



BIRCH LAKES STATE FOREST

630 ACRES • ESTABLISHED 1963

FOREST LANDSCAPE: Birch Lakes State Forest, Minnesota's smallest state forest, is located in the deciduous forest biome. Visitors can hike through dense forests of maple, oak, and basswood and access Big Birch Lake. Topography is rolling to hilly, with shallow depressions that contain water.

A WORKING FOREST: From year to year, you may see changes in this forest. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources manages the trees, water, and wildlife in state forests to keep them healthy and meet recreational, environmental, and economic goals. Trees are harvested to make a variety of products, such as lumber and building materials, pulp for making paper, pallets, fencing, and utility poles. Through careful planning, harvesting, and planting, land managers work to improve wildlife habitat. The DNR manages state forests for everyone to use, while preventing wildfires and ensuring forests continue to keep air and water clean.

HISTORY: Birch Lakes State Forests is managed primarily for recreation. In 1959, citizens lobbied the Minnesota Legislature to create a park in Stearns County near Big Birch Lake. Nearly all of the lakeshore is privately developed, making the Big Birch Lake Campground and Day-Use Area are popular public destinations for camping, swimming, and hiking.

Big Birch Lake was created by glacial movement approximately 35,000 years ago. People have lived in this area for centuries. The Ojibwe referred to the lake as *ga wigwassensikag sagaiigun*, or "place of the little birches." Traces of an ancient fort were discovered along the shore in the mid-19th century. Between the mid-1800s and today, the lake went through several name changes, including Birch Bark Fort Lake, Fort Lake, Birch Lake, and finally Big Birch Lake.

The Minnesota Legislature established this state forest in 1963. With improved fire protection and active management, the forest today provides recreation, scenery, wildlife, watershed protection, raw materials, and jobs for the people of Minnesota.

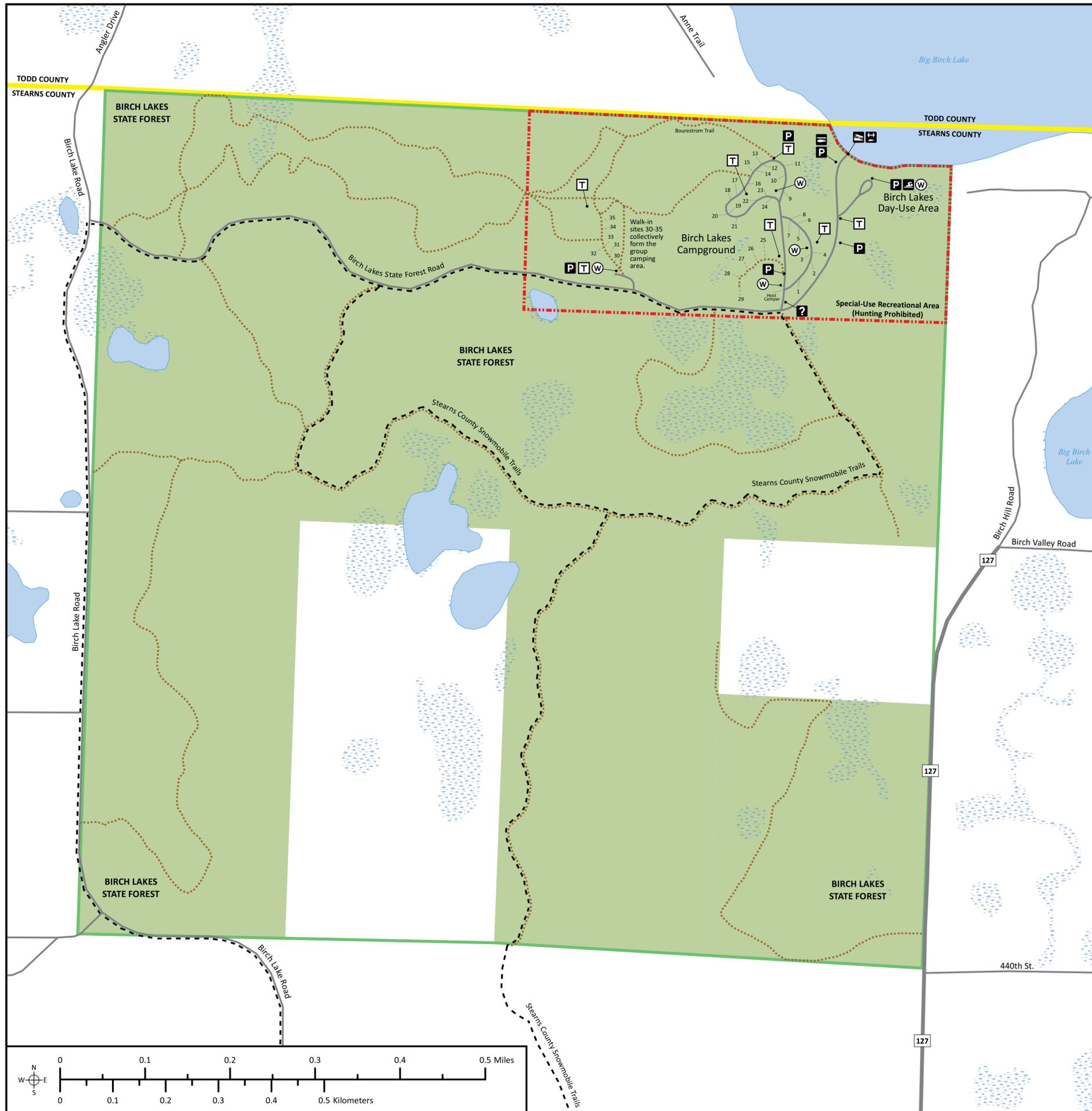
TREES: Uplands support stands of red oak, basswood, and aspen. Red maple and green ash are common understory trees. Tamarack may be found in lowland areas.

