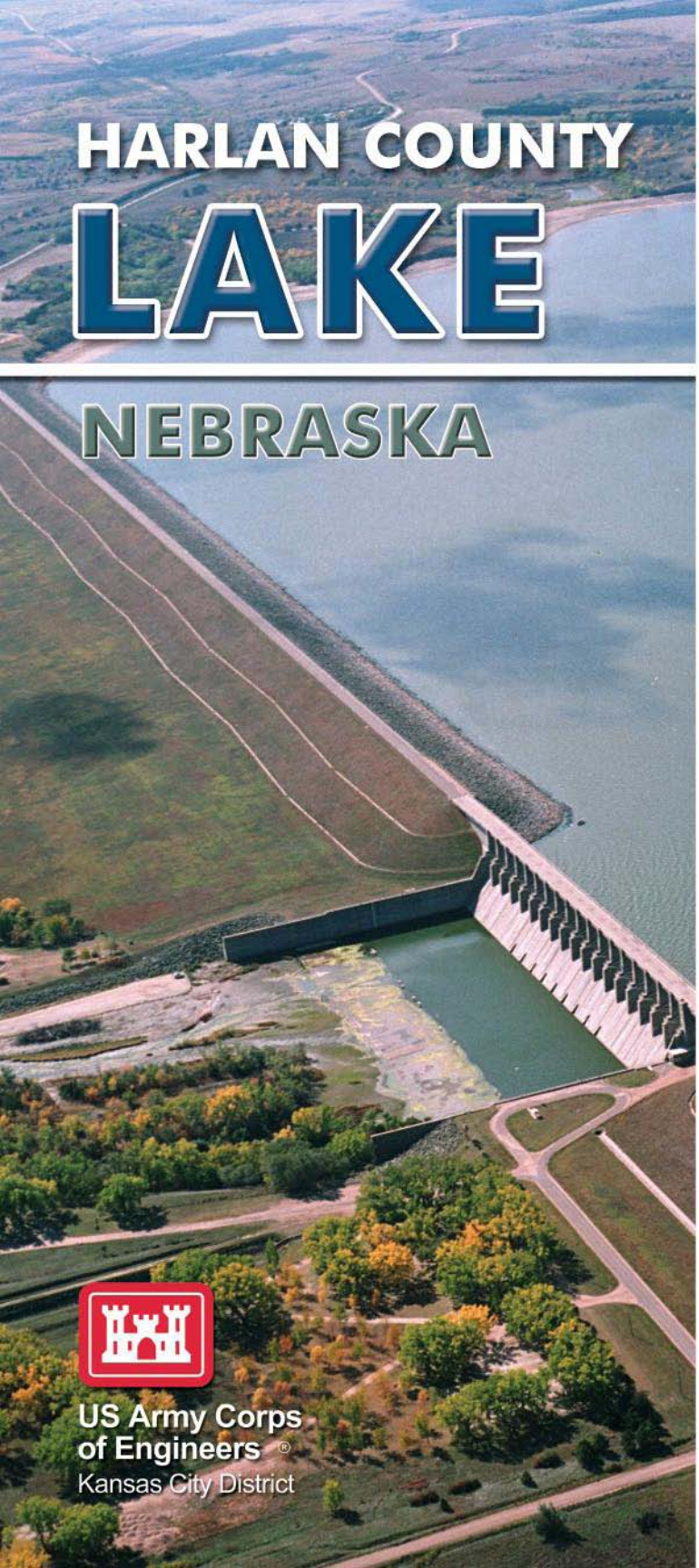


Regional History

The mixed grass prairie of the Republican River Valley was once occupied by one of the greatest concentrations of bison on the Great Plains. Though the area was of prime importance as a hunting ground for Native Americans, it was not of any great interest to the early Euro-American settlers, due to its location between the Santa Fe Trail to the South and the Oregon Trail to the North. Undoubtedly, the region was visited by Euro-American trappers and traders, one of which was Buffalo Bill Cody.

Buffalo Bill Cody & Sitting Bull Montreal, QC 1885. Photo by David Notman

In the fall of 1859, 14 year old Cody and a companion set out up the Republican River on a trapping expedition. Following the loss of one of their oxen, they made camp in a dugout about 5 miles southwest from what is now Republican City. Soon after, young Cody broke a leg, forcing him to spend 27 days alone while his companion went for help. During his stay, he was visited by a Sioux war party that took his rations but otherwise left him unharmed.

