

BOWSTRING, BATTLEGROUND AND WELSH LAKE STATE FORESTS

BOWSTRING STATE FOREST
526,285 ACRES

BATTLEGROUND STATE FOREST
17,969 ACRES

WELSH LAKE STATE FOREST
19,798 ACRES

ESTABLISHED 1963

FOREST LANDSCAPES: Bisected by the Mississippi River and dotted with innumerable small lakes, as well as the large Leech and Winnibigoshish lakes, this area is home to spectacular forests of towering trees, abundant game, and seasonal berries. These forests are located between Bemidji and Grand Rapids and popular for cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, hunting, fishing, boating, and birdwatching.

A WORKING FOREST: From year to year, you may see changes in these forests. The DNR 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 telephone poles. Through careful planning, harvesting, and planting, land managers work to improve wildlife habitat. The DNR manages state forests for everyone, while preventing wildfires and ensuring forests continue to keep air and water clean.

HISTORY: The two large lakes in the area—Leech and Winnibigoshish—were formed around 10,000 years ago by huge blocks of ice left behind by receding glaciers. Abundant wild rice grows in the area's many lakes and rivers. Evidence of human life—hunting, fishing, settling, and harvesting wild rice—date back at least 1,000 years. In the 1600s, the Dakota had communities on Leech Lake. Beginning in the middle 1700s, the Mississippi and Pillager bands of Ojibwe arrived, along with French fur traders who set up Northwest Company trading posts in the area. Treaties in 1847, 1855, and 1864 later ceded Indian lands to the new state of Minnesota and established the boundaries of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Indian Reservation. The Battle of Sugar Point was fought in 1898 between the 3rd U.S. Infantry and members of the Pillager Band of Chippewa (Ojibwe). Between 1880 and 1920 timber barons claimed the land and removed millions of board feet of pine. In the 1940s the Civilian Conservation Corps planted millions of trees and improved opportunities for recreation and sustainable future harvests. Also, dams constructed in the early 1900s greatly increased the area of Cass Lake and Lake Winnibigoshish.

TREES: Aspen, maple, ash, oak, and balsam fir cover much of the forest. White, red, and jack pine grow on sandier soils. Other conifers include spruce, cedar, and tamarack.

WILDLIFE: Game species include white-tailed deer, black bear, ruffed grouse, woodcock, and furbearers. Other species include gray wolf, bobcat, beaver, fisher, pine marten, trumpeter swan, mink, muskrat, otter, snowshoe hare, eagle, and wood frog. More than 200 species of birds have been found in the area.