WILDLIFE: Mammals include white-tailed deer, squirrels (gray, fox, and red), raccoon, red fox, eastern cottontail, eastern chipmunk, woodchuck, beaver, coyote, skunk, and muskrat. Bird watchers may find ruffed grouse, wild turkey, along with woodpeckers, vireos, warblers, and a variety of woodland songbirds.

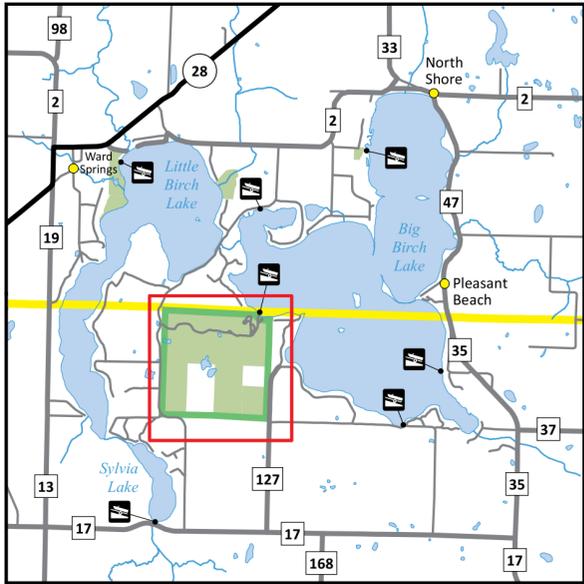
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BIRCH LAKES STATE FOREST



Roads and Trails

- State Highway (28)
- County Road (127)
- Other Road
- Hunter Walking Trail or Hiking Trail
- Snowmobile Trail

For more information on snowmobile trails, visit: mndnr.gov/snowmobiling

Places

- Landmark or Placename

Public Facilities

- Numbered Drive-In Campsite
- Numbered Walk-In Campsite
- Campsites 30-35 collectively form the group camping area.
- Trailer Access
- Fishing Pier
- Fish Cleaning Shelter
- Swimming
- Parking
- Information
- Vault Toilet
- Drinking Water

