

RICE LAKE STATE PARK

FACILITIES AND FEATURES

• Campgrounds:

Rice Lake has a variety of camping facilities: a semi-modern campground with 42 sites to accommodate individual and family-sized groups; a primitive group camp to accommodate large groups (60+); 5 canoe-in sites, 5 walk-in sites; and 4 cart-in sites.

Semi-modern campsites have a picnic table, fire ring and parking space. Many sites also have a tent pad. Rice Lake's campgrounds are served by flush toilets, showers, and 16 electrical sites. Running water is supplied at the sanitation building.

The primitive group camp has picnic tables, tent sites, and a fire ring.

• Picnic Grounds:

Rice Lake's picnic grounds have tables, fire rings, running water, toilets, playground equipment and a picnic shelter.

• Public Water Access:

A water access to Rice Lake is available in the park. A parking lot is provided.

• Phone:

A public pay phone is available outside the park office.

VISITOR FAVORITES:

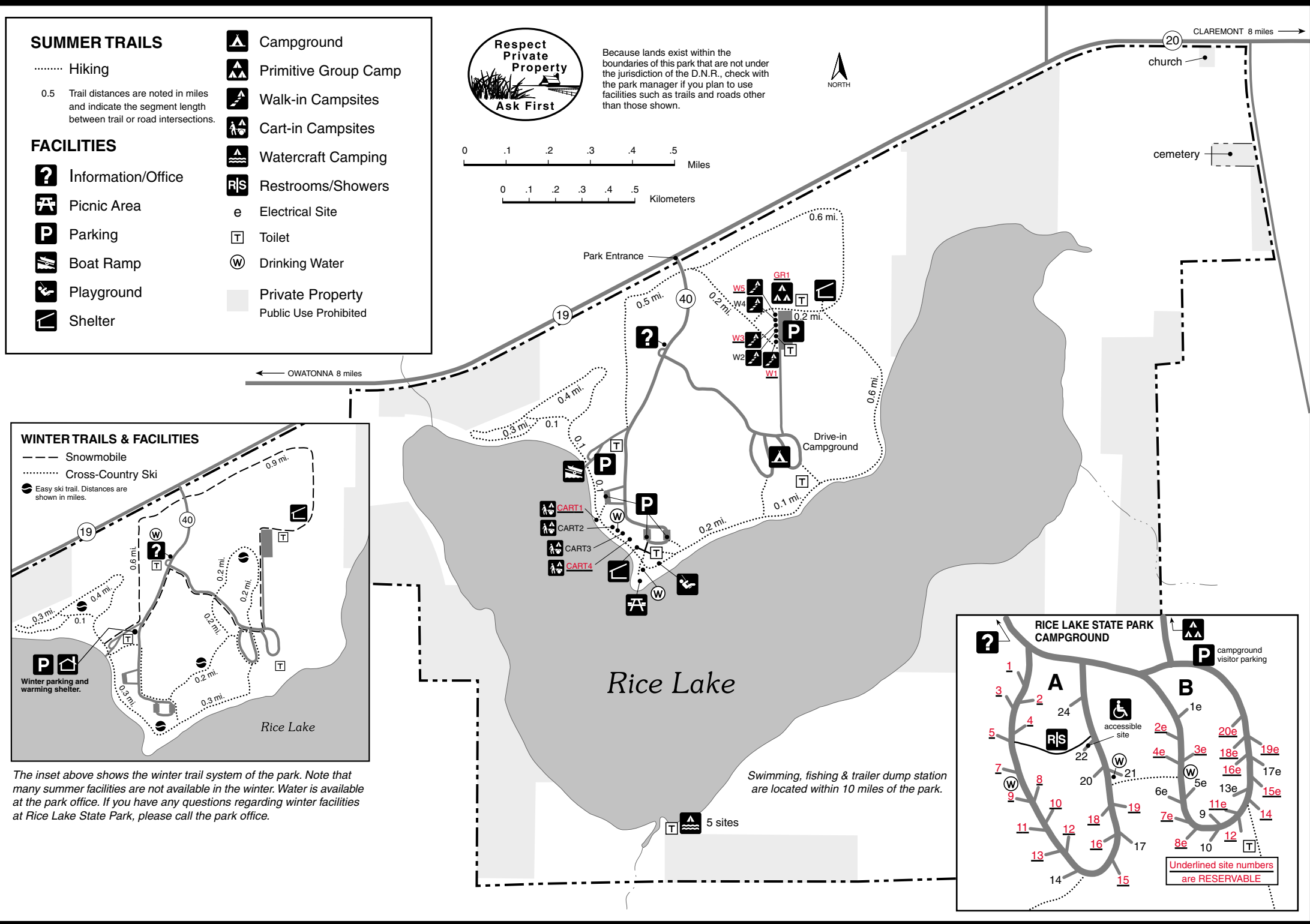
- Spring wildflowers
- Waterfowl migrations (spring & fall)
- Wildlife observation