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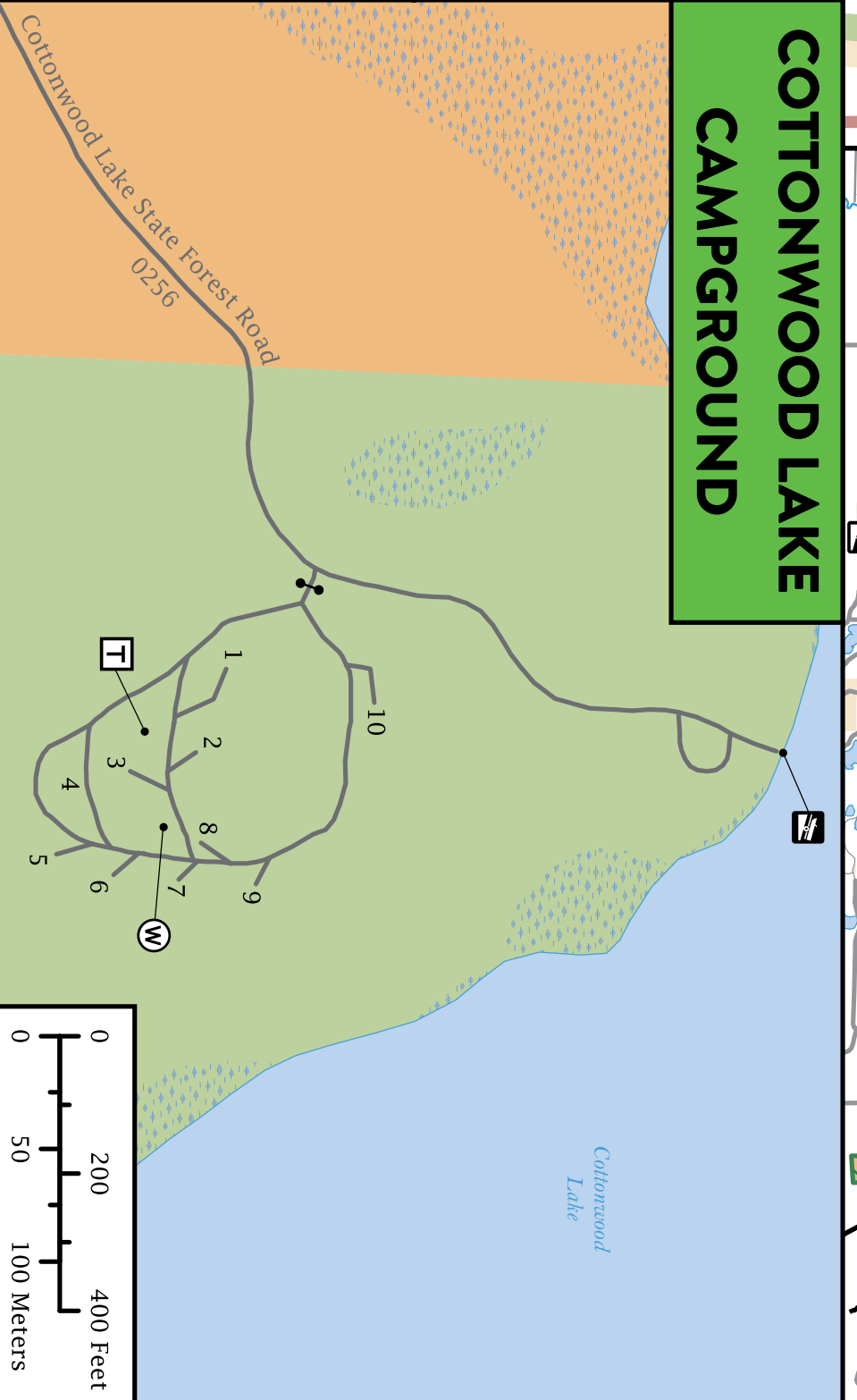
