



The Milan Bridge was built as part of the Lac qui Parle Flood Control Project in 1938 and replaced in 2020. The extensive stone bridgeheads were restored in 2021.

Lac qui Parle Flood Control Project

The Lac qui Parle (LQP) Flood Control Project was built during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The workers were unemployed men hired under a federal jobs program called the Works Progress Administration or WPA.

The LQP Flood Control Project was one of the largest public works projects in Minnesota history. It was also the state's largest flood control project in terms of cost, complexity, and geographic area.

Designed to reduce flooding along the Minnesota River, the Project extended for 60 miles from Odessa to Granite Falls. It covered 25,000 acres of land. Government partners included the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the State of Minnesota, and others.

Most of the Project was built over eight years from 1933-1941. The work was interrupted by World War II and then completed after the war in the late 1940s and early 1950s.



Works Progress Administration poster from about 1936.



Restored stonework at the Milan Bridge. The original bridge, built in 1938, was replaced in 2020.

Goals of the LQP Flood Control Project

- Reduce flooding in river cities like Montevideo and Mankato
- Conserve water during times of drought
- Create lakes, parks, and hunting grounds for public use
- Provide jobs and training to the unemployed

During the Great Depression of the 1930s the unemployment rate in the U.S. was nearly 25%. Like other “New Deal” government projects, the LQP Flood Control Project was designed to create jobs while at the same time building necessary public infrastructure.

At its peak in 1937, more than 1,000 men were working on the LQP Project. Many of the workers slept in wooden barracks in large work camps built near Lac qui Parle Dam and Marsh Lake Dam.

1936 view of the WPA Work Camp that stood near Lac qui Parle Dam.



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Fishing on the south side of the Lac qui Parle Dam about 1940.



Brass plaques like this are mounted on the Project's four dams and at Lac qui Parle State Park's Lower Campground.

Accomplishments of the LQP Flood Control Project

- Built the Lac qui Parle Dam, Marsh Lake Dam, and several smaller dams, dikes, and canals
- Created two large reservoirs called Lac qui Parle Lake and Marsh Lake
- Made changes to the Minnesota, Pomme de Terre, Chippewa, and Lac qui Parle Rivers
- Rebuilt parts of two railroads and many roads and highways to lift them above flood stage
- Built scenic drives, bridges, and causeways
- Created hundreds of acres of park land – including Lac qui Parle State Park – with swimming beaches, picnic areas, campgrounds, and a historic site
- Preserved thousands of acres of land for public hunting and wildlife habitat



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Building one of the dams in 1936.



Lac qui Parle Dam, completed in 1941.



Restoring the stonework at the Milan Bridge in 2021.



The Project built two small dams and dredged the bottom of the “Watson Sag,” shown here, so high water from the Chippewa River would flow into Lac qui Parle Lake rather than flooding Montevideo and other cities.



Stone staircase on the causeway just west of the Milan Bridge. The WPA built the staircase around 1939. It was restored in 2021.

Places to Visit (see map below)

Dams and Reservoirs

The largest dam is the Lac qui Parle Dam, completed in 1941. It holds back the Minnesota River to create Lac qui Parle Lake. 17 miles to the north is Marsh Lake Dam, also completed in 1941, which creates Marsh Lake. The LQP Project also built two smaller dams, the Chippewa Control Works (1936) and Watson Sag Weir (1937), which divert high water from the Chippewa River into Lac qui Parle Lake to prevent floodwaters from reaching Montevideo and other cities.

Stone Bridgeheads, Staircases, and Riprap

WPA workers hand-placed thousands of square yards of granite “riprap” throughout the Project to protect ditches, banks, and shorelines. A good example is at the Milan Bridge on State Highway 40 which crosses Lac qui Parle Lake on a riprapped causeway. In 2021 the causeway’s stone staircases and the stonework at the ends of the bridge were restored. The waves proved too strong for the unmortared riprap and as a result there are areas of restored historic mortar and non-historic random mortar along the causeway.



Scenic drive on the east side of Lac qui Parle Lake. Lac qui Parle Mission State Wayside is on the right.



Stone and timber picnic shelter at Watson State Scenic Wayside (now Watson Lions Park), completed in 1939.



Stone and timber building in the Lower Campground at Lac qui Parle State Park. Inside is a 45-foot-long model of the flood control project built by the WPA workers.



Hand-placed granite riprap at Marsh Lake Dam. Workers laid this stone riprap in many places in the Lac qui Parle Project to protect banks from erosion. Some stones have drill marks leftover from the men hand-splitting the rock.

Scenic Drives

The LQP Flood Control Project built scenic drives on the west and east shores of Lac qui Parle Lake. They are LQP County Road 33 and the south part of Chippewa County Road 32.

Parks

The Project built seven parks and recreation areas. Two of the parks have impressive timber and stone structures:

- Lac qui Parle State Park’s stone and timber buildings are located in the Lower Campground just west of Lac qui Parle Dam. They were completed in 1941.
- Watson State Scenic Wayside, now called Watson Lions Park, is located 3.75 miles east of Lac qui Parle Dam. Its stone and timber structures were completed in 1939.

At the Lac qui Parle Mission State Wayside, completed in 1942, the WPA built a replica of an 1830s church used by Christian missionaries living among the Dakota people.



One of the buildings in Lac qui Parle State Park's Lower Campground. The stone craftsmanship is excellent.



Boats on the east shore of Lac qui Parle Lake. This photo was taken about 1945 at Milan Beach Resort at the east end of the Milan Bridge.

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WPA workers made concrete fence posts which they installed in a 3-mile line along the southwest boundary of the Flood Control Project. The posts can be seen on the west side of LQP County Road 33 near the LQP State Park Lower Campground.

Things to Know

- The Lac qui Parle Dam raised the level of the Minnesota River about 8 feet to create Lac qui Parle Lake.
- The granite used in the Lac qui Parle Project was cut by hand. On some of the stones you can see the marks from the drills the workers used when they hand-split the rock.
- The WPA built a 45-foot-long model of the Flood Control Project that is on display in the Lower Campground in LQP State Park.
- On the west side of LQP County Road 33 there is a three-mile line of concrete fence posts. They were made and installed by the WPA workers in 1939 to mark the southwest boundary of the Flood Control Project.
- Dakota people (*Pejuhutazizi Oyate*) and their ancestors have been living near Lac qui Parle and elsewhere along the Upper Minnesota River for thousands of years.

Lac qui Parle Flood Control Project - Places to Visit

Mille Lacs to Watson Segment

