

Podcast 2009-02

Hunting and fishing on Reclamation Lands and Waters

Welcome to the Bureau of Reclamation Great Plains Region Podcast

(MUSIC SOUNDER)

Federal Public Lands in the Great Plains Region are remarkable for the many natural resources and diverse recreation opportunities they offer.

From the vast wheat fields of northern Montana and North Dakota to the bayous and marshes of the Texas Gulf Coast, you could spend a lifetime experiencing outdoor adventures close to home.

The Region's 1.6 million acres – an area the size of Delaware-- incorporates some 350,000 acres of surface water and 2,700 miles of shoreline.

Some 14 Million visitors come to the Region's reservoirs each year to take advantage of the fantastic outdoor recreation possibilities, which include camping, boating, picnicking, hiking and wildlife watching as well as fishing and hunting.

According to a recent national survey, 47 percent of all anglers and hunters use public lands. You might think with all that activity, things would be crowded, but according to Reclamation outdoor planner Scott Hettinger with the Dakotas Area Office, there's still plenty of "elbow room" to be found:

(HETTINGER01)

"THERE'S SEVERAL AREAS THAT ARE NOT VERY WELL KNOWN, AND RECLAMATION HAS DONE EXTENSIVE WORK ON HABITAT DEVELOPMENT FOR WILDLIFE AND...MANAGED FOR WATERFOWL AND DEER AND PHEASANTS...WETLAND DEVELOPMENT...TREE PLANTINGS. MOST OF OUR LAND IS FULL OF WILDLIFE AND NOT CROWDED."

Hettinger tells us about one of his favorite spots in the Region:

(HETTINGER02)

“WE HAVE LONETREE WMA, WHICH IS...33,000 ACRES OF NOTHING BUT WILDLIFE HABITAT. IT WAS ORIGINALLY PURCHASED FOR A RESERVOIR AND THAT DID NOT GET DEVELOPED, BUT WHAT WE HAVE IS TREES AND NATIVE GRASS PLANTINGS AND 25 TO 30 FOOD PLOTS...AND IT’S JUST A MECCA FOR UPLAND GAME...DEER, MOOSE...WATERFOWL...IT’S GOTTA BE ONE OF THE CROWN JEWELS ON RECLAMATION LANDS HERE IN THE DAKOTAS.”

Another notable Wildlife Management Area is the Freezeout Lake WMA in Montana. The state is also home to the Beaverhead River below Clark Canyon Reservoir and the Big Horn River below Yellowtail Dam, both known as world class Blue Ribbon trout streams.

Hunting is often permitted on lands and waters administered by the Bureau of Reclamation...however, specific areas may be closed to all hunting or trapping, or there may be restrictions on some species during certain times of the year.

Regional Outdoor Recreation Planner Steve Anderson explains that responsibility for lakes, rivers, infrastructure and lands is shared among several federal, state and local agencies:

(ANDERSON01)

“WHILE THE PARK SERVICE AND THE FOREST SERVICE MANAGE, YOU KNOW, SOME OF OUR RESERVIORS, MOST OF THE RESERVOIRS IN OUR REGION ARE MANAGED BY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES NAMELY STATE PARKS DEPARTMENTS OR STATE FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT, COUNTY PARKS DEPARTMENTS, CITY AND WATER DISTRICTS. SO WHILE WE ADMINISTER THE LANDS, A LOT OF RECREATION AND RESOURCE

MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES ARE MANAGED BY THESE OTHER AGENCIES.”

Anderson tells us that before heading out for a day of fishing or hunting on Federal Lands, it's your responsibility to check up on the latest local regulations:

(ANDERSON02)

WITHIN THE STATES IN OUR REGION, ALL THE FISHING, HUNTING AND BOATING RULES AND REGULATIONS ARE PROMULGATED OR MADE UP BY THE STATE AGENCIES. SO IF YOU COME INTO OUR RESERVOIRS HERE IN MONTANA AND GO FISH AT SAY, (CANYON Ferry RESERVOIR, IT'S THE SAME BASIC RULES AND REGULATIONS AS YOU'D FIND ON ANY OTHER WATER BODY THE STATE. NOW HAVING SAID THAT, SOME OF OUR RESERVOIRS MIGHT HAVE SOME SPECIAL EXCLUSIONS OR CLOSURES BASED UPON THE RESOURCES THAT ARE AVAILABLE THERE...HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES AND SO FORTH...SO IT'S ALWAYS A GOOD IDEA TO NOT ONLY CHECK THE STATE RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR HUNTING, FISHING, BOATING BUT ALSO CONTACT THE ENTITY THAT'S MANAGING THE RESERVOIR FOR US. OF COURSE IF YOU'RE LAUNCHING A BOAT, IT'S ALWAYS A GOOD IDEA TO TAKE A LOOK AT THE DISPLAY BOARDS OR THE KIOSKS THAT MIGHT BE LOCATED AT THE LAUNCH RAMPS.”

