



PILLSBURY STATE FOREST
25,613 ACRES • ESTABLISHED 1943,
1963, 1967, 2002

FOREST LANDSCAPE: Pillsbury State Forest is located on hilly, rocky land in central Minnesota. With many large, clean lakes, it is a popular destination for camping, fishing, swimming, cross-country skiing, and especially horseback riding.

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 utility 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: Pillsbury State Forest became Minnesota's first state forest in 1935. However, its foundation was set in place millennia before that date, beginning with the Wisconsin glaciation between 16,000 and 20,000 years ago. When the glaciers began receding 12,000 years ago, they left behind the sediment and till that make up the landscape's rough, steep topography known as the St. Croix terminal moraine. Large chunks of glacial ice melted in place creating many of the large lakes in the area. After the glaciers, people such as Dakota and Ojibwe arrived to establish hunt, fish, tap maple sap, and harvest wild rice. European fur traders entered the area in the early 1700s, with the Northwest Company dominating during the late 1700s and early 1800s and the American Fur Company after 1817. Loggers removed the virgin forests in the late 1800s. In 1900 Governor John. S. Pillsbury donated 1,000 acres of cutover pine lands as Minnesota's first forest reserve. Over the years, the Minnesota Legislature enlarged the original forest reserve to its present size. Later, Minnesota's first forest tree nursery was developed in the state forest in 1903. We can still see some of the descendants of that long-gone enterprise along County Highway 15. The Minnesota Forest Service erected the region's first fire lookout tower in 1911. Fire spotters abandoned the wooden structure when steel towers became available in 1937.

