Bittersweet Wild Lakes Area

The 2,553-acre Bittersweet Wild Lakes Area is a few miles north and east of the town of Woodruff off Highway 70. Its wild campuses (Bittersweet, Prong, Oberlin, and Smith) are small, scenic, undeveloped and connected by portage trails.

The forest surrounding these lakes captures the oldest stands of hemlock, red pine and white pine known in the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest. Already a State Natural Area, the Bittersweet Wild Lakes Area has now been set aside to preserve the beautiful woods and waters for visitors to enjoy in a quiet, remote setting.

All five primary portages are reservable for up to 14 nights through the reservation system at www.whfsnp.org or on a first-come, first-served basis. Moters are not allowed on any of these lakes and access is by carry-in landings. Campers must register at the Clear Lake Visitor Station.

This wild lakes area has a low maintenance road, so vehicles with high clearances are recommended.

Suggested Canoe Trips

We are suggesting six separate trips on three different rivers in this guide. Trips #1-4 describe the four continuous sections of the Manitowish River. It flows 44 miles from High Lake to the Turtle Falls Bridge. To reach Highway 47 to the south, just upstream from the Fishtrap Dam. The eastern portion to Escanaba Lake can be a side trip. Escanaba Lake is 100 percent state-owned and a beautiful place to paddle. Be aware that Escanaba and Palette are research lakes and no fishing is allowed without a permit. Permits must be returned by the end of each day. Staying on the route and portaging to Stevens Point will eventually bring you to a sand road. Portage over this road for a small creek that runs north to the Trout Campground and headland. Beaver dams will be located along this stretch. The White Sand to North Trout Campground section of this route can be paddled as a day or overnight trip. Enter South Trout Campground through North Trout, and take the Trout River, which passes through Wild Rice, Alder, and Manitowish Lakes. Paddling north of Manitowish Lake and under the Highway 51 bridge into Spider Lake allows you to connect with the Manitowish River Trip. There are a total of three portages on this route. The total distance is 19 miles and can be divided into smaller routes.

Trip #5: White Sand to Trout River

This trip begins at White Sand Lake north of Highway K. Travel south across a portage from White Sand to Lost Canoe Lake. From Lost Canoe, portage into Palette Lake, which has three portages. The western portion to Stevens Point depends on your route to Trout Lake. The eastern portion to Escanaba Lake can be a side trip. Escanaba Lake is 100 percent state-owned and a beautiful place to paddle. Be aware that Escanaba and Palette are research lakes and no fishing is allowed without a permit. Permits must be returned by the end of each day. Staying on the route and portaging to Stevens Point will eventually bring you to a sand road. Portage over this road for a small creek that flows into the North Trout Campground and headland. Beaver dams will be located along this stretch. The White Sand to North Trout Campground section of this route can be paddled as a day or overnight trip. Enter South Trout Campground through North Trout, and take the Trout River, which passes through Wild Rice, Alder, and Manitowish Lakes. Paddling north of Manitowish Lake and under the Highway 51 bridge into Spider Lake allows you to connect with the Manitowish River Trip. There are a total of three portages on this route. The total distance is 19 miles and can be divided into smaller routes.

Rules and Regulations

Camping is permitted only at designated sites. Do not cut or damage living trees or shrubs. No more than six persons on a site. No fire is required. Access must be by watercraft. Camping is limited to one night only. Sites are available on a first-come, first-served basis. There is no camping allowed on islands in the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest. Islands possess unique characteristics and are susceptible to erosion. Day use is allowed where posted, but to preserve what is there it may be best to enjoy from a distance.

Safety Messages

Canoeing
Every canoe must carry a U.S. Coast Guard approved inflatable life-saving device for each person aboard. Passengers should wear a life jacket at all times. Most forest water trails are slow to moderately slow, but canoists should be aware of any changing conditions. As a rule, do not overextend watercraft.

Drinking Water
Boil all water to approved tablets or filters before drinking.

10200 Highway N • Baudette, A rizona 56622 • 715-542-3923
dnr.wi.gov (keywords “NHAL”)

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Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
PO Box 779, Madison, Wisconsin 53701-0779

Northern Highland American Legion State Forest
1 Governor Knowles State Forest …………715-463-2888
2 Brule River State Forest …………………715-372-5678
3 Flambeau River State Forest ……………715-532-5273
4 Northern Highland American Legion State Forest …………………715-542-3923
5 Peshtigo River State Forest …………………715-779-3900
6 Black River State Forest …………………715-284-4103
7 Crouse Experimental State Forest …………..687-785-9007

Waupaca County Tourism
888-947-2757

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
10200 Highway N • Baudette, Minnesota 56622 • 715-542-3923
NORTHERN HIGHLAND AMERICAN LEGION STATE FOREST

For Emergency Dial 911

Helpful Hints
• Keep your canoe at least 100 feet from shore where soil can filter out impurities. Always carry a compass, insect repellent and first aid kit. Please leave a clean site for others—pack out everything you bring in.

• Use caution and confine fires to a fire ring. Put out all fires completely and make sure the fire ring is cool before you leave the area.

• Plants, native or alien, may be protected by law. Always be aware of any changing conditions. As a rule, do not overextend watercraft.

• Boil all water to approved tablets or filters before drinking.

• Water quality varies from stretch to stretch. When in doubt, consume only bottled or previously boiled water. Boil all water.

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