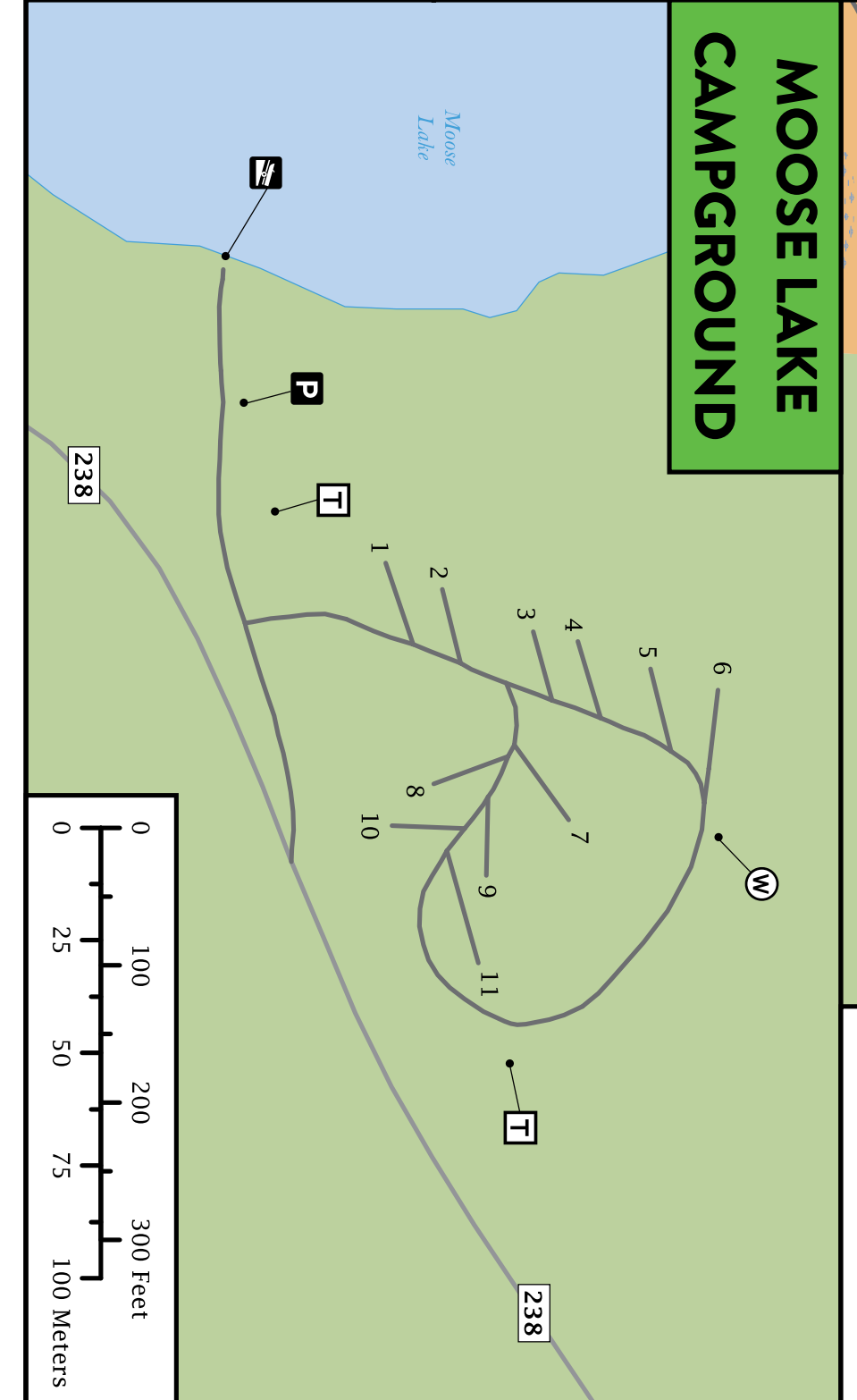
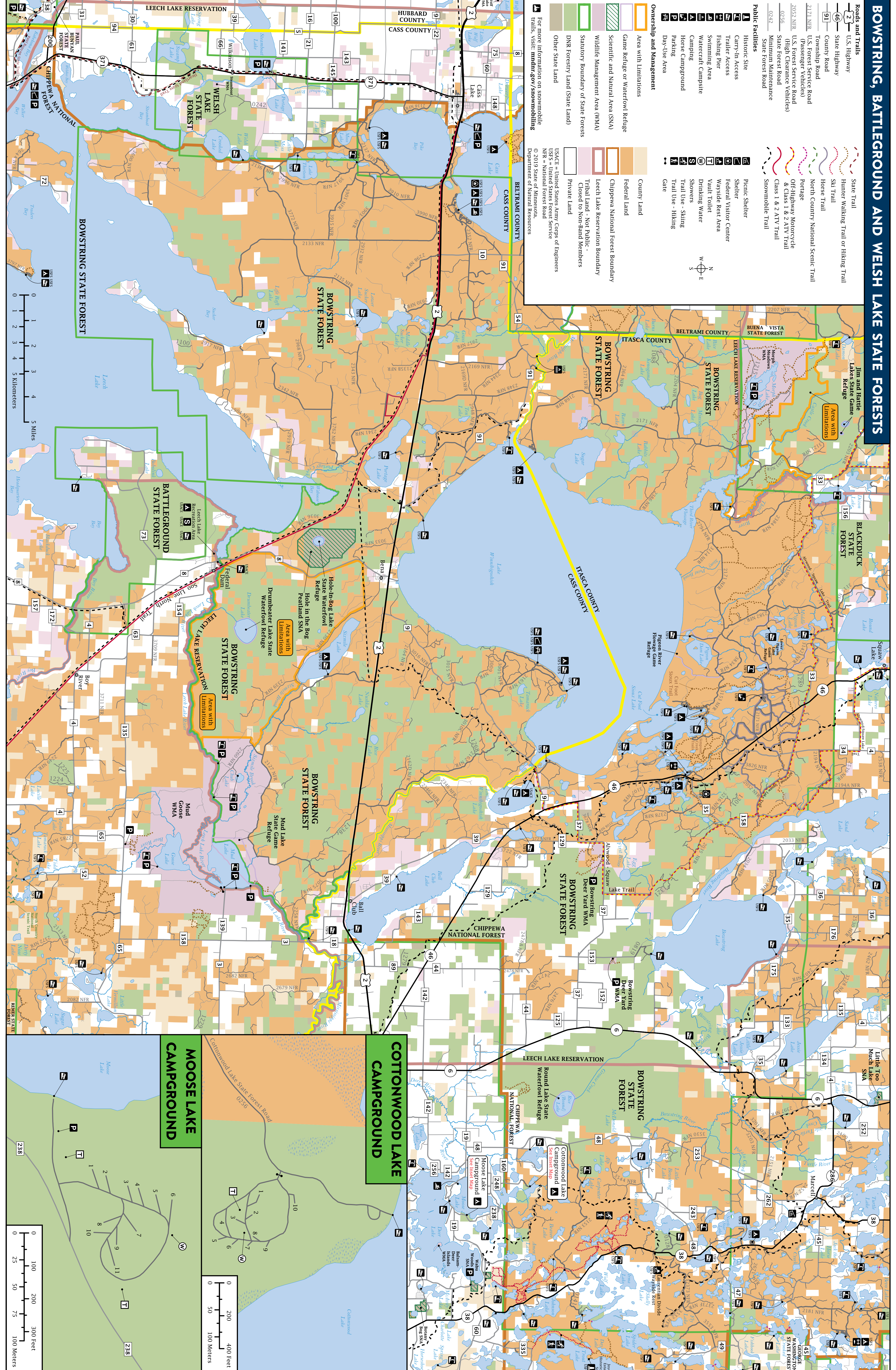
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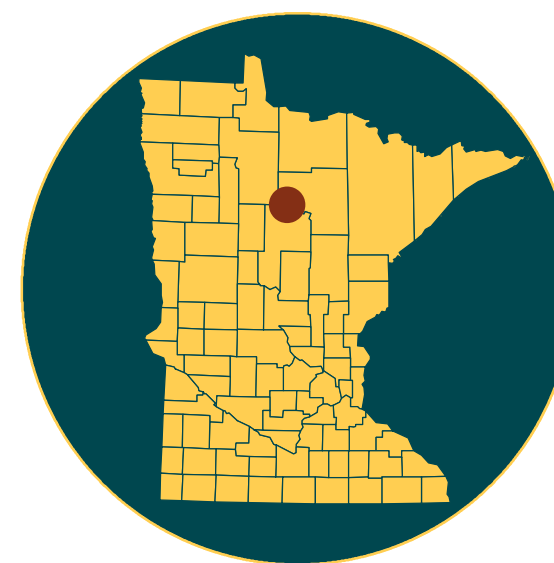
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Carol Henderson

