

Located in one of the state's largest recreation areas, little Prairie Lake gets ready to host big motored anglers.

# A Little Lake Goes Big Time

Story and Photo  
By Gary Thomas

**P**rairie Lake was designed for fishing. Engineers and fisheries biologists planned the 210-acre lake to include all the things that fish would need to prosper.

Located in the Jim Edgar Panther Creek State Fish and Wildlife Area, the lake is more than 2 miles long, and features numerous coves and inlets giving it more than 13 miles of shoreline.

But while the lake is designed for fishing, the shoreline is not. Most of the brush and trees that ringed the lake are still there. If you want to fish the good spots, you'll need a boat.

The lake was first stocked just five years ago, so anglers have been using the water for only a few years.

"Helping design this lake was a fisheries biologist's dream," said Department of Natural Resources District Fisheries Biologist Dan Stephenson. "We bulldozed all the trees under 12 inches in diameter and cut off the trees more than 12 inches



**The 210-acre Prairie Lake was designed for fishing, with motored anglers able to cruise 13 miles of shoreline habitat.**

3 feet above ground level. Brush from these cuttings became massive brush piles. All total, thousands of stumps and giant brush piles dot the lake bottom making for perfect gamefish cover. The lake also has a meandering creek channel that drops 8 to 10 feet below the lake's bottom, creating excellent fishing."

Stephenson said some of the larger trees left standing have died, providing cover for game fish, and homes for wood ducks and other wildlife.

The lake has one two-lane launch ramp, and a parking lot that will accommodate about 35 vehicles with trailers. There is no overflow area, so getting on the lake is first-come, first-serve. There also are two piers that go out into the lake from the campground, where campers can tie up their boats and leave them overnight.

This is a very scenic lake, and anglers are amazed at the water quality. Constructed with numerous erosion controls and filtering grasslands surrounding the lake, the water is so clear you can look more than 10 feet into the water most of the year.

Located 25 miles northwest of Springfield in Cass County, the site also has two other lakes—the 35-acre Drake Lake and the 25-acre Gridley Lake—plus 10 ponds ranging from about 1 to 1.5 acres in size. Those lakes are restricted to electric motors (although boaters can put in boats with motors and use them to load them back onto their trailers).



Gary Thomas is a former editor of *OutdoorIllinois* magazine.

## Prairie Lake fishing

### Boating restrictions:

Beginning April 1, anglers can use any size motor on Prairie Lake, but the entire lake is a "no wake" zone.

### Fishing regulations:

**Largemouth bass:** 15-inch minimum length limit and three per day; average 17 to 19 inches on average or 4-pound fish.

**Sunfish:** no limit on size or number; redear average 8 to 9 inches and bluegill 7 to 8 inches.

**Muskie:** 48-inch minimum length and one fish per day; up to 44 inches and 20 pounds.

**Channel catfish:** limit six per day; average 5 pounds.

**Crappie:** no limit on numbers or size.