The Department of the Interior said today that "people use" of Bureau of Reclamation reservoirs for recreational purposes reached a new record in 1968 with some 49.5 million visitor days of use recorded at 232 recreation areas around Bureau facilities, an increase of 1.6 million over the 1967 figure. Of the 1968 visitation, 48 percent was by local residents in the Western states. However, there was wide use by tourists from all over the United States and foreign countries.

According to the Bureau's 1968 "Crop Report and Related Data," just released, Lake Mead behind Hoover Dam on the Colorado River continued to attract the most recreation visitors. Lake Mead, key feature of the Lake Mead National Recreation Area, showed a 14 percent increase over 1967, climbing from 4.7 million visitor days to 5.4 million.

Jackson Lake Dam and Reservoir in Teton National Park in Wyoming, a water storage facility of Reclamation's Minidoka Project, climbed to second spot with 3.4 million visitor days, pulling ahead of Folsom Lake in California. Folsom Lake numbered one in 1966 with 4.4 million visitor days but dropped to third place in 1968 with 2.4 million visitor days, mostly as a result of low water levels.

During 1968, as in previous years, the largest recreation activity at Reclamation recreation areas was sightseeing (19.3 million), followed by fishing (8.5 million), camping (6.0 million), picnicking (5.5 million), boating (3.7 million), swimming (2.7 million), water skiing (2.3 million), hunting and other activities (1.5 million).
Land and water areas available to recreation seekers at Reclamation installations increased slightly during the year. Some 52,000 acres of land were added, bringing the total to 3.8 million acres; water surface totaled 1.7 million acres, surrounded by 11,400 miles of shoreline which was an increase of 38,100 water surface acres, and 21 miles of shoreline. Developed recreation facilities included 535 campgrounds; 23,800 tent and trailer spaces; 8,360 miles of roads; 100,600 parking spaces; 17,300 picnic tables; 176 swimming beaches; and 10,600 boat docks.

Five new recreation areas were opened during the year around four reservoirs and a diversion pool; Contra Loma and Red Bluff Diversion Dam in California; Mann Creek, Idaho; Helena Valley, Montana; and Phillips Lake, Oregon. They attracted some 41,500 visitor days, more than half at Contra Loma Reservoir, which is located near the heavily populated San Francisco Bay area.

Fishing, hunting, and fish and wildlife enhancement are important elements of the modern Reclamation program. Some 570,000 acres of Reclamation lands are devoted to refuges. During the year the duck count was 441.3 million, and the goose count was 68.9 million. The game catch included 19.5 million fish and 229,000 ducks and geese.

According to the Crop Report, during the decade that recreation statistics have been published, total visitor days at Reclamation project facilities, principally reservoirs, has increased 154 percent. This increase has been a significant part of the overall increase in recreation visits at all Federal recreation areas which rose from 332 million in 1960 to 537 million in 1965. Some 32 percent of the increase is credited to Department of the Interior areas. In 1965, the latest year for which such figures are available, about $3.7 billion worth of recreation expenditures for goods and services were generated by Department of the Interior areas. During the same year recreation-oriented spending totaled about $79 billion. By 1980 recreation use of Federal areas is expected to reach 850 million yearly, with, presumably, like increases in recreation-oriented spending.

The Crop Report contains a summary of a recent economic impact study of recreation at three Colorado-Big Thompson Project reservoirs which shows the reservoirs generate about $4.9 million worth of expenditures annually and recreation-related property value increases of $8.1 million over a 22-year period.

(Copies of the Crop Report and illustrations of recreational activities are available from the Bureau of Reclamation, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.)