CAMPING

COTTONWOOD LAKE CAMPGROUND – BOWSTRING STATE FOREST

This heavily wooded, remote campground is close to the lake, but not right on the water. Campsites have access to vault toilet, drinking water, and public boat launch. First-come, first-served. Fee charged on site.

MOOSE LAKE CAMPGROUND – BOWSTRING STATE FOREST

With 11 primitive campsites, two vault toilets, drinking water, and nearby boat launch, this campground is nestled close to Moose Lake, which features excellent fishing for walleye and muskellunge. First-come, first-served. Fee charged on site.

LEECH LAKE RECREATION AREA – U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

Located within the Chippewa National Forest, this recreation area has 316 miles of shoreline, including boat access to Portage Bay, famous for perch, walleye, and muskellunge. The campground offers 73 wooded sites with electric hookups, including five sites with full hookups. Additionally there are 4 walk-in sites, picnic shelters, playgrounds, flush toilets, and many other amenities. Fee charged. [Recreation.gov](http://recreation.gov)

LAKE WINNIBIGOSHISH RECREATION AREA – U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

Located on the east shore of Lake Winnibigoshish next to the dam, this area has 22 campsites, toilets, showers, playground, and picnic shelters. Visitors can camp, picnic, boat, fish, and use playgrounds. Reservations accepted. Fee charged. [Recreation.gov](http://recreation.gov)

CHIPPEWA NATIONAL FOREST CAMPGROUNDS

The U.S. Forest Service administers several campgrounds in the area. All campsites have a cleared area for a tent, fire ring, access to drinking water, and vault toilets. Some have electric hook-ups, access to showers, flush toilets, swimming beaches, and boat ramps. Camping in a Chippewa National Forest campground is limited to 14 days, year-round. Fee charged. fs.usda.gov/activity/chippewa/recreation/camping-cabins

DISPERSED CAMPING

Dispersed camping with no amenities or fees is allowed in state and federal forests at least one mile outside of a designated campground. Within Wildlife Management Areas, camping is allowed at signed, designated sites.

CHIPPEWA NATIONAL FOREST DISPERSED CAMPSITES

Several dispersed campsites are located in the national forest, including near the Joyce Estate Historical Site on Trout Lake. Camping is limited to 21 days. Get maps from the local U.S. Forest Service office. Reservations required in the Chippewa National Forest. recreation.gov

BOATING

Several boat accesses are located in the area, including on the Mississippi River and Cass, Winnibigoshish, and Leech lakes.

Avoid disrupting areas with wild rice, especially in late summer.

Register your watercraft at mndnr.gov/licenses/watercraft

TRAILS

Hiking, biking, and horseback riding are allowed on state and federal forest trails and roads unless posted closed to that use. Off-trail hiking, skiing, and snowshoeing are allowed in winter. A Great Minnesota Ski Pass is required on designated ski trails. mndnr.gov/licenses/skipass

CUT FOOT SIOUX HORSE TRAIL

– **CHIPPEWA NATIONAL FOREST**
Horse riders can enjoy 18 miles of wooded trails and more than 100 miles of low-use roads starting from the Cut Foot Sioux Horse Campground.

SUOMI HILLS TRAILS

– **CHIPPEWA NATIONAL FOREST**
This 19-mile mowed trail system winds through rolling hills. Located 9 miles south of Marcell along State Highway 38. Open to hikers and mountain bikers. Groomed for cross-country skiing in winter.

<https://go.usa.gov/xmgxD>

SIMPSON CREEK TRAIL

– **CHIPPEWA NATIONAL FOREST**
Hikers and bikers can enjoy this 13-mile trail winding through pines and hills. With overlooks to Cut Foot Sioux Lake, and journeys into cedar swamps, the route offers good opportunities to view bald eagles, ospreys, and loons during spring through fall. Winter trails are not groomed for skiing, but they are kept clear and in good condition for beginning and intermediate skiers.

Visit fs.usda.gov/recrea/chippewa for more information and maps about the Chippewa National Forest.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER STATE WATER TRAIL

Popular with canoers and kayakers, this trail winds through conifer forests and bisects Winnibigoshish and Leech lakes. Paddlers should take caution on the large lakes, especially in any kind of wind. For information on water levels, outfitters, licenses and fees, current conditions, and water trail maps, visit mndnr.gov/watertrails/mississippiriver/two.html

NORTH COUNTRY NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

This trail is complete all the way across Hubbard County through Itasca State Park and into Becker County to the Hubble Pond Wildlife Management Area. Eventually, the trail will link to a larger corridor similar to the Appalachian Trail that will traverse more than 4,000 miles through seven northern states from North Dakota to New York. For interactive maps and to download GIS/GPS data, visit <http://northcountrytrail.org/Minnesota>.

SNOWMOBILE TRAILS

Winter visitors can enjoy hundreds of miles of marked, groomed snowmobile trails.

Snowmobile trails are open between December 1 and March 31. Some parts of the trail may be groomed and other parts may be plowed for logging activities. Trails are marked with orange signs.

- For maps, visit mndnr.gov/snowmobiling/interactive_map
- Snowmobiles must be registered. mndnr.gov/regulations/snowmobile

OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE TRAILS

Off-highway vehicle (OHV) trail seasons vary and may close temporarily.