Ownership and Management

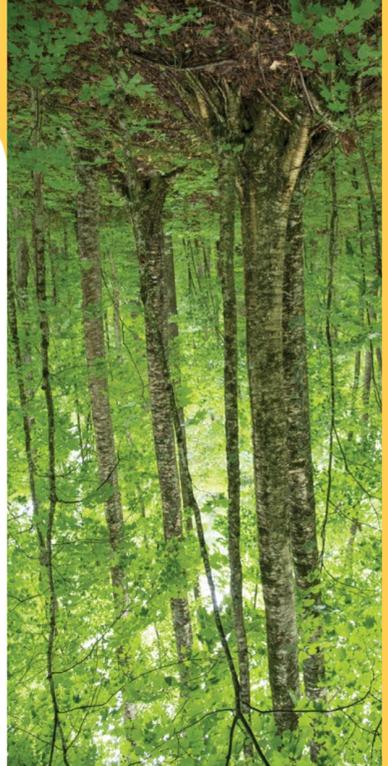
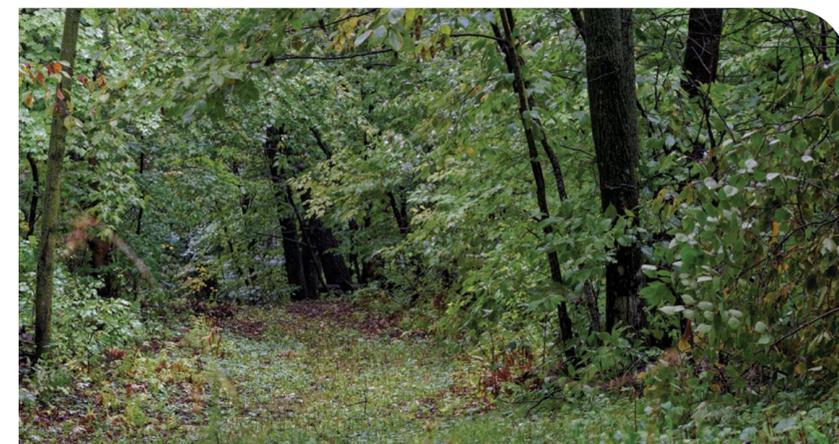
- Statutory Boundary of State Forest
- State Land
- No Hunting
- Private Land

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MAP AND GUIDE

CAMPING

NO DISPERSED CAMPING

Please practice the “Leave No Trace” camping ethic.

BIRCH LAKE CAMPGROUND AND DAY-USE AREA

This campground on the southwest shore of Big Birch Lake provides 200 yards of shoreline that attracts swimmers and picnickers. Campers may choose from 24 drive-in campsites, five walk-in campsites, and a group camp with several walk-in sites. There is a restroom, swimming beach, fishing pier, and boat access. For group camp reservations or other campground information, contact the Sauk Rapids DNR Office at 320-223-7841. No reservations (except for group campsites). Fees collected on site.

BOATING

Boaters, canoeists, and kayakers can access Big Birch Lake by using the public boat access near the campground. There are also several other public boat accesses on Big Birch and Little Birch lakes outside the state forest.

Register your canoe, kayak, or motorboat at mndnr.gov/licenses/watercraft

TRAILS

All trails and roads are open to hiking, horseback riding, and off-road biking, unless posted closed. Off-trail hiking, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing are also allowed.



BOURESTOM TRAILS

Five miles of trails wind through the 630-acre forest providing wildlife viewing in the summer and snowmobiling in the winter. The trail is open to cross-country skiing in the winter but is not groomed. No Great Minnesota Ski Pass required.

SNOWMOBILE TRAILS

Several miles of snowmobile trails (grant-in-aid) are open and groomed between December 1 and April 1 depending on snow conditions. Use caution at all times as logging operations often share the trails. Trails are marked with orange directional signs.

- Snowmobiles must be registered mndnr.gov/regulations/snowmobile
- Detailed trail maps are on mndnr.gov/state_trails/list.html

Stearns County Snowmobile Trail

Stearns County maintains a snowmobile trail through the forest. See the Minnesota DNR’s snowmobile map for more information.

OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE TRAIL CLASSIFICATION: CLOSED

All trails on state-managed lands are classified regarding motor vehicles. The Birch Lakes State Forest allows highway-licensed vehicles only on forest roads that are not posted or gated closed. Snowmobiles may operate on designated trails. No motorized use is allowed off roads and trails.



SCAN TO DOWNLOAD MAP

HUNTING AND TRAPPING

Birch Lakes State Forest provides habitat for hunting and trapping. In the appropriate season, licensed hunters can hunt for white-tailed deer, grouse, and wild turkey.

mndnr.gov/hunting

FIREARMS AND BOWS

Firearms and bows must be unloaded and cased while in or within 200 feet of a state recreation area (campground, day-use area, parking area, boat launch, etc.). Exception: During seasons open for hunting, a person may carry an unloaded, uncased firearm or strung bow from a forest recreation area to hunt outside of the area.