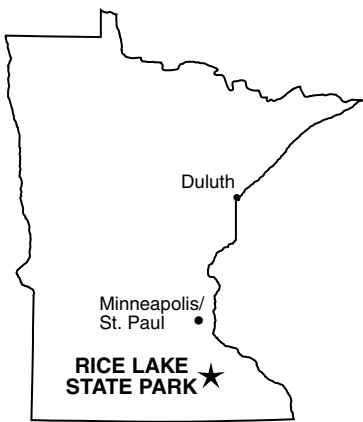
LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION ?

The DNR has mapped the state showing federal, state and county lands with their recreational facilities.

Public Recreation Information Maps (PRIM) are available for purchase from the DNR gift shop, DNR regional offices, Minnesota state parks and major sporting and map stores.

Check it out - you'll be glad you did.





RICE LAKE STATE PARK

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Rice Lake State Park
8485 Rose Street
Owatonna, MN 55060
(507) 455-5871

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Department of Natural Resources
Information Center
500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, MN 55155-4040

(651) 296-6157 (Metro Area)
1-888-646-6367 (MN Toll Free)

TDD (Telecommunications
Device for Deaf)
(651) 296-5484 (Metro Area)
1-800-657-3929 (MN Toll Free)

DNR Web Site: www.dnr.state.mn.us
State Parks page: www.mnstateparks.info

RICE LAKE STATE PARK is located seven miles east of Owatonna on Steele County Highway 19. State highway map index K-20.

The land known today as Rice Lake State Park was originally located in a vast oak savanna, known as Minnesota's southern oak barrens. These oak barrens covered about seven percent of the state extending from the Twin Cities on the north to the Iowa border and beyond. It formed a broad transition zone between the prairies to

the west and the deciduous forests to the east.

Originally, the dominant vegetation of this area was prairie with occasional groves and scattered individual oak trees – principally burr oaks. Today, remnants of the oaks still remain at Rice Lake State Park. The prairie vegetation has disappeared, however, a victim of its own ability for producing the rich topsoil so highly prized by white settlers for farming. These soils were some of the richest in the state and were utilized to such an extent that today, almost none of the vegetation that made it remains. There are a few exceptions; scattered remnants along railroad grades and in and around old cemeteries such as the one located at the east boundary of the park.

The destruction of the original vegetation of the southern oak barrens was so complete that today it is the rarest community type in Minnesota. Remnants of the original oak overstory can be found in many places, but the original prairie vegetation once found beneath has been replaced, usually by alien species.

GEOLOGY: Five hundred million years ago, a shallow sea covered much of North America, including southwestern Minnesota. On its bed layers of sediment turned to rock, hundreds of feet thick. The bedrock of this area is identical to that found to the east in Minnesota's bluffslands – however, in Steele County it is exposed in only one location along the Straight River. The bedrock in the remainder of the county has since been covered by heavy deposits of glacial drift carried by the ice ages that covered Minnesota from a period about two million years ago up until 10,000 years ago. During this period of time, ice advanced across Minnesota many times. Several early glaciations covered most of Minnesota with thick deposits of glacial till, an unsorted mixture of rocks, sand, and clay; and outwash, sand and gravel washed out of the glacier by water from the melting ice.

The most recent glacial period, lasting from about 40,000 to 10,000 years ago, is called the late Wisconsin glaciation. Most of the glacier passed to the west of the park, reaching as far south as Des Moines, Iowa. Meltwater flowing from under the eastern side of the glacier eroded channels in the older glacial deposits. A low area now occupied by Rice Lake was eroded where the water emerged from under the ice. (There are two intertwined channels, crossing under eastern Rice Lake). The ice uncovered lower ground to the west as the ice melted, so the western part of the

channel system is now occupied by the west-flowing Maple Creek. In the 1870's a barrier was placed at this outlet to create higher water levels to fuel a water powered flour milling operation east of the lake near Wasioja. The eastern outlet drains into the South Branch, Middle Fork of the Zumbro River. Rice Lake is on the divide, and once fed both drainages in historical time.

Many small gravel pits have been opened to mine the outwash that lines the channels. This outwash also conducts groundwater, which emerges as springs into the lake.

