

There's plenty of public access for area boaters

By Tara Marion

In Kalamazoo County, a combination of 15 lakes, ponds and rivers have a total of 18 points of public boat access, which are equipped with many amenities. They are also restricted by a few rules and regulations, according to Dave Olsen, parks and recreation supervisor at the Department of Natural Resources.

The DNR sets the guidelines for each of these access sites, except for those found within the county parks, which are managed by the Kalamazoo County Parks Department.

What amenities are available and which rules are enforced often depends on the specific location. For example, although he'd like to keep toilets at all public boat launching sites, Olsen explained why vandalism has made this an unrealistic goal. "We've had toilets burned; we've had them blown up. We've had them vandalized in other ways, but in most places, we do maintain them.

In other efforts to maintain the quality of these sites, the DNR has imposed a ban on dogs and alcohol at several locations that are frequented by families.

Olsen explained that many people are scared of dogs, and owners are often irresponsible about disposing of their waste. The DNR doesn't allow alcohol because they've turned into party locations and bothered the neighbors. "It's distracted us from the central purpose of the site, which is boat launching and turned it into more of an entertainment center," Olsen said.

Unless otherwise noted, all public access sites are open 24 hours a day and have no user fees. The exception is Austin Lake where there is a \$4 daily admission or a \$24 annual permit.

The DNR and Kalamazoo County do not charge a fee for these accesses unless they need someone to control site use. "We charge a fee to defray the cost of having someone on site," Olsen explained, "so you only have to pay a fee when an attendant is on duty."

Austin Lake. This 1,050 water-acre lake is located two miles west of Galesburg. This site is closed for all use from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m. Features include toilets, parking for 43 car-trailer units, a hard-surface ramp for areas of limited water depth or lake size, and a courtesy pier, which is an access pier on a ramp that slides in and out of the water for summer and winter.

According to the DNR, Austin Lake is a handicapped-accessible site with this courtesy pier, designated parking, accessible routes to major on-site amenities and restrooms. No alcohol or dogs are allowed.

Barton Lake. This 347 water-acre lake is located four miles east of Schoolcraft. Features include toilets, parking for 26 car-trailer units, a hard-surface ramp and courtesy pier.

Blue Lake. This 24 water-acre lake is located one mile northeast of Climax in Cold Brook County Park. Features include toilets, parking for 20 car-trailer units, a hard-surface ramp and courtesy pier.

Comstock. This Kalamazoo River boat-launching site is located in Comstock. The DNR doesn't attempt to define the water acreage of rivers because the boatable acreage is debatable. Features include parking for five car-trailer units and a carry-down launching area, which indicates a site that's suitable for small fishing boats and square-nosed john boats.

Eagle Lake. This 224 water-acre lake is located three miles east of Mattawan. This site is closed for all use from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m. Features include toilets, parking for 25 car-trailer units and a hard-surface ramp. No alcohol or dogs are allowed.

Eagle Lake. This 73 water-acre lake is located two miles southeast of Augusta in Fort Custer Recreation Area. This site is only available 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., unless camping. Features include toilets, parking for 14 car-trailer units and a hard-surface ramp. State park rules apply and a motor vehicle permit is required.

Hogset Lake. This 81 water-acre lake is located three miles south of Portage. Features include parking for four car-trailer units and a gravel-surface rap that accommodates fishing boats and some small pleasure boats. High-speed boating and water skiing are only permitted 11 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time.

This lake has another access site located in **Prairie View Park.** Features include toilets, parking for 10 car-trailer units and a gravel-surface ramp. This site is only available when the parking is open, which is generally 9 a.m. to sunset, although hours fluctuate. County regulations limit launching to 10 boats at a time. This site is suitable for boats with small outboards (under 15 horsepower).

Kalamazoo River. This boat-launching site is located two miles southeast of Augusta in Fort Custer Recreation area. This site is only available 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., unless camping. Features include toilets, parking for 10 car-trailer units and a hard-surface ramp.

Le Fever Lake. This 12 water-acre lake is located two miles southeast of Climax. Features include toiles, parking for 10 car-trailer units and a gravel-surface ramp.

Long Lake. This 575 water-acre site is located three miles east of Portage. This site is closed for all use from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m. Features include toilets, parking for 24 car-trailer units and a hard-surface amp.

Morrow Lake. This 100 water-acre lake is located one mile west of Galesburg in River Oaks County Park. This site is only available when the park is open, which is generally a daylight hours from spring to fall. Features include toilets, parking for 75 car-trailer units, and a hard-surface ramp.

Morrow Pond. This access site is located three miles west of Galesburg. Features include toilets, parking for 32 car-trailer units, a hard-surface ramp and courtesy pier.

Paw Paw Lake. This 126 water-acre lake is located three miles southeast of Mattawan. Features include toilets, a parking lot for nine car-trailer units and a hard-surface ramp.

Rupert Lake. This 28 water-acre lake is located two miles northwest of Alamo. This site is closed for all use from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m. Features include toilets, parking for 10 car-trailer units and a gravel-surface ramp. No alcohol or dogs are allowed.

Sherman Lake. Tis 120 water-acre lake is located two miles south of Yorkville. This site is closed for all use from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m. Features include toilets, parking for 30 car-trailer units, a hard-surface ramp and courtesy pier. According to the DNR, Sherman Lake is a handicapped-accessible site with this courtesy pier, designated parking, accessible routes to major on-site amenities and restrooms. No alcohol or dogs are allowed.

High-speed boating and water skiing are only permitted from 11 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time. Some parts of the lake are listed as no-wake zones, which means boat operators are required to operate their vehicles at a slow speed so their boats do not create a wake. "It's about a crawl or maybe a reasonably fast walk," Olsen explained.

Sugar Loaf Lake. This 148 water-acre lake is located three miles southwest of Portage. This site is closed for all use from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m. Features include toilets, parking for 38 car-trailer unites, a hard-surface ramp and a courtesy ramp. According to the DNR, Sugar Loaf Lake is also a handicapped-accessible site.

Whitford-Lawler. This 24 water-acre lake is located two miles south of Augusta in Fort Custer Recreation Area. This site is only available 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., unless camping. Features include toilets, parking for 16 car-trailer units and a hard-surface ramp. State park rules apply and a motor vehicle permit is required. Motor boats are prohibited.

Whether your summer plans include fishing expeditions by yourself or water recreation with your family, there is a public boat launch that will suit your needs.