Wildlife Management Areas are closed to all-terrain (ATVs) and off-road vehicles (ORVs).

SOO LINE TRAIL
ATV riders can enjoy the flat Soo Line Trail that extends between the towns of Cass Lake and Moose Lake.

mndnr.gov/maps/ohv/sooline_north.pdf

- Non-residents must have an ATV trails pass. findthetrails.com
- ATVs, ORVs, and off-road motorcycles must be registered. mndnr.gov/licenses/ohv

- Visit mndnr.gov/ohv for up-to-date rules, maps, and trail and road closures.

OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE

CLASSIFICATION: LIMITED, CLOSED
All trails on state-managed lands are classified regarding motor vehicles.

Bowstring State Forest is classified as "limited," allowing OHVs, ATVs, and off-highway motorcycles on signed and mapped routes open for that type of OHV use. Off-road traffic is prohibited, except when needed to retrieve big game when hunting and trapping during the proper season and with the proper license. mndnr.gov/regulations/ohv

Battleground and Welsh Lake state forests are classified as "closed." OHVs are not allowed.

Highway-licensed vehicles are allowed on all state forest roads.

OHV USE IN CHIPPEWA NATIONAL FOREST

OHV riders may use federal forest roads that are posted open.

HUNTING AND TRAPPING

State forests provide opportunities for hunting and trapping. In the appropriate season, licensed hunters can hunt for big and small game. mndnr.gov/hunting

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe regulates Tribal Members' hunting and fishing within the Leech Lake Reservation. Please be respectful as Tribal seasons and Minnesota regulated seasons differ in length and starting dates.

FIREARMS AND BOWS

Firearms must be unloaded and cased and bows must be unstrung and cased while in or within 200 feet of any recreation area (campground, day-use area, parking area, boat launch, etc.).

Cutting shooting lanes is not allowed on any state or federal land.

Building permanent structures, including deer stands, is prohibited.

For a complete list of regulations about hunting, trapping, firearms, bows, limits, seasons, and deer stands on state-managed land, visit mndnr.gov/regulations/hunting

For regulations about shooting in the Chippewa National Forest, visit fs.fed.us/visit/know-before-you-go/shooting

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

State Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) are managed to establish and perpetuate quality wildlife habitat to produce a variety of species, particularly harvestable species, emphasizing wildlife that lives in wetlands and young forests. They are also managed to provide opportunities for public hunting, trapping, and wildlife observation.

WMA maps: mndnr.gov/maps/compass

WMA information: mndnr.gov/wmas

WMA HIGHLIGHT: MUD GOOSE WMA

This 17,000-acre WMA is a mixture of forest, shallow lakes, and wet meadows. The unit is managed to improve forest wildlife and waterfowl habitat, with special emphasis on wild rice. The Mud Lake Dam on the Leech Lake River manages water levels. Mud and Goose lakes are important for ring-neck ducks. The northwest side of Mud Lake is a game refuge. This WMA features hunter walking trails, wild rice harvesting, and shore fishing at the Mud Lake Dam.

WMA HIGHLIGHT:

BOWSTRING DEER YARD

This 484-acre WMA consists of two parcels that are four miles apart. Both parcels contain deer wintering areas, and the WMA's primary purpose is to preserve and enhance deer habitat. Hunter walking trails extend onto other public lands open to hunting. Habitat is managed through commercial timber harvests and shearing lowland brush to attract woodcock and ruffed grouse.

AQUATIC MANAGEMENT AREAS

Aquatic Management Areas (AMAs) provide water access to anglers and managers, while protecting critical shore land habitat and providing areas for education and research. AMA rules are similar to WMA rules. mndnr.gov/amas

FISHING

Anglers may find muskellunge, northern pike, walleye, and panfish in area lakes. Some lakes may have special provisions or restrictions on fishing in state and national forests. You must have the proper license and abide by the same rules and seasons as anywhere else in Minnesota.

Avoid spreading invasive organisms such as zebra mussel larvae or spiny waterfleas by not transporting lake or river water, including in bait buckets. Pack out unused bait and live worms or dispose 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.