PREHISTORY: Ages before the white settlers came to the area, the Indians established camp sites here for food gathering, especially much sought after wild rice, which once grew in, and gave Rice Lake its name. They continued to return here even after they relinquished their land at the Treaty of Mendota in 1851, and after white settlement had begun in 1854. Their well-traveled trails were quite evident. One in particular was mentioned by early white settlers as running southeast from Rice Lake, perhaps to a wooded area on another branch of the Zumbro River. Here, sheltered from the prairie winds, a native hunter would have found all manner of wild game, and where stealth and bow and arrow could be most effective.

HISTORY: Rice Lake is a headwater source for the Zumbro River, its outlet forming the South Branch of the Middle Fork. One aspect of the lake's history is that its outlets were dammed and diked for the purposes of providing energy for the water-powered mill located further to the east at Wasioja. Even with the dikes and dams constructed to increase the water-holding capacity of Rice Lake, it occasionally became depleted, requiring the mill to periodically shut down. Set in motion by progress and technology, the economics of the operation finally forced the mill to close.

An earlier attempt at harnessing the prairie winds to grind flour had been made in 1874 at the pioneer town of Clairmont where a large windmill was constructed in 1874. In 1891, the mill caught fire and burned to the ground, ending its brief history. Clairmont got its name from "Claremont Street" a road located east of the present park. The first settlers here were from Claremont, New Hampshire and preempted long narrow claims along the road or "street" so they could live close together. North of the park boundaries, a stage-coach route followed the "Ridge Road" in the

mid-1800s. There was a promising young village of Rice Lake on this road, but the railroads came, and other newer towns hired away all that was or could have been to other places of promise. All that remains of the town of Rice Lake today is the Rice Lake Church built in 1857, which is located on the north boundary of the park along Dodge County Highway 20.

WILDLIFE: One of the highlights of Rice Lake State Park is the bird life that can be seen here, especially during the spring and fall migrations. The park contains a variety of habitats – marsh, lake, meadow, and woods – and is attractive to a large number and diversity of birds. The forested areas attract migrating woodland species as well as a large population of summer and year-round residents that nest in the park. Seven species of woodpecker have been observed in the park including Minnesota's largest, the pileated woodpecker. While walking through the woods, watch for the large oval-shaped cavities in dead trees made by this crow-sized woodpecker as he digs carpenter ants, a favored food, from their galleries.

Rice Lake is very attractive to waterfowl because of its shallow nature and marsh edges. It is the only lake of any size for many miles that water-oriented migrating birds can use to stop, rest, and feed. As a result the lake is an excellent place to come and observe the migrations of waterfowl, especially during the spring months. Flocks of whistling swans, Canada, snow, and blue geese, diving and surface-feeding ducks have been recorded in the past.

Many areas that were used for agriculture before their purchase for use as a park are meadows, presently planted with alien-tame grasses. In the future, the vegetation-management program of the Division of Parks and Recreation will be reestablishing some of the original prairie vegetation species on these areas. This will be advantageous in providing better-quality nesting cover for the species of birds that made their homes in the prairies once found in the park.

TRAILS: Park trails provide visitors with an opportunity to explore the natural and historic features of the park.

There are four miles (4.8 km.) of hiking trails through Rice Lake State Park. These take you through deciduous woods, meadows and along the edge of Rice Lake itself. The 3.5 miles (5.6 km) of cross-country ski trails offer opportunities to quietly observe animal tracks and perhaps a

glimpse of one of the many deer which inhabit the park. In addition there are 1.5 miles (2.4 km) of snowmobile trails.

SO EVERYONE CAN ENJOY THE PARK. . .

State parks were established to preserve natural and aesthetic features and to help meet the diverse recreational and educational needs of park visitors. All park visitors have an obligation to preserve these features. Please observe the rules designed to keep our parks clean and to protect plants and wildlife.

- Minnesota law requires park permits on all motor vehicles entering a state park. Permits can be purchased at all state parks.
- The park is closed, except to registered campers from 10:00 P.M. until 8:00 A.M. of the following day. Loud noises or other disturbances in the campgrounds are prohibited after 10:00 P.M.
- Visitors to the park are asked to respect animals and plants that live there. Do not pick plants, disturb animals, dig trenches, or scavenge dead wood.
- Pets are prohibited from all park areas, except when restrained on a leash six feet or less in length. Pets may not enter buildings.
- The use of firearms, explosives, air guns, slingshots, traps, seines, nets, bows and arrows, and all other weapons are prohibited in state parks.
- Bikes and other licensed vehicles are allowed only on designated roads, not on park trails.

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This information is available in alternative format upon request.

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