

# Recreation

## Saylorville Lake Recreation

As the nation's largest federal provider of outdoor recreation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) manages 12 million acres of lands and waters at Corps projects across the country. The recreation mission of the Corps is to manage and conserve natural resources, while providing quality public outdoor recreation opportunities to serve the needs of present and future generations. Many Corps projects are located near metropolitan areas and these areas are anticipating significant growth in the coming years. The only island of green for many Americans is a Corps project. Saylorville Lake is just one of the many Corps projects near a metropolitan area and with its 26,000 acres of land and water, the Corps is responsible for the stewardship of these resources near Des Moines, Iowa.



## Public Health and Wellness

There is a growing movement to increase physical activity by utilizing outdoor recreation on public lands to improve health and wellness. The medical community has actually developed "Park Prescriptions" which allow patients to increase their time spent enjoying physical activity on public lands while also providing physicians and other healthcare providers with a new set of tools to inspire patients to improve their health (Institute at the Golden Gate). It is no secret that the lack of physical activity and poor diet has contributed to an unhealthy, overweight nation. Iowa is no exception to the obesity epidemic, with about 28% of Iowa adults and 11% of children and adolescents categorized as obese according to the Center for Disease Control. Communities can influence people's health decisions and it is important to have environments located in the communities that encourage physical activity to prevent these health issues.

According to the Outdoor Foundation, 50% of Americans participated in outdoor recreation in 2010. Running, including trail running, was the most popular outdoor activity. (Outdoor Foundation 2010). "For many Americans, a lifelong love affair with the outdoors starts with a first fishing trip, a night under the stars or a breathtaking view after a tough hike" (Outdoor Foundation 2010). Saylorville Lake's miles of trails, acres of water, and large land base allows for unlimited opportunities of outdoor recreation. It is important that our project provides the outdoor environment that spawns physical activity to improve the health and wellness of the public.



## Camping

What better place to spend quality time with family and friends than camping at Saylorville Lake and its many campgrounds. The Saylorville Lake area offers five campgrounds with just under 600 campsites. There are individual sites, group loops for larger camping parties in wagon wheel form, as well as an organized youth group site offering a secluded area for scouting groups away from the other campers. Saylorville Lake has electric and non-electric sites for the modern day camper and primitive camper alike, with two campgrounds being voted among America's top 100 campgrounds in 2005 and 2006. Additionally, Swede Point Park is a 128 acre park that offers camping, hiking, and picnicking. The park is located along the Des Moines River near Madrid and is managed by the Boone County Conservation Board.



US Army Corps  
of Engineers®  
Rock Island District

Saylorville Lake - 5600 NW 78th Avenue - Johnston, IA 50131

Phone: (515) 964-0672 or (515) 276-4656

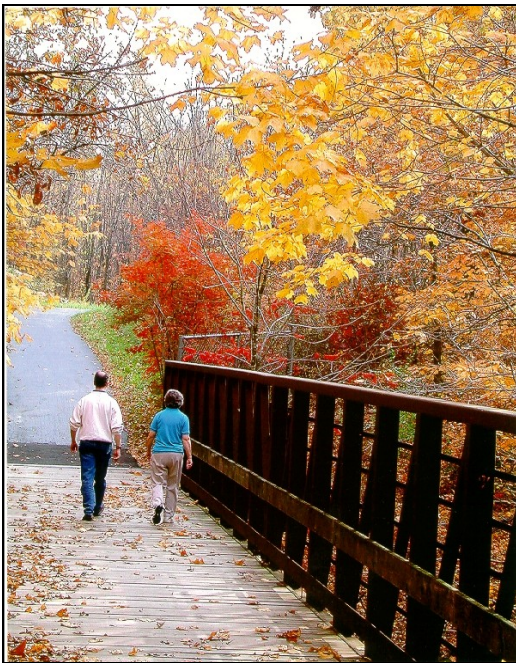
Website: [www2.mvr.usace.army.mil/Saylorville/](http://www2.mvr.usace.army.mil/Saylorville/) Email: [SaylorvilleLake@usace.army.mil](mailto:SaylorvilleLake@usace.army.mil)

## **Picnic/Day Use**

There are 9 designated picnic areas at Saylorville Lake with additional picnic tables around the project. Catch some shade in one of the reservoir's 38 shelters and enjoy an afternoon in our picnic/day use areas. Many of our areas offer universally accessible playgrounds where kids can burn off some energy and then settle down for an afternoon lunch near the standing grills. Large groups can enjoy a fun game of baseball or volleyball on our sand volleyball courts or ball fields. If disc golf is your game, an 18 hole course is located at the Walnut Ridge Recreation Area. Big Creek State Park also offers 10 shelters with additional picnic areas throughout the park and another disc golf course.