SCIENTIFIC AND NATURAL AREAS

Scientific and Natural Areas (SNAs) protect natural features of exceptional scientific or educational value including native plant communities, rare species, and significant geological features. Visitors may enjoy the undisturbed natural quality of these sites, however, most SNAs have no trails, restrooms, or drinking water. SNAs do not allow camping, vehicles, or collecting plants and animals. SNAs do allow birding and wildlife watching, hiking, photography, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing.

HOLE IN THE BOG PEATLAND SNA

Located between Winnibigoshish and Leech lakes, this SNA is a world of hummocks and hollows, with expansive carpets of sphagnum mosses and black spruce bogs. Scattered tamarack appear in more open areas. Shrub include Labrador tea, leather leaf, and bog laurel. Walk in from the parking area on Cass County 8. It is important to tread gently. The delicate vegetation is easily damaged from visitor use.

NEARBY RECREATION

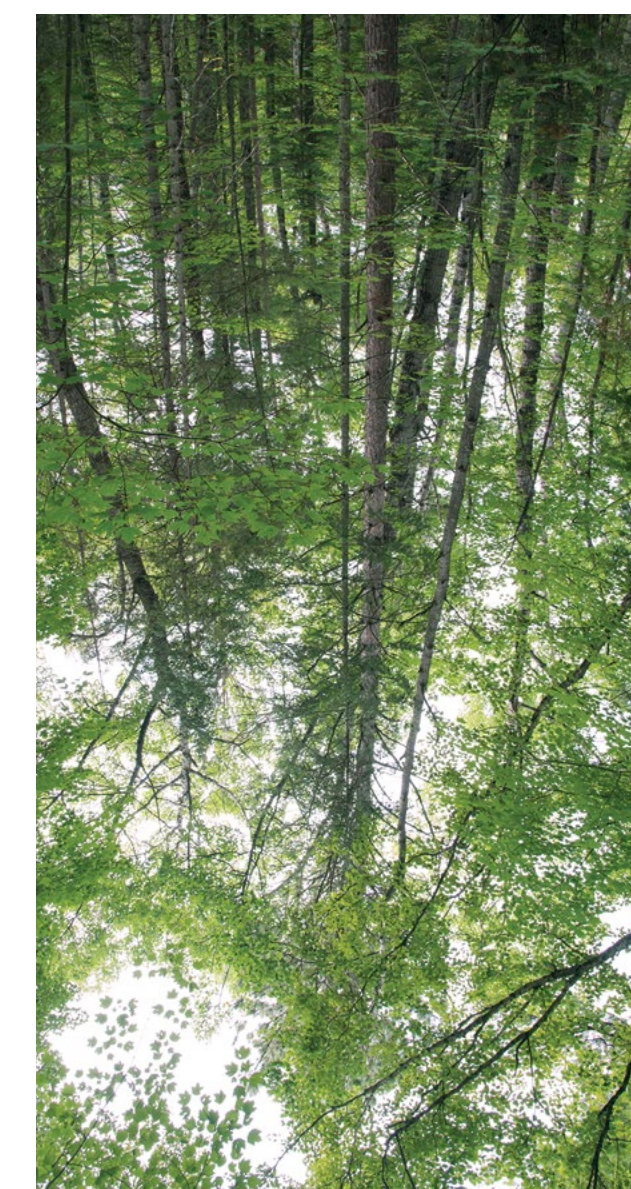
NORWAY BEACH RECREATION AREA – CHIPPEWA NATIONAL FOREST

Located four miles east of the city of Cass Lake on U.S. Highway 2, this recreation area offers more than 150 camping sites in four camping loops: Norway Beach, Chippewa, Wanaki, and Cass Lake. Interpretive trails, sandy beaches, a paved biking trail, boat ramps, and a reservable picnic shelter are all nestled among red and white pines. Campsites are open between Memorial and Labor days. Fees charged for camping. www.recreation.gov