The post Civil War period combination of westward expansion, construction of railroads through the West and a reduced threat of Native American conflict brought rapid settlement to the region. Natives warned the new settlers of a massive flood in 1826 which led to their hesitance to live in the valley's flood plain. The newest settlers chose to ignore this advice in favor of living adjacent to the abundant resources and fertile land near the river. Although floods were a common occurrence over the years, it was not until 1935 that the new settlers learned what the Native American warnings referred to. On May 31,

1935 torrential thunderstorms dumped as much as twenty inches of rain at the Republican River's headwaters in eastern Colorado. A raging torrent of water twenty feet deep and as wide as two miles at points roared through the valley. The momentary peak flow of 280,000 cubic feet per second measured at Cambridge, Nebraska, exceeded any previously recorded flood by 360%. Damages from the flood totaled over $9 million,115 human lives,12,000 head of cattle, 283 bridges and 341 miles of roadways destroyed.

Outdoor Recreation

Each year, Harlan County Lake's abundant resources and opportunities attract visitors from across the nation. Campers, fishermen, hunters, and water sport enthusiasts flock to the lake to experience one of the region's finest outdoor playgrounds. To provide visitors with ample opportunities, the Corps of Engineers operates six campgrounds with services ranging from full hookups and modern shower buildings to more primitive tent camping areas.

User Fees

User fees are charged for camping, picnic shelter and boat-ramp use in parks operated by the Corps of Engineers. The amount of the fee is based on a regional comparison of similar services and on the type of amenities provided. Holders of an Interagency Senior or Access Passport are entitled to receive a 50% discount on all camping and boat launch fees at Corps facilities.

Camping

Visitors searching for the perfect lake side retreat will find a wide range of camping opportunities available at the six Corps of Engineers parks, two marinas, and at the Alma City Park.

Designated campsites located in Methodist Cove and Hunter Cove parks are available for use from May through October. These parks offer sites with utilities, modern shower facilities, playgrounds and picnic shelters. Gate Attendants are stationed at the entrance to these parks and are on duty to help you, our visitors, by assisting with your campsite registrations or reservations and to answer your questions. Reservations for many of the sites in these parks can be made online at recreation.gov or by phone at 877-444-6777. Hunter Cove Park remains open during the months of April, October and November for a reduced fee to provide service to season campers. Gremlin Cove, North and South Outlets and Cedar Point Park offers more basic experiences to campers. Visitors to these parks are encouraged to select a campsite denoted by the presence of a fire ring and picnic table, and settle back to enjoy the freedom of relaxing at the lake. Fees at these parks are collected by park rangers on patrol and/or by the use of a self-pay vault.

Boating

Corps of Engineers operated boat ramps are available for public use at Gremlin Cove, Hunter Cove, and Methodist Cove Parks. Other boat ramps around the lake include those in Patterson Harbor Marina, Alma City Park (high lake levels only), and Cedar Point Park (low lake levels only). Visitors must pay the required day use fees for boat launching at Corps of Engineers managed ramps. A daily fee can be paid on site or annual passes, which are accepted at any Corps of Engineer facility nationwide, are available at gate attendant booths in Hunter Cove or Methodist Cove parks or at the Corps' visitor center.

Fluctuating lake levels can add hazards to previously safe boating areas. Boaters are cautioned to watch for submerged obstructions at all times and should be alert to changing weather conditions and head for shore immediately when bad weather threatens.

Fishing

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, in cooperation with the Corps of Engineers, perform a wide variety of activities to improve the lake's aquatic habitat and provide abundant populations of game fish for visiting anglers. Game fish most sought after include walleye, white bass, wiper, channel catfish, and northern pike. Other game fish present but in lesser number include large-mouthed bass, crappie, and bluegill. Fishermen are encouraged to use one of the fish-cleaning stations at Hunter Cove Park or Methodist Cove Park to prepare their catch.

