Early Water Supply
Reservoir Canyon was identified very early in the history of the City of San Luis Obispo as a source of reliable water of good quality.

In the late 1800’s the private San Luis Obispo Water Company purchased about 200 acres of land in the canyon and constructed several small diversion dams to divert water out of the creek and a series of pipelines to carry the water to a distribution reservoir just below the canyon. The company also constructed an earthen dam at the mouth of the canyon to also capture water for distribution into the City’s water supply. It was this structure that gave the name Reservoir Canyon to the area. Prior to that time it had been known as Fillmore Canyon.

In 1900 the City of San Luis Obispo purchased the water company in its entirety and became the water purveyor for the community. At that time the water collection system consisted of several diversion structures on San Luis Obispo Creek and several of its tributaries, including Reservoir Canyon Creek, Hansen Creek, and Gularte Creek, as well as the dam on Reservoir Canyon Creek. The purchase of the water company also included property for a potential dam site on Stenner Creek. However, this dam was never built. These facilities continued to operate into the 1950’s. By this time the City had secured rights to water from the Salinas Reservoir, constructed in 1942 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as part of the war effort to supply water to Camp San Luis Obispo, which was a major training facility during the war. With such a large water supply available, the smaller local supplies became uneconomical to continue to operate and were eventually abandoned as part of the City's water supply.

Today all that remains of the local water supply system are remnants of a diversion dam on San Luis Obispo Creek, a few sections of pipeline, some remains of small concrete diversion dams in the tributary creeks, including Reservoir Canyon Creek, and the dam face at the mouth of Reservoir Canyon. The reservoir itself became silted in following the 1985 Las Pilitas Fire and today only holds a small volume of open water. Water still flows over the reservoir's outlet in a 15-foot waterfall, which is a popular walking destination for visitors.

As part of the 1994 General Plan update, the City Council formally declared that the Reservoir Canyon property would be kept as a portion of an open space system envisioned for the community. Since that time the 284-acre Hastings property, the 207-acre Bowden Ranch property, and the 89-acre Upper Goldtree Vineyard property have been added. Today, the total land area of Reservoir Canyon Natural Reserve is 783 acres.

La Loma Adobe History
La Loma Adobe is Reservoir Canyon Natural Reserve’s most notable cultural and historic feature, located near the top of Lizzie Street within the Reserve.

With La Loma Adobe when one considers the site and structure together as a historic landscape, our understanding becomes that much richer. It is typical to observe the presence of natural resources surrounding early settlements; it is likely that La Loma Adobe was constructed where it is because of the perennial spring that flows adjacent, the elevated views off-site to the Mission and the surrounding valley, and the proximity to game species and pasture for cattle.

City staff’s preliminary research is inconclusive as to how large the original land holding surrounding La Loma Adobe was. It is known that by the beginning of the early California period the La Virna property (which included La Loma Adobe) was large enough to support a substantial cattle operation when it transferred from Baptiste Garcia to the tenure of Estevan Quintana in 1852.

Following a dispute with the U.S. Land Grant Commission in 1853 in which Estevan Quintana’s claim that La Virna rancho was deeded by the Mexican government was denied, there was a subsequent exchange for a portion of La Virna rancho for 3,166 acres of the 3,506.33-acre Rancho Potrero de San Luis Obispo, which lay on Stenner Creek about five miles northeast. The exchange was made with Doña María Concepción Boronda de Muñoz, one of the prominent Boronda family of Monterey County, CA (Dana, 1970). It is also known that an additional quarter section of land (160 acres) adjacent to La Loma Adobe was homesteaded by the Boronda de Muñoz family in 1870 (Sanchez, 1998).