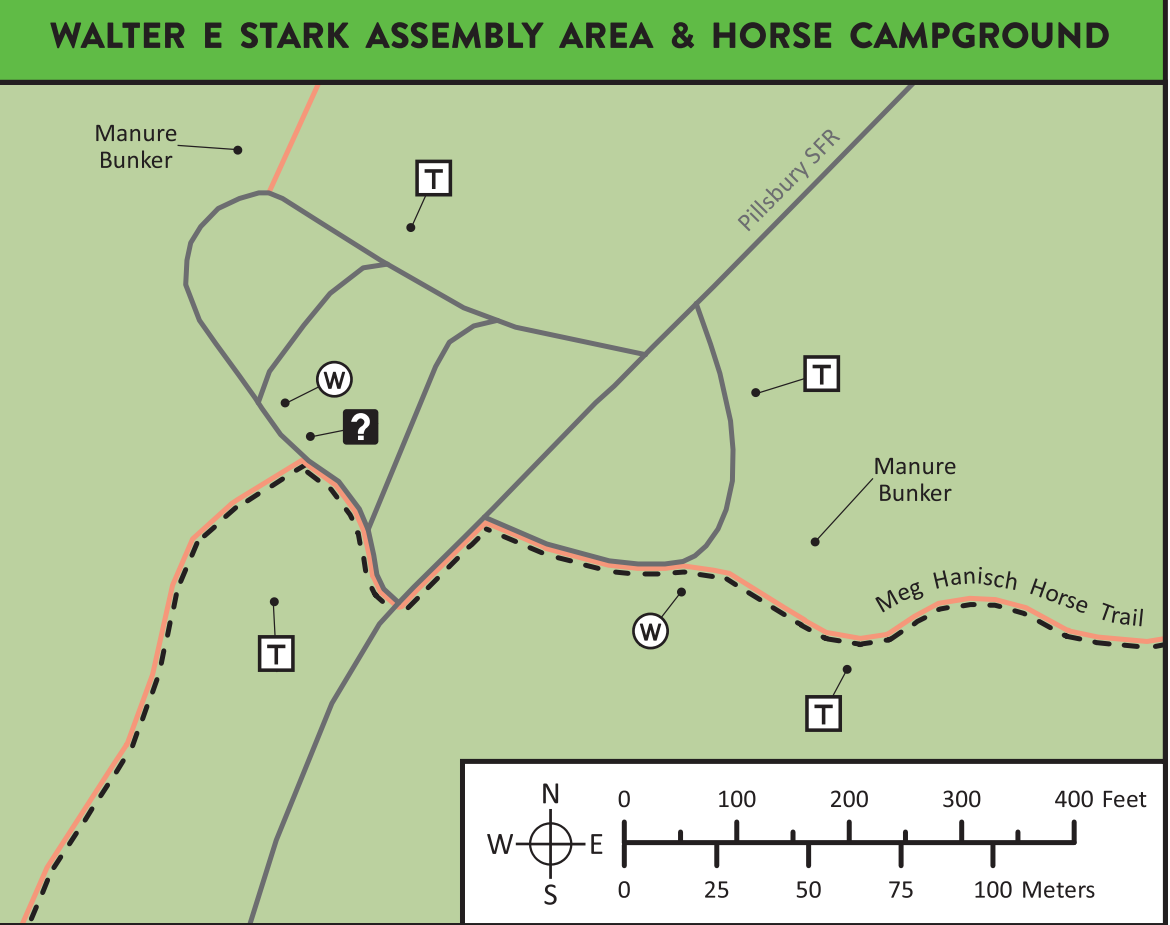
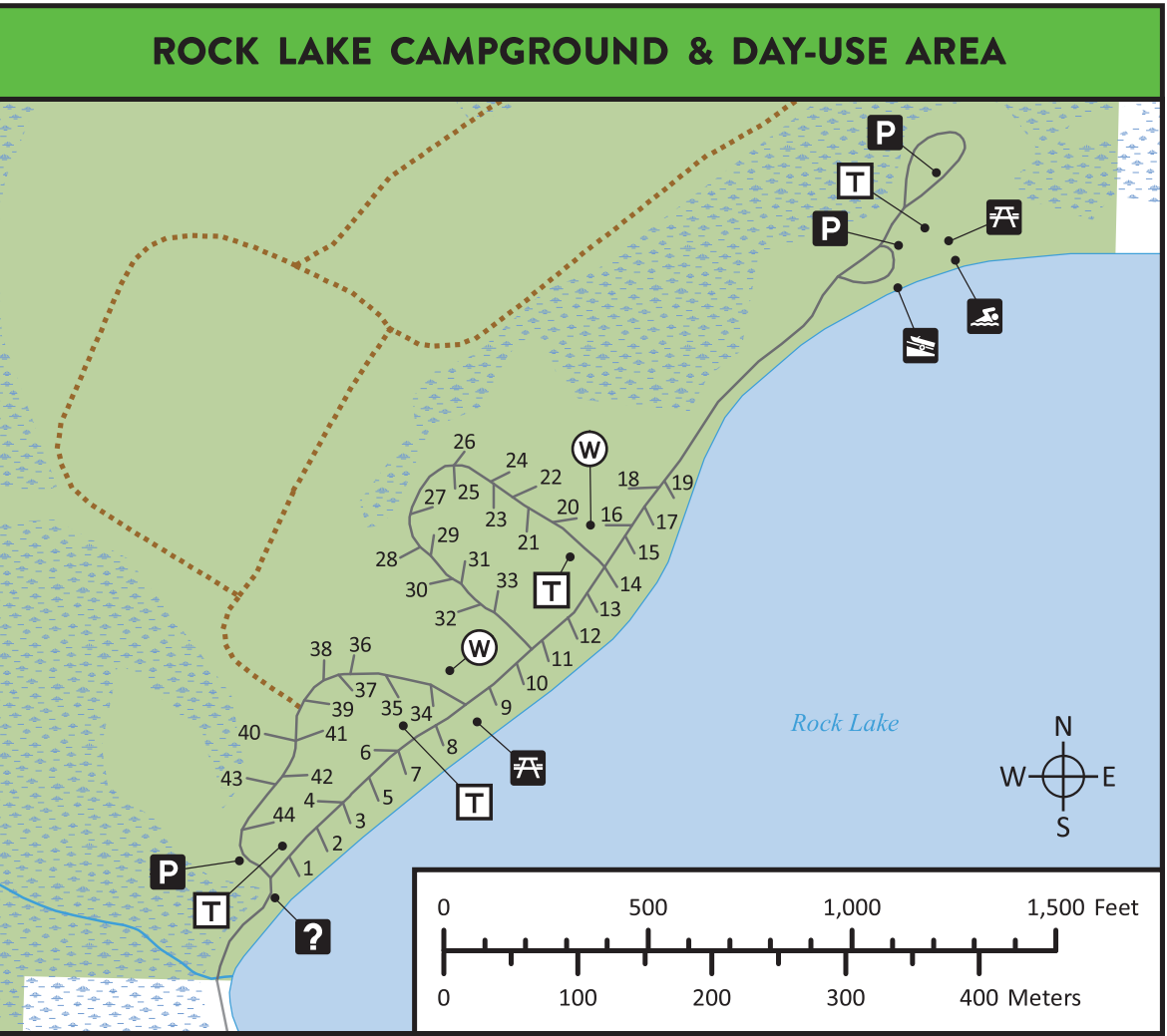
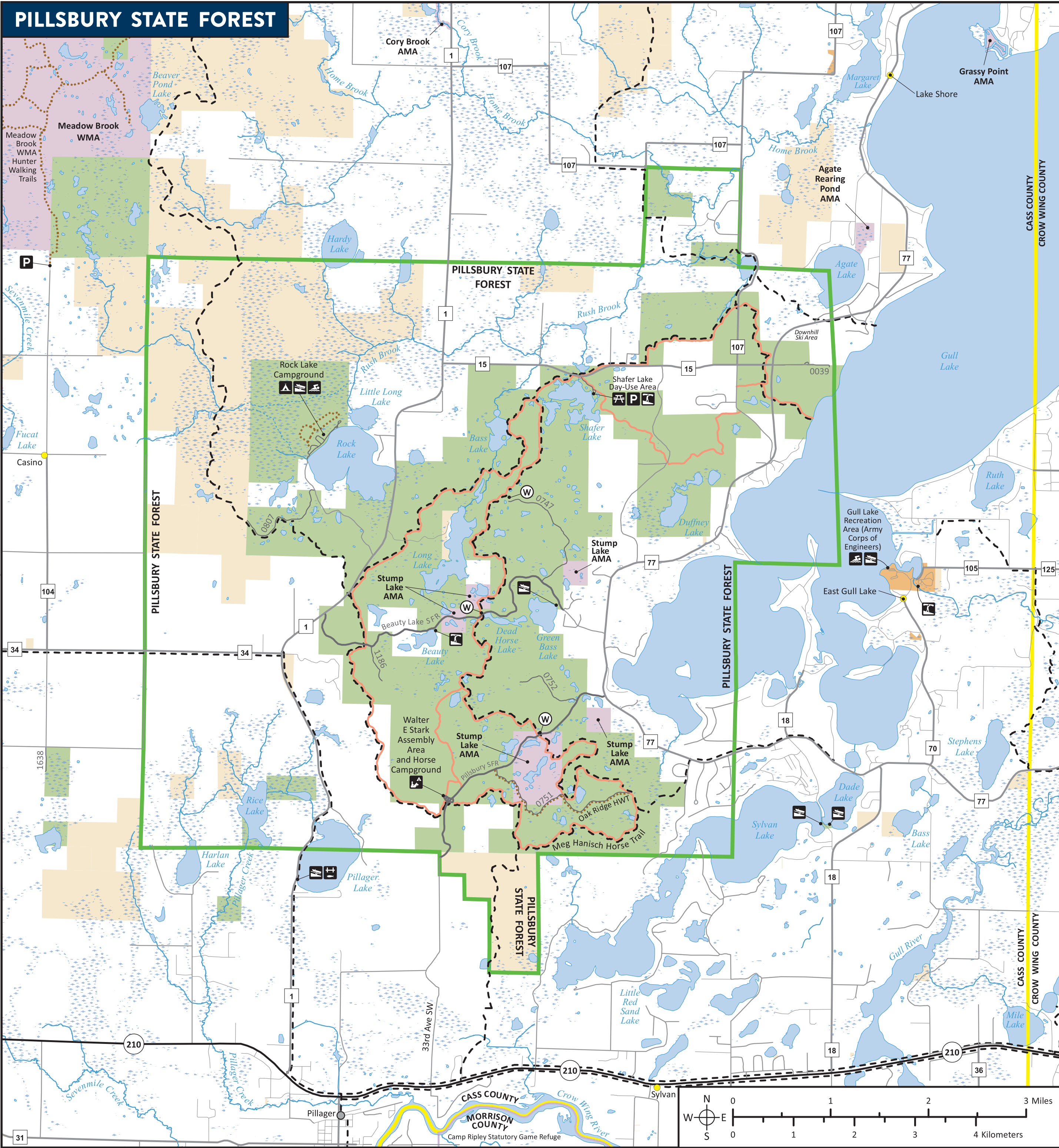
TREES: Northern hardwoods are widespread including red oak, aspen, paper birch, and maple. Red and white pine are scattered throughout. The DNR continues to manage the forest to ensure healthy regrowth after a blowdown damaged the area in 2015.

