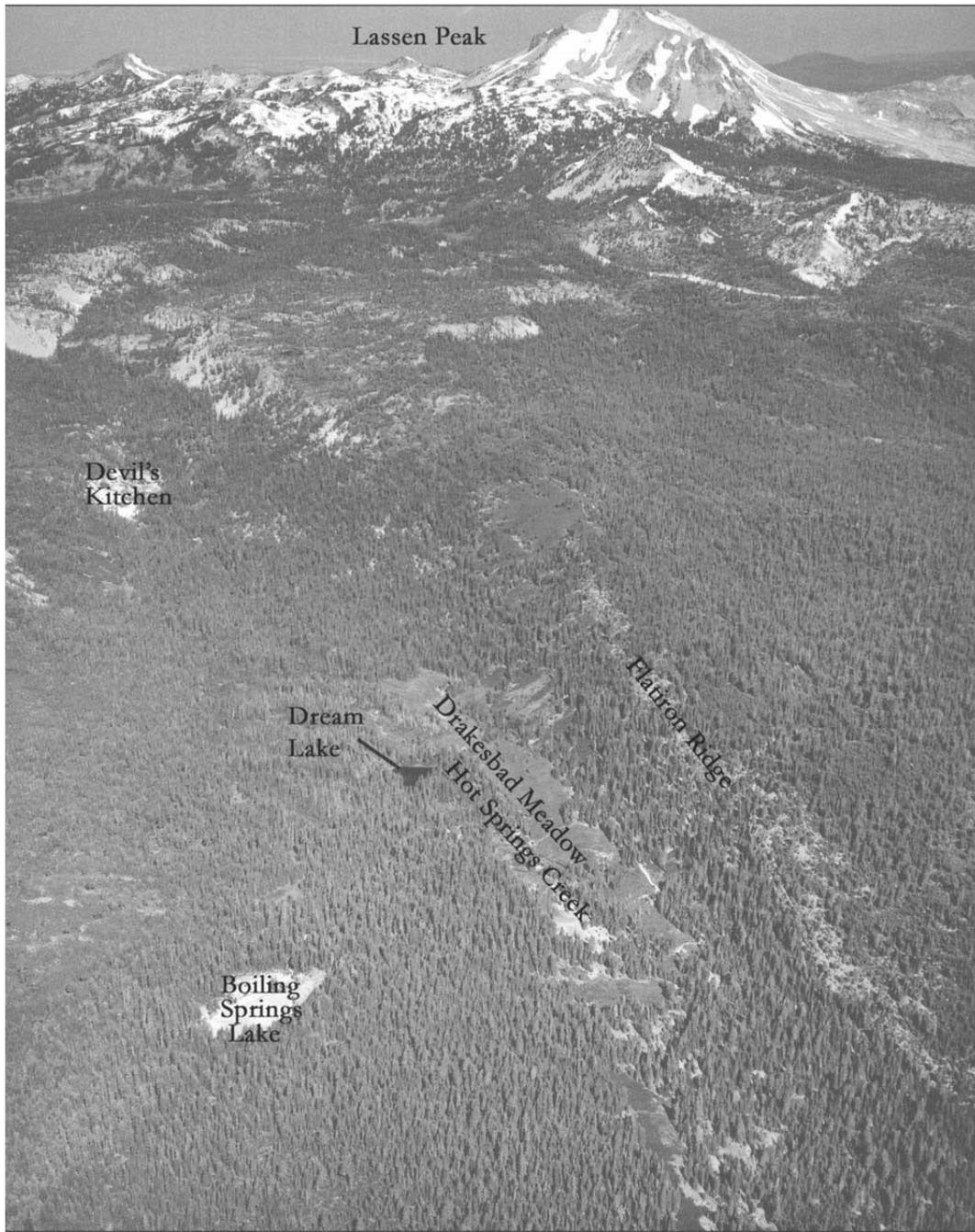
National Park Service, *Drakesbad Guest Ranch Cultural Landscape Inventory*, 2009. Pacific West Regional Office-Seattle.

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, *Scoping Level Design Alternatives for Dream Lake Dam*, October 2003. Denver Service Center Technical Information Center (eTIC).

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, *1999 Condition Survey Report, Dream Lake Dam*, November 2000, Denver Service Center Technical Information Center (eTIC).

Part IV: Project Information

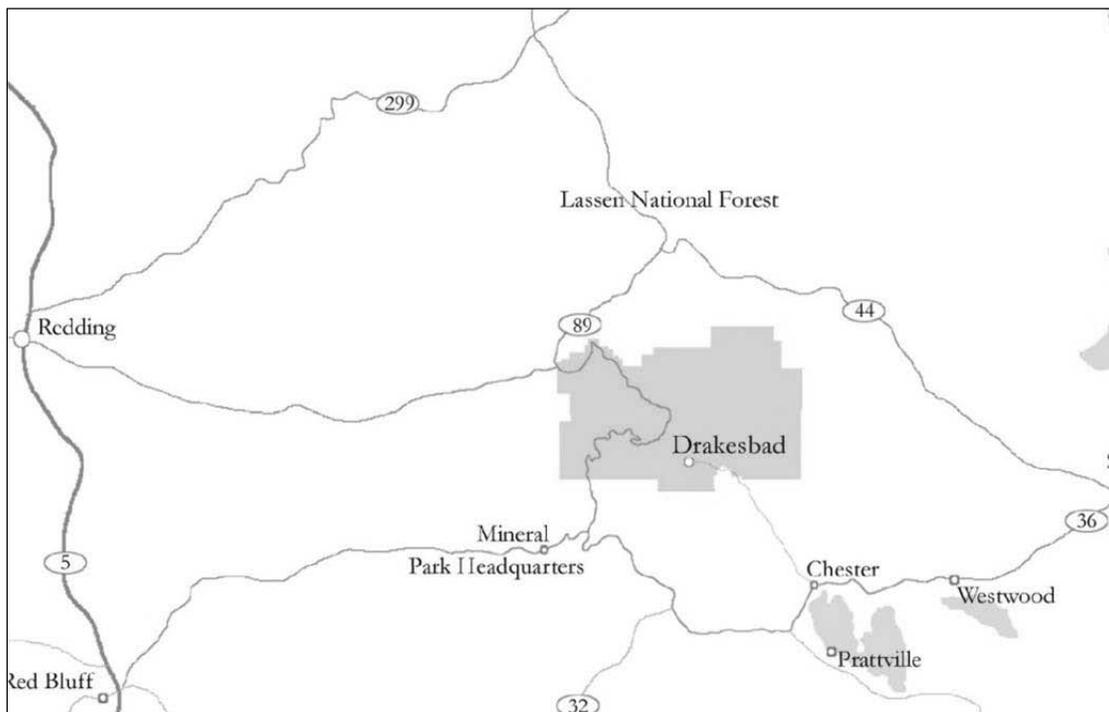
The HALS report was stipulated by the California State Historic Preservation Office as mitigation for the removal of Dream Lake Dam and the subsequent draining of Dream Lake. Dream Lake Dam and Dream Lake were contributors to the Drakesbad Guest Ranch Historic District. According to the Programmatic Agreement (PA) between the National Park Service and the California State Historic Preservation Officer, signed in 2011, removal of the Dream Lake Dam, and the subsequent draining of the lake, would have an adverse effect on the historic district. NPS historian Christy Avery, Pacific West Regional Office-Seattle, prepared the documentation.



An aerial view of the southwestern portion of Lassen Volcanic National Park and of the Warner Valley, with Dream Lake near the center.



Lassen Volcanic National Park location map.



Drakesbad Guest Ranch location map.