Mike Nyhoff is Area Manager for the Glen Elder Wildlife Area in North-central Kansas for the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks. He tells us that failure to check and follow rules and regulations regarding hunting and use of firearms can be expensive:

(NYHOFF01)

“IF YOU'RE CAUGHT WITHOUT A HUNTING LICENSE, IF YOU'RE A RESIDENT, IT'S A PRETTY GOOD FEE ANYHOW, PROBABLY FIFTY TO A HUNDRED DOLLAR FINE AND THEN COURT COSTS ARE SEVENTY TO A HUNDRED DOLLARS ON TOP OF THAT. IF YOU'RE A

NON-RESIDENT, THEN YOU'RE GONNA BE UNDER THE SAME FINES, BUT YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO POST YOUR BOND IMMEDIATELY AT THE COURT HOUSE OR AT A MAILBOX, MAIL IN THE CASH OR YOU'LL BE TAKEN TO JAIL."

Anglers also need to ensure that they have the correct license in their possession before setting out for the day. In addition, a little common sense goes a long way toward avoiding situations that could lead to inconvenience or even tragedy:

(NYHOFF02)

"NEAR THE DAM, ESPECIALLY NEAR THE OUTLET STRUCTURE... YOU CAN HAVE SOME PRETTY HEAVY OUTFLOW AT TIMES, AND PRETTY GOOD CURRENTS GOING DOWN THROUGH THERE...IT'S JUST NOT A GOOD IDEA TO BE CASTING RIGHT IN THAT AREA JUST WITH THE ... POSSIBILITY OF SLIPPING, FALLING IN."

At many reservoirs, areas near dams and other infrastructure are marked as off limits due to safety or security issues, and Nyhoff says ignoring those buoys and signs can net you a citation instead of a fish. But that still leaves many excellent fishing spots to try your luck:

(NYHOFF03)

"ROCKY POINTS ARE GENERALLY SOME OF THE MAIN AREAS, ESPECIALLY IF YOU'RE TRYING FOR SOME WHITE BASS, STRIPERS, OR MAYBE SOME WALLEYE OR CRAPPIE. POINTS ARE USUALLY YOUR BEST AREAS, THE WATER DROPS OFF INTO A LITTLE BIT DEEPER AREA, AND THE FISH COME OUT OF THE DEEPER WATERS TO THE SHALLOWS TO FEED ACTIVELY. SO, THE CLOSER YOU CAN GET TO WHERE THAT HAS A DROP-OFF, THE BETTER. CATFISH AND SOME OF OUR OTHER ONES, ESPECIALLY EARLY IN THE SEASON, WHEN IT'S JUST WARMING UP, ARE GOING TO BE LOOKING FOR SHALLOW WATER AND AREAS THAT WARM UP QUICKLY AND HAVE A LOT OF FOOD SOURCE."

An excellent resource for the latest information and tips for an enjoyable and successful hunting or fishing experience is one of the many concessionaires and marinas operating under contract on Public Lands and reservoirs, according to Steve Anderson:

“MOST OF THEM ARE SMALLER MOM AND POP TYPE OPERATIONS. THEY PROVIDE A LOT OF THE OPPORTUNITIES OR THE FACILITIES AND SERVICES THAT THE STATE PARKS OR EVEN RECLAMATION CAN’T PROVIDE IN OUR CAMPGROUNDS. MOST OF THE TIME YOU’RE GOING TO FIND THE HIGHER QUALITY CAMPSITES AND CAMPGROUNDS IN THE CONCESSION WITH FULL TRAILER HOOKUPS, THEY USUALLY HAVE A STORE, THEY MIGHT SELL MEALS...A RESTAURANT. THEY CERTAINLY HAVE A LOT OF THE FISHING GEAR, HUNTING LICENSSES, FISHING LICENSES, GASOLINE, MOTOR OIL, DIESEL...SO THEY PROVIDE A VALUABLE SERVICE IN THAT RESPECT. AND IN SOME OF OUR RESERVOIRS, THEY MIGHT BE THE ONLY PRESENCE AT A PARTICULAR PERIOD OF TIME...SOMEBODY YOU CAN GO TO IF YOU HAVE AN EMERGENCY.”

Most of the 80 reservoirs in the Great Plains Region were constructed in the early 1900s and the 1950’s for water supply and power generation. However, recreation has become an important component at virtually every reservoir. They range from just two to more than 35,000 acres in size, with many offering a wide variety of recreation and facilities and services including boat launch ramps and fish cleaning stations. Fishing is often classified as the number one recreation activity at most reservoirs. The most popular locations include Cheney Reservoir in Kansas, Canyon Ferry Reservoir in Montana, Calamus Reservoir in Nebraska, Pueblo Reservoir in Colorado, Heart Butte Reservoir in North Dakota and Lake Thunderbird in Oklahoma.

For more information on hunting, fishing and other recreational uses of Reclamation reservoirs and lands in the Great Plains Region, go online to RECREATION.GOV or WWW.USBR.GOV/GP.

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RECLAMATION, MANAGING WATER IN THE WEST

(MUSIC STING OUT)

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