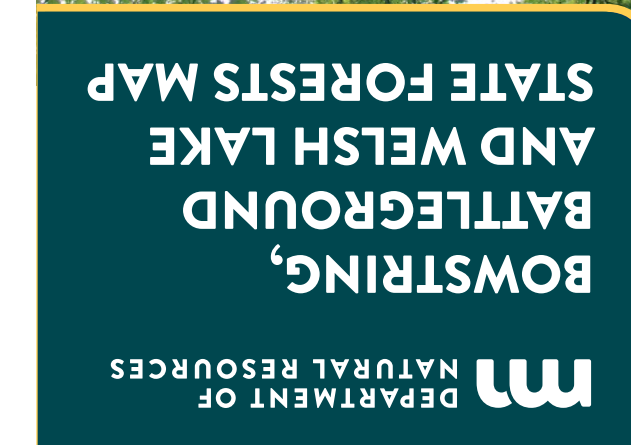
LEECH, WINNIBIGOSHISH, BOWSTRING LAKES

Glaciers created these large lakes thousands of years ago when massive ice blocks melted under glacial till. The lakes can be challenging to river travelers, and quite dangerous for canoeists who should always travel within swimming distance of the shore. These lakes support a healthy population of game fish and are the main attractions in the area. The Mississippi River flows into and out of Lake Winnie. White sand appears on the on Mississippi east of Lake Winnie, remnants of ancient sand dunes that formed by wind action on the lake's southeast shore during a hot, dry period more than 6,000 years ago.

Leech Lake is the largest lake at more than 100,000 acres. It averages 18.5 feet deep, and its deepest point is 150 feet. Lake Winnibigoshish is half the size, and Bowstring Lake is quarter the size of Lake Winnie. All lakes feature several public water accesses, and anglers can find a wide variety of fish, including walleye, trout-perch, muskellunge, northern pike, rock bass, smallmouth bass, and cisco.



MAP AND GUIDE



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

TIP LINE (Turn in Poachers)
800-652-9093

EMERGENCY SERVICE - DIAL 911

CASS COUNTY SHERIFF
218-547-1424

ITASCA COUNTY SHERIFF
218-326-3477

NEAREST HOSPITAL SERVICES
Bemidji Sanford Medical Center
1300 Anne St. NW | Bemidji, MN 56601

Grand Itasca Hospital | 1601 Golf Course Rd.
Grand Rapids, MN 55744 | 218-326-3401

Essentia Health | 115 10th Ave. NE
Deer River, MN 56636 | 218-246-2900

Bigfork Valley Hospital | 258 Pine Tree Dr.
Bigfork, MN 56628 | 218-743-3177

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FORESTRY
500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155
888-646-6367
mndnr.gov



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 closed.
- Summer camping on state forest land is limited to 14 days. 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 by vendors who harvested firewood in the same county as the state forest or harvested in Minnesota and certified by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture or USDA. Bring your receipt. You may also collect dead firewood 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, county, and federal lands.
- Keep campfires no larger than 3 feet wide and 3 feet high. Attend the fire at all times. Completely extinguish fire before leaving the area. It 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.
- We do not require a permit to collect berries, mushrooms, or dead fuelwood for personal use while in the forest. 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/forestry
- Wild rice, Minnesota's state grain, may be harvested when ripe unless posted otherwise. Collecting wild rice requires a license. mndnr.gov/regulations/wildrice
- Non-tribal members who harvest wild rice within the Leech Lake Reservation must have a permit from the Division of Resource Management office of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe.
- This is a partial list of rules. For more information, visit the website listed below.

mndnr.gov/forestrules

RESPECT PRIVATE PROPERTY

Many state forests contain private land within their boundaries. 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.

KNOW WHERE YOU ARE

This area contains a patchwork of state-managed land within areas of federal- and county-managed and private land. Rules may change as you cross boundaries.

For information about hunting, off-highway vehicle use, snowmobiling, camping, and other recreation, visit:

- Chippewa National Forest: www.fs.usda.gov/chippewa
- Cass County: co.cass.mn.us
- Itasca County: co.itasca.mn.us
- Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Indian Reservation: llojibwe.org/drm/conservation/conservation.html

STAY ON TRAILS

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

AREAS WITH LIMITATIONS

These areas are designated to protect unique natural resources and provide other non-motorized recreation opportunities. Motorized vehicles may not operate off designated trails within "Areas With Limitations" for any reason, including retrieving big game.

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