WILDLIFE: Wildlife includes white-tailed deer, black bear, ruffed grouse, beaver, muskrat, fisher, red and gray fox, bobcat, wild turkey, snowshoe hare, otter, and mink. Waterfowl includes wood ducks, trumpeter swan, and bald eagle.

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Roads and Trails

- State Highway
- County Road
- Pillsbury SFR
- State Forest Road
- Minimum Maintenance State Forest Road
- Other Road
- Hunter Walking Trail (HWT) or Hiking Trail
- Horse Trail
- Snowmobile Trail

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

Places

- City
- Landmark or Placename

Public Facilities

- Camping
- Horse Campground
- Day-Use Area
- Swimming Area
- Fishing Pier
- Trailer Access
- Carry-In Access
- Information
- Parking
- Vault Toilet
- Drinking Water

Ownership and Management

- Wildlife Management Area (WMA) or Aquatic Management Area (AMA)
- Game Refuge
- Statutory Boundary of State Forest
- State Land
- County Land
- Federal Land
- Private Land

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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 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, county, 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. 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.
- Collecting berries, mushrooms, or dead fuelwood for personal use does not require a permit. However, collecting large amounts of these items to take home for personal use or sale does require a permit. Get permits from your local DNR forestry office. mndnr.gov/areas/forestry
- This is a partial list of rules. For more information, visit the website listed below.

mndnr.gov/forestrules



PILLSBURY
STATE
FOREST

CAMPING AND
DAY-USE AREA

ROCK LAKE CAMPGROUND
AND DAY-USE AREA

The campground contains 44 campsites, of which 15 are lakeside, and four are handicapped-accessible. One-third of the sites can accommodate a 30-foot RV. Each campsite has a fire ring and picnic table, along with access to toilets, drinking water, nature trails, fishing, and swimming beach on Rock Lake. Fees charged. No reservations. First-come, first-served. Campers must occupy the site the first night of their stay.

WALTER E. STARK HORSE ASSEMBLY
AREA AND CAMPGROUND

Located along Pillsbury Forest Road and the trailhead for 27 miles of horse trails, this campground provides 25 non-designated campsites set up for horse camping and horse-trailer parking. Each campsite has a fire ring and table with access to vault toilets, garbage cans, and drinking water. Also available are permanent picket lines and manure bunkers. Fees charged. No reservations. First-come, first-served.

SHAHER LAKE DAY-USE AREA

Located next to the public canoe landing on Shafer Lake, this day-use area is set up for picnicking, horseback riding, swimming, and canoeing. Day-use area is connected to 27 miles of horse trails shared with the Walter E. Stark Horse Assembly Area and Campground.

DISPERSED CAMPING

Dispersed camping with no amenities or fees is allowed in state forests at least one mile outside of a designated campground. 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. No fee.

Please practice the “Leave No Trace” camping ethic.

BOATING

Three public carry-in accesses are located on Beauty, Green Bass, and Shafer lakes. A trailer access is on Rock Lake.

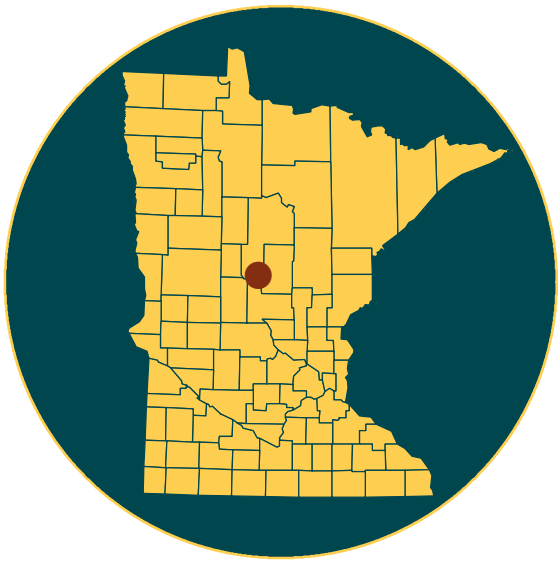
Register your watercraft at mndnr.gov/licenses/watercraft