Boaters Before Getting Underway:

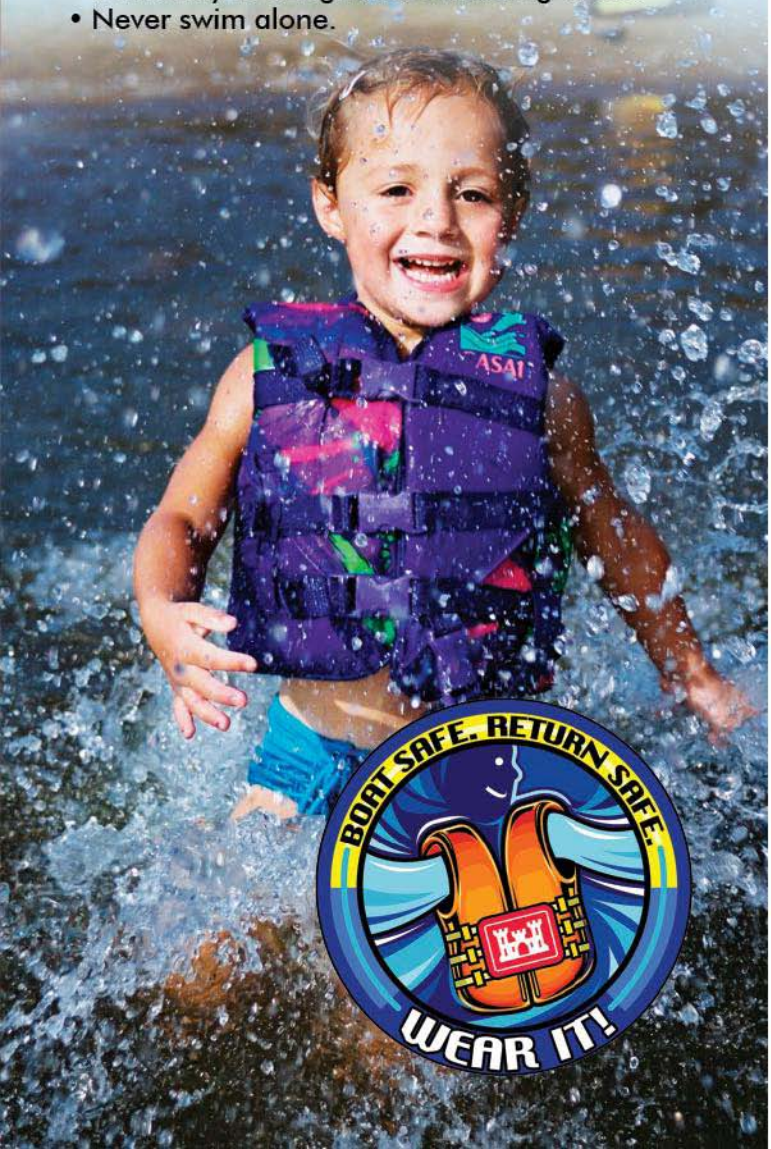
- Know your boat and know the rules of the road. Take a safe boating course.
- Check your boat for all required safety equipment.
- Consider the size of your boat, the number of passengers and the amount of extra equipment that will be on-board. *Don't Overload the Boat!*
- If you will be in a power boat, check your electrical system and fuel system for gas fumes.
- Follow manufacturer suggested procedures before starting up the engine.
- Wear your life jacket - don't just carry one on board.
- Leave your alcohol behind. Work to increase your safety, not increase your risks!
- Check the weather forecast.
- File a float plan with a member of your family or friend.

Swimmers

Since most drowning victims had no intention of being in water and since most people drown within 10-30 feet of safety, it is important that you and your family learn to swim and always use a personal flotation device when near the water.

Please Remember

- Never rely on toys such as inner tubes and water wings to stay afloat.
- Don't take chances, by over estimating your swimming skills.
- Swim only in designated swimming areas.
- Never swim alone.



ATV Riding

The US Army Corps of Engineers, in partnership with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Harlan County Tourism Bureau, has developed the Cedar Run ATV trail at Harlan County Lake. The Cedar Run ATV Trail offers enjoyable ATV, UTV and motorcycle riding opportunities for riders of all levels. The trail winds through over 9.5 miles of terrain ranging from rolling prairie grass covered hills to wooded draws. The staging area and trailhead serve as trail access points and offer toilet facilities, parking, and picnic sites. The trail is subject to closure during wet conditions, maintenance, or special events so visitors are encouraged to CALL BEFORE YOU HAUL by dialing 308-799-2105 for current trail conditions and information. Trail brochures are available the visitor center or at the trail's access points.