- Cutting shooting lanes is not allowed.
- Building permanent structures, including deer stands, is prohibited.
- For regulations about hunting, trapping, firearms, bows, limits, seasons, and deer stands on state-managed land, visit mndnr.gov/regulations/hunting
- For regulations about shooting on federally managed land, visit www.fs.fed.us/visit/know-before-you-go/shooting

FISHING

Big Birch Lake is 642 acres, has an average depth of 28 feet, and a maximum depth of 81 feet. Anglers can catch black crappie, bluegill, bullheads, hybrid sunfish, largemouth bass, pike, pumpkinseed, rock bass, smallmouth bass, sunfish, tullibee (cisco), walleye, perch, common carp, and redhorse in Big Birch Lake. Anglers must have a Minnesota fishing license and follow current fishing regulations.

- Avoid spreading invasive organisms such as zebra mussel larvae—which is found in Big Birch Lake—or spiny waterfleas by not transporting lake or river water, including in bait buckets. Pack out and dispose unused bait and live worms in trash containers where they can’t reach water or soil.
- Visit mndnr.gov/fishing for up-to-date regulations.
- Visit mndnr.gov/lakefind for current information on specific lakes.



RESPECT PRIVATE PROPERTY

Many state forests contain private land within their boundaries, so know where you are. Watch for posted “No Trespassing” and “No Hunting” signs and stay off private property. You must have permission before entering private land, even to cross it to access public land.

Trespassing is a misdemeanor. If convicted, you could lose your license to hunt. All conservation and peace officers enforce trespass laws.

RESPECT THE LAND

Whether you’re riding or walking, tread lightly on the land. Be courteous to others, respect private property, and obey the law.

LEAVE TROUBLE BEHIND

Help prevent the spread of invasive plants and animals.

- Clean your gear before entering and leaving the recreation site.
- Remove mud, seeds, and plants from clothes, pets, boots, gear, vehicles, and watercraft.
- Stay on designated trails.
- PlayCleanGo.org

GENERAL STATE FOREST RULES

Whether you are camping, hunting, riding, geocaching, skiing, or gathering berries, take care to leave the forest in good condition.

- Forest lands are open at all times unless otherwise posted.
- On state forest land, summer camping is limited to 14 days, and winter camping is limited to 21 days between the second Sunday in September and the first Saturday in May.
- Pack out what you pack in. Remove all personal property. Do not burn litter or garbage.
- Don’t leave equipment unattended for more than 24 hours.
- Building any permanent structures, including deer stands, is prohibited.
- Use firewood purchased from vendors who harvested firewood in the same county as the state forest or harvested in Minnesota and certified by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. Bring your receipt. You may also collect dead fuelwood on site. Kiln-dried, unstained, unpainted dimensional lumber free from metal or other foreign objects is also permitted. It is illegal to bring in any other firewood. These rules are to prevent accidentally introducing harmful pests such as emerald ash borer. mndnr.gov/firewood
- Fireworks are prohibited on all state and federal lands.
- Keep campfires no larger than 3 feet wide and 3 feet high. Attend the fire at all times. Completely extinguish fires before leaving the area. Ashes should be cold to the touch.
- Bury human waste (if toilets are not available) and animal parts such as fish guts at least 150 feet from a water body and away from areas where it could cause a nuisance or hazard to public health.
- Collecting berries, mushrooms, or dead fuelwood for personal use while in the forest is OK. However, collecting large amounts of these items to take home for personal use or sale requires a permit. Get permits from your local DNR forestry office. mndnr.gov/areas/forestry
- Unless posted closed, hiking, horseback riding, and off-road biking are allowed on all trails except groomed ski trails.
- This is a partial list of rules. For more information, visit the website listed below.

mndnr.gov/forestrules

BIRCH LAKES STATE FOREST MAP
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
info.dnr@state.mn.us
651-296-6157 | 888-646-6367
TDD
(Telecommunications Device for the Deaf)
651-296-5484 | 800-657-3929

DNR TIP LINE (Turn in poachers)
800-652-9093

EMERGENCY SERVICE – DIAL 911
STEARNS COUNTY SHERIFF
320-259-3700
TODD COUNTY SHERIFF
320-732-2157

NEAREST HOSPITAL SERVICES
CentraCare Melrose
320-256-4231

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