


---

# Harlan County Lake

Nebraska



## REGIONAL HISTORY

The Republican River Valley was once occupied by one of the greatest concentrations of buffalo on the Great Plains and was a favored hunting ground for the Pawnee, Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe Indian tribes. The great number of buffalo led the Pawnee to call it the “Manure River”. The present name of “Republican” was derived from the Republican band of Pawnees that lived and hunted in the river valley.

Although the area was of prime importance as a hunting ground for Indian parties, it was not of any great importance to the early white settlers, mainly because it lay isolated between the Santa Fe and Oregon trails. The region was undoubtedly visited by many trappers and Indian traders, but they left little or no record of their movements.

One early trapper who did leave a record was young William F. Cody (Buffalo Bill). In the fall of 1859, Cody set out, with a companion, 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 in the dugout while his companion went for help. During his stay, he was visited by Sioux hunters who stole his rations, leaving him unharmed.

Settlement in the area tended to follow the Republican River Valley because of the availability of water, timber, and good river bottom soil. Local tradition has it that the Indians warned early settlers not to build homes in the river bottom because of the “big water”.

Ignoring these warnings, farmers were lured into the valley because of rich farmlands. Floods were a common occurrence over the years, but it was not until 1935 that the settlers learned what the “big water” actually was. It was described by witnesses as a wall of water 8 feet high. Over 100 people drowned in the flood and most bridges and farm buildings were swept away. The Harlan County Dam and several other dams were later built to prevent the collection of a single mass of water like the one that caused the disaster in



## HARLAN COUNTY LAKE

Located on the Republican River in south-central Nebraska, Harlan County Dam controls a drainage area of 7,164 square miles. Prior to construction of the lake, the Republican River flooded frequently and May 1935, the river caused more than 100 deaths and millions of dollars in flood damages. In an effort to prevent repeat occurrences, local citizens and their elected officials worked to bring about the authorization of Harlan County Lake in 1941. Since its completion in 1952, the Harlan County project has prevented over \$150 million in flood damages.

Through the cooperative efforts of the Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the Bostwick Irrigation District, approximately 104 billion gallons of water storage is managed to irrigate farmland as far downstream as Concordia, Kansas. During the summer, water is released through the dam to irrigate some 23,000 acres in Nebraska, 12,000 acres in Kansas, and to supplement releases from Lovewell Reservoir (Kansas) to irrigate an additional 28,000 acres.

While the lake's most apparent benefits are flood control and providing water for irrigation, the lake also provides pollution abatement, recreation, and fish and

## HUNTING

Hunters will find a variety of game at Harlan County Lake. Ring-necked pheasants, deer, ducks, geese, and turkey are the most abundant. Other species include quail, rabbit, squirrel, bobcat, and coyote. Hunting is permitted on all government owned land surrounding the lake, with the exception of parks and certain other areas that have been posted by the Corps of Engineers. Public access is available, but vehicles are restricted to existing roadways only. Hunters are encouraged to stop by the visitor center for additional information on hunting regulations,



## FISHING

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, in cooperation with the Corps of Engineers, performs a variety of fisheries management activities to improve the lake's aquatic habitat. Walleye, wipers, white bass, channel catfish, and northern pike are favorites with anglers and account for a large percentage of the fish caught in the lake and the outlet area below the dam. Other game fish present 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



## BOATING

Boaters are cautioned to watch for submerged obstructions at all times. Changes in the lake level can add hazards to previously safe boating areas. Some dangerous areas, marked with buoys are shown on the map in this pamphlet. Boaters should also be alert to changing weather conditions and head for shore

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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

**Harlan County Lake**  
70788 Corps Road A  
Republican City, NE 68971  
308-799-2105

## USER FEES

User fees are charged for camping, picnic, shelter and boat-ramp use in most parks operated by the Corps of Engineers. The amount of the fee is based on the type of facilities provided. Holders of Golden Age and Golden Access Passports receive a 50% discount on all camping and boat launch fees at Corps facilities. Both passports may be obtained at the visitor center or park attendant booths when proof of

## NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The Corps of Engineers works to maintain the environmental quality of the lake project area by performing a variety of natural resource management practices. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission cooperate with the Corps in many areas of the resource management program. Over 300,000 trees and shrubs and more than 2,000 acres of grasslands have been planted using funds collected through the Game Commission's Habitat Stamp Program.

One of the Corps' most important resource management tools is the agricultural leasing program. By incorporating special lease conditions and restrictions, the program serves to protect and conserve soil, water, vegetation, and wildlife resources.



## RULES AND REGULATIONS

Rules and regulations have been established to safeguard the natural and cultural resources of Harlan County Lake and to ensure that visitors have a safe and pleasant recreational experience. Your compliance with these rules and regulations will make your visit and the visits of others enjoyable. You may obtain a copy of the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 36, Chapter III, at the project office near the north end of the dam or by asking a park ranger for a copy. Any questions concerning the rules and regulations should be directed to one of the park rangers.

## RECREATION

Harlan County Lake, with a normal pool surface of 13,250 acres, is the second largest lake in Nebraska. The lake and surrounding land attract over 500,000 campers, hunters, fishermen, and water sport enthusiasts each year.

Nine parks around the lake have been developed to provide a wide variety of recreation opportunities to area visitors. The Corps of Engineers operates six parks with services ranging from full electrical hookups and modern shower buildings to random tent campsites and privies.



Reservations for campsites at Hunter Cove and Methodist Cove Parks can be made by calling: NATIONAL RECREATION RESERVATION SERVICE AT 1-877-444-6777 or on the web at [www.reserveusa.com](http://www.reserveusa.com)



### FROM DAM SITE

- ▶ To Phillipsburg, Kansas - 26 Miles
- ▶ To Holdrege, Nebraska - 32 Miles
- ▶ To Minden, Nebraska - 43 Miles
- ▶ To Kearney, Nebraska - 60 Miles
- ▶ To Hastings, Nebraska - 75 Miles
- ▶ To Grand Island, Nebraska - 100 Miles
- ▶ To Lincoln, Nebraska - 185 Miles
- ▶ To Omaha, Nebraska - 243 Miles
- ▶ To Kansas City, Missouri - 330 Miles
- ▶ To Denver, Colorado - 390 Miles

**National Recreation Reservation Service™**



Toll-Free: **1-877-444-6777**  
TDD: 1-877-833-6777  
INTL: 1-518-885-3639  
Internet: **reserveusa.com**

**Reserve Your Place Under the Stars™**



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers**  
Kansas City District