Canoeing and Tubing

During the summer months, many visitors enjoy a leisurely float downstream from the Harlan County Dam in a canoe or in an inner tube. For your safety, Nebraska boating laws are enforced on the river and visitors are reminded that life jackets are required for all participants (children under 13 must wear their PFD at all times). Summertime flows in the river are dictated by rainfall and irrigation demand and may be intermittent so call the Corps of Engineers' office to get the latest information prior to heading out. Also, be considerate of downstream landowners, other users and the environment and take your litter with you when you leave.

Environmental Stewardship

The Army Corps of Engineers is the steward of the lands and waters comprising the Harlan County Project. Its Environmental Stewardship mission is to manage and conserve natural resources, consistent with ecosystem management principles, while providing quality public outdoor recreation experiences to serve the needs of present and future generations. Working in cooperation with partners such as the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Pheasants Forever, and the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Corps of Engineers has been able to enhance and revitalize thousands of acres of land surrounding the lake.

Located in South Central Nebraska, Harlan County Project's lands are primarily classified as mixed grass prairie land. Native prairies are managed by controlled burning and managed hay production. These practices attempt to prevent invasion by non-native species, enhance prairie community health, and increase wildlife habitat value.

Harlan County Lake's woodlands are restricted to locations providing sufficient moisture. A band of mature woodlands may be found along the Republican River and throughout the deeper drainages leading into the lake.

One of the Corps' most effective habitat enhancement tools is the agricultural leasing program. Under this program several thousand acres of public lands are leased to farmers for the purpose of crop and hay production. Leased tracts of public land have specific conditions incorporated to protect and conserve soil and water while enhancing vegetation and wildlife resources.

Hunting

Hunters can find a wide variety of game animals at Harlan County Lake. White-tailed deer, wild turkey, ring-necked pheasants, ducks, and geese abound around the lake with other species including bobwhite quail, rabbit, squirrel, bobcat, and coyote rounding out the list of game species. Public access is available, but vehicles are restricted to authorized roadways only as depicted on this brochure's map. Sportsmen are encouraged to stop by the visitor center for additional information on hunting opportunities, regulations and waterfowl blind permits and to contact the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission for clarification on special regulations that apply to Corps of Engineers managed property at HarlanCounty Lake. Hunting is permitted on government land surrounding the lake, with the exception of parks and administrative areas (consult this brochure's map or contact a park ranger for details on restricted areas).

Volunteer

The Corps of Engineers offers volunteer opportunities in recreation and environmental stewardship. Contact a park ranger if you are interested in joining the team.

Harlan County Dam

After the flood, an organization of landowners, businessmen, and other concerned citizens lobbied congressmen and senators from Nebraska, Kansas, and Colorado for a flood control and irrigation project for the region. The resulting Flood Control Acts of 1941 and 1944 paved the way for the US Army Corps of Engineers to construct this massive dam in the Republican River valley.

Construction of the dam began in 1946 and since its dedication in 1952; the Harlan County project has prevented hundreds of millions of dollars in damages through the control of flood water on a drainage area of 7,164 square miles. In addition to flood control, Harlan County Dam operates under congressional authority to provide water for irrigation, outdoor recreation opportunities, environmental stewardship, and water quality protection.

What is a cubic foot per second?

1 cfs = 7.48 gallons per second
1 cfs = 448.8 gallons per minute or 646,317 gallons per day
280,000 cfs = 2,094,400 gallons per second
= 2 miles wide x 26.5' tall x 1'deep

Irrigation

To benefit the region's agricultural interests the Corps of Engineers at Harlan County Lake, in cooperation with the Bureau of Reclamation, provides approximately 104 billion gallons of water for over 62,000 irrigable acres of cropland as far downstream as Concordia, Kansas.

For additional information about facilities or the operation of Harlan County Lake, contact:

Harlan County Lake Project Office
70788 Corps Road A
Republican City NE 68971
308-799-2105
www.nwk.usace.army.mil/hc