



This blue goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, is the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Lake Ilo

National Wildlife Refuge

Visitor Information



Welcome

Lake Ilo National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is one of more than 570 refuges and 38 wetland management districts in the National Wildlife Refuge System – a network of lands set aside specifically for wildlife. The System is a living heritage, conserving wildlife and habitat for people today and for generations to come.

General Information

Location

Lake Ilo NWR is located 1 mile west of Dunn Center, North Dakota, along Highway 200. There is no office or visitor center on the Refuge. The Refuge is managed by the staff at Audubon NWR, Coleharbor, North Dakota.

Hours

The Refuge is open from 5:00 am to 10:00 pm daily. Please consult the Refuge map for areas open to public use.

Refuge Establishment

In 1936, the Works Progress Administration constructed a dam near the confluence of Spring Creek and Murphy Creek. This water conservation project, initiated during the drought of the Great Depression, employed several hundred local citizens.

The dam created Lake Ilo, the first major lake in this part of North Dakota. In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Executive Order establishing Lake Ilo NWR as a breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife.

A Haven for Wildlife

The Refuge has 4,034 acres of native prairie, planted grasslands, and wetland habitat. Since the establishment of the Refuge, 227 bird, 36 mammal, 6 reptile, 3 amphibian, and 11 fish species have been observed.

Large concentrations of waterfowl use the 1,240-acre Lake Ilo during spring and fall migrations. Waterfowl species that commonly nest here include blue-winged teal, Canada goose, gadwall, mallard, northern pintail, and northern shoveler. Other nesting waterbirds include black-crowned night heron, double-crested cormorant, eared grebe, great blue heron, pied-billed grebe, and western grebe.

Shorebirds such as American avocet, killdeer, marbled godwit, willet, Wilson's phalarope, and yellowlegs are also plentiful here.

Songbirds such as the bobolink, chestnut-collared longspur, western meadowlark, and several native sparrows can be found in the grasslands.

Resident mammals that make their year-round home here include badger, coyote, mule deer, weasel, and white-tailed deer.

Visitor Opportunities

Lake Ilo Park

Located on the north shore of Lake Ilo, Lake Ilo Park has picnic tables, charcoal grills, a nature play area, and restrooms.

Nature Trails

A trailhead is located on the north side of Lake Ilo, near the entrance to Lake Ilo Park. Nature trails wind through the area providing opportunities to view wildlife in the grasslands, woodlands, and on Lake Ilo. Interpretive signs and benches are located along the trail.

Interpretive Displays

A reconstructed stone tipi ring is located near the trailhead. Information about the history of the Lake Ilo Dam, along with a dedication stone, is located near the spillway of the dam.

Wildlife Observation and Photography

We invite you to observe and photograph wildlife in the grasslands, wetlands, and along the nature trails. Early mornings and evenings offer the best wildlife viewing times. Spring and fall migration are peak times to observe and photograph many species of birds.

Portions of Lake Ilo are open to boating for the purposes of wildlife observation and photography from May 1 through September 30 (see map). Boat motors are restricted to idle speed.

Open-water Fishing

Portions of Lake Ilo are open to shoreline fishing year-round and to fishing from a boat from May 1 through September 30, in accordance with State and Refuge regulations (see map).

Boat motors are restricted to idle speed.

Open-water Fishing

A fishing pier is located in Lake Ilo Park. A boat ramp and dock are located west of the Park.

Islands in Lake Ilo and the Lake Ilo Dam, including the water 100 feet in front of the dam, are closed to all public access.

Ice Fishing

Portions of Lake Ilo are open to ice fishing.

Three ice access points are available for vehicles to access the ice (see map). Traveling on ice can be hazardous and requires caution.

Fish houses may be used for ice fishing in accordance with State regulations. Beginning March 15, fish houses must be removed daily from the Refuge. They may not be left unattended on Refuge grasslands.

Vehicles, including all-terrain vehicles and snowmobiles, can be used on the ice only in conjunction with ice fishing.

Protecting the Refuge

For the protection of wildlife, habitat, and other visitors, please observe the following regulations:

- Vehicles must stay on designated roads, ice access points, or on the ice.
- Animals, artifacts, plants, and other natural materials are protected and may not be disturbed.
- Pets must be leashed or contained in a vehicle or fish house.
- Persons possessing, transporting, or carrying firearms on National Wildlife Refuge System lands must comply with all provisions of State and local law. Persons may only use (discharge) firearms in accordance with refuge regulations (50 CFR 27.42 and specific refuge regulations in 50 CFR Part 32).

Prohibited Activities

- Vehicle travel on shorelines.
- Accessing islands in Lake Ilo.
- Accessing the Lake Ilo Dam and the water 100 feet in front of the dam.
- Recreational water sports, including, but not limited to jet skiing, knee boarding, sailing, scuba diving, snorkeling, stand-up paddling, swimming, tubing, and waterskiing.
- Hunting
- Horseback riding
- Camping
- Fireworks
- Fires, except for fires in grills in Lake Ilo Park.
- Littering
- Use of devices capable of shooting or directing a projectile or liquid at another person or wildlife.

Accessibility

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs and activities of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is available to all individuals regardless of physical or mental ability. For more information, please contact the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Equal Opportunity, www.doi.gov/accessibility.

Lake Ilo National Wildlife Refuge
C/O Audubon National Wildlife Refuge
3275 11th St. NW
Coleharbor, ND 58531

701 / 442-5474

audubon@fws.gov

www.fws.gov/refuge/lake-ilo

Telecommunications Relay Service
TTY / Voice: 711

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
www.fws.gov

Refuge Information
1 800 / 344 WILD

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