## **Boating**

Saylorville Lake offers amazing opportunities in boating from powerboats, sailboats, pontoon boats, personal watercraft, and paddled vessels. Boaters can choose from 17 different boat ramps to launch from to enjoy their favorite water recreational activities including boating, waterskiing, tubing, sailing, windsurfing, fishing and hunting with room for each to enjoy the lake. The majority of boating is done below the mile long bridge where several coves line the shoreline and allow for great places to relax and enjoy the amazing views of public lands. Also, Big Creek Lake at Big Creek State Park is managed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and is a no-wake lake that offers an impressive fishery and a tranquil setting with plenty of tree shaded coves.



## **Swimming**

Swimmers and sun bathers alike have two choices when they arrive at Saylorville Lake. Sandpiper Beach and Oak Grove Beach, are non-alcohol beaches. Sandpiper is a high water beach that allow the beach to remain open at higher lake elevations and has vault toilets and changing facilities. Oak Grove is convenient for campers with it's close proximity to the Prairie Flower Campground. Big Creek State Park offers a third beach that is managed by the Iowa DNR.

## **Multi-Purpose Neal Smith Trail**

Connecting city life to natural scenic beauty, this 26 mile multi-purpose trail extends from Des Moines through the Saylorville Lake Project to Big Creek State Park. Thirteen miles of this trail is managed by the Corps with the remaining miles managed by the Iowa DNR and the City of Des Moines. The Neal Smith Trail is a designated National Recreational Trail that allows for year-round outdoor activities, including hiking, biking, running, rollerblading, snow-shoeing, and cross-country skiing. In addition to the recreational opportunities, the trail showcases mature forest, rolling prairie, oak savannas, and panoramic views of Saylorville Lake.

## **Des Moines River Water Trail**

The 20 mile, state designated Des Moines River Water Trail provides an opportunity to connect a diverse group of both rural and urban trail users. The Des Moines River Water Trail is also designated as a National Recreation Trail to recognize its significance as a superb local and regional trail. This unique trail not only promotes a critical healthy community, but it also connects outdoor enthusiasts with rich cultural tradition. The water trail also exhibits tremendous bird and wildlife viewing opportunities during all seasons. The history, natural beauty, community, camaraderie, and pride in rediscovering this river segment makes the Des Moines River Water Trail a destination and experience that will keep paddlers returning.



## **Fishing**

The Saylorville Lake Project is a known hotspot for White Bass, Wipers and large fish in general. Species such as Walleye, Saugeye, Crappie, Pike, Bass, and Catfish are also very commonly angled fish from the reservoir, Big Creek Lake, and the Des Moines River. The Saylorville Lake Project currently holds the state records for Wiper, Walleye and Saugeye. The Corps also manages two constructed, drainable fish rearing ponds to raise about 200,000 fish as a part of a stocking program in conjunction with the Iowa DNR to provide outstanding opportunities for shore fishing and lake fishing alike.

## **Hunting**

Saylorville provides a range of hunting opportunities from open hunting to managed hunts. The large expanse of wildlife habitat that runs up along the reservoir creates a hunting haven for hunters in pursuit of whitetail deer, turkeys, waterfowl, or other game species. Saylorville also hosts an Urban Bow Antlerless Deer Hunting Program and National Wild Turkey Federation Wheelin' Sportsmen Turkey Hunt for disabled hunters.



## **Equestrian Center**

The Jester Park Equestrian Center allows riders to jump on the saddle and explore Saylorville Lake on horseback. The equestrian center provides a different kind of recreational opportunity for the novice or the seasoned veteran by offering riding lessons, wagon rides, and arena riding. Some choose to blaze the Lakeshore Bridle Trail to experience the historic use of recreational stock.



## **Special Event Activities**

Saylorville hosts a great location for special events for organized use beyond the normal day-to-day use by individuals or groups. Special event activities at Saylorville average 10,000 participants annually. Events like the annual Dam to Dam 20 K race, National Disc Golf Tournament, fishing tournaments, boat regattas, and weddings have taken place at Saylorville.

## **Educational Programs**

Saylorville Park Ranger staff, along with help from the Iowa DNR, Polk County Conservation Board, Dallas County Conservation Board, and numerous volunteers, provides educational opportunities to the public. Pro-

grams include learning about water safety, campfire programs in the campgrounds, attending one of the many hikes or various environmental education presentations and special events. No matter your interest, there are numerous opportunities for everyone to get out, learn, and enjoy the outdoors!

## **Saylorville Lake Visitor Center**

During 2010 the Saylorville Lake Visitor Center was remodeled bringing needed updates to the center's information and educational displays. The displays inform the public about Saylorville Lake and the US Army Corps mission, natural resources, wildlife, archeology and geology. The Center was also upgraded bringing new modern security, seating, lighting, audio and visual equipment to the theater and display areas. During 2012 new handicap accessible doors were installed as well as new sidewalks meeting ADA requirements for accessibility to the downstairs theater. New bike racks, benches, water fountain and information board improves the visitors experience and aesthetics to the front of the Visitor Center. The Visitor Center is the primary location for school and civic groups, campers and visitors to attend the various free educational programming offered to the public.