TRAILS

Hiking and bicycling are allowed on state forest trails and roads. Bicyclists must stay on trails and roads. Off-trail hiking is allowed year-round, and skiing and snowshoeing are allowed in winter.



SCAN TO
DOWNLOAD MAP



HORSE TRAILS

Pillsbury State Forest is known for its 27 miles of rugged, scenic trails managed for horseback riders. Trailer parking is available in the Walter E. Stark Horse Assembly Area (along the Pillsbury Forest Road) and the Shafer Lake Day-Use Area.

EAST GULL LAKE TRAILS – CITY OF EAST
GULL LAKE

The City of East Gull Lake maintains paved bike trails (some on shared roads with car traffic), hiking trails near Dade Lake, and several cross-county “loop” trails ranging from 2 to 6 miles in length. See City of East Gull Lake website for more information and trail locations.

SNOWMOBILE TRAILS

Snowmobile trails (state and grant-in-aid) are open and groomed between December 1 and April 1, depending on snow conditions. Use caution at all times. Logging operations can sometimes share the trails. Trails are marked with orange signs.

- Visit mndnr.gov/snowmobiling/interactive_map for maps.
- Snowmobiles must be registered. mndnr.gov/regulations/snowmobile

OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE
CLASSIFICATION: CLOSED

All trails on state-managed lands are classified regarding motor vehicles. The Pillsbury State Forest is closed to all off-highway vehicles (OHVs) including off-road vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, and off-highway motorcycles. mndnr.gov/regulations/ohv

- Wildlife Management Areas are also closed to OHVs.

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

FIREARMS AND BOWS

Firearms must be unloaded and cased and bows must be 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 land.
- 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



WILDLIFE
MANAGEMENT AREAS

State Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) are managed to perpetuate and establish 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 watching wildlife.

WMA HIGHLIGHT: MEADOW BROOK

This 5,771-acre WMA located northwest of Pillsbury State Forest was established in 1979 to manage forest wildlife such as deer, bear, small game, grouse, and waterfowl. The unit is primarily forested with aspen, oak, and northern hardwoods, with numerous forested wetlands, wet meadows, and lowland brushlands. There are seven parking lots and 13 miles of hunter walking trails.

WMA maps: mndnr.gov/maps/compass

WMA information: mndnr.gov/wmas

FISHING

Anglers may find largemouth bass, northern pike, walleye, and panfish in area lakes and rivers. You need a fishing license, and must abide by the same rules and seasons as anywhere else in Minnesota.

AREAS WITH LIMITATIONS

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

RESPECT PRIVATE PROPERTY

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

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.

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.

NEARBY RECREATION

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

Located at the confluence of Gull River and Gull Lake, this recreation area contains a large campground, swimming beach, fishing platforms, playgrounds, interpretive trail, and water access. Each campsite has a 50- or 30-amp electric hookup, picnic table, fire ring, with access to showers, toilets, and drinking water. Fees charged for camping. Reservations on www.recreation.gov

PAUL BUNYAN STATE TRAIL

This 123-mile long, multi-use trail linking Crow Wing State Park and Lake Bemidji State Park offers opportunities for hiking, bicycling, in-line skating, and horseback riding. Primarily located on a former railroad grade, the trail is generally level and wheelchair accessible. Park in Crow Wing State Park or at the Brainerd/Baxter trailhead. mndnr.gov/state_trails/paul_bunyan

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

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.

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](https://www.playcleango.org)



MAP AND GUIDE



STATE FOREST MAP
PILLSBURY

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

CASS COUNTY SHERIFF

218-547-1424

NEAREST HOSPITAL SERVICES


Essentia Health –
St. Joseph’s Medical Center, Brainerd
218-829-2861

Lakewood Health, Staples

218-894-1515

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