

Lakes Basin Recreation Area

Plumas National Forest

Beckwourth Ranger District



A Great Place to Visit

Looking for an alpine setting with an abundance of glacially carved crystal blue lakes? Then visit Lakes Basin Recreation Area. People have been visiting this area for thousands of years. Seems this is the place where just about everybody finds something they are looking for.

Recreation activities include camping, fishing, boating, hiking, nature viewing, mountain biking, equestrian and 4x4 camping. From a day trip to a stay at a rustic lodge, here is where adventure or solitude awaits.

Area History

There is evidence of extensive use for tool making, gathering and seasonal habitation by Native Americans. Near Lakes Basin Campground one can find petroglyphs. Though Native Americans pursued many activities here, there is no indication of permanent habitation.

Evidence of more recent activities such as mining, logging and cabins can be found throughout the area. Make sure all artifacts remain available for discovery by future generations by leaving them as you found them.

Day Use Areas - no fees

Frazier Falls Trailhead - Frazier Falls Trail is a paved accessible trail that includes an accessible picnic area at the trailhead. Plan your visit to include time for a snack or lunch here. You will find picnic tables, restrooms and trash bins available.

Gold Lake Boat Launch Day Use - Here is a forested location for your relaxation. It's next to the boat launch parking area. Park either next to the Gold Lake Campground fee station or in the boat launch parking area. Trash bins and restrooms are available.

Gold Lake Picnic Area - A picnic table in a grassy area next to Gold Lake Dam offers great views of the lake. This location also has a restroom. The restroom has a sliding door suitable for snow conditions when used by snowmobilers.

Silver Lake/Bear Lake Trailheads - A single picnic table along with drinking water, a trash bin and a restroom are available at the end of your hike.



photo by Frederick Howe

Boat Launching

Gold Lake has a recently improved launching facility. It features a two lane ramp, boat loading dock, parking, day use area, restrooms and solar lighting. A second launch area is available at the Gold Lake Day Use Area near the dam. This second launch site supports hand launching of small craft. It has a shallow gravel launch area.

Boating

At 6,411 feet elevation, Gold Lake is the most popular lake at Lakes Basin Recreation Area for boating. Gold Lake is popular for skiing, jet skiing, wind surfing and fishing. Water temperatures remain cold throughout the year. High winds blowing over the Sierra Nevada oftentimes produce unsafe conditions, especially for small craft. Boating is regulated by Plumas County. All users must adhere to state, county and other regulations.

Fishing

Rainbow, Brown and Cutthroat Trout are regularly caught in most of the creeks and lakes. Lake Trout and Kokanee Salmon are found in Gold Lake. Oftentimes crayfish are abundant. Fishing is regulated by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. The Gold Lake Boat Launch Facility is a very busy location. Fishing in this area is not allowed.

Wildflower Viewing Web Site

https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/regions/Pacific_Southwest/LakesBasin/index.shtml

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Forest Service
Pacific Southwest Region
Plumas National Forest
www.fs.fed.us/r5/plumas

Beckwourth Ranger District
PO Box 7, Blairsden, Ca. 96103
(530) 836-2575
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Camping

Lakes Basin Recreation Area has four very popular campgrounds. During the camping season, all have vault toilets and trash collection. Other amenities include fire rings with grills, bear resistant lockers and picnic tables. An additional developed campground is available to 4X4 enthusiasts. All campgrounds remain open until closed by snow. After the Labor Day Weekend, trash collection stops; water at Lakes Basin Campground is turned off; and fees are not collected. During that time pack out all trash.

Lakes Basin Campground

This vendor operated campground offers drinking water, graveled roads, family campsites, one group site (tents only) and one double site. Maximum trailer length is 30 feet. Reservations at www.recreation.gov

Gold Lake Campground

This is a Forest Service operated campground with 37 first come sites. Dirt and gravel roads within the campground may provide limited access and turn around space.

Goose Lake Campground

This is a Forest Service operated campground with 10 first come sites. There are three access locations from the highway. The fee station is at the south entrance. Roads throughout the campground require high clearance.

Haven Lake Campground

This is another Forest Service operated campground with 4 first come sites. Due to roadway obstacles, high clearance vehicles are recommended.

Gold Lake 4X4 Campground

This is the fifth campground in the recreation area. It is located at the southwest end of Gold Lake. It is Forest Service operated and amenities include fire rings and bear resistant lockers. New composting toilets should be installed in 2018. Access to the campground requires 4 wheel drive and high clearance. This campground provides access to a variety of 4X4 routes. A staging area is available just past the entrance to Gold Lake Campground.

The 4X4 camp has no trash collection and no fees. Campers must pack out all trash and not use trash facilities at other campgrounds.

Dispersed Camping and Backpacking

Camping in the Lakes Basin Recreation Area is restricted to the developed campgrounds listed above. Backpacking is allowed only north of Mt. Elwell from Smith Lake to Wades Lake. Trail access to this area is via the Smith Lake Trail or the Jamison Creek Trail in Plumas Eureka State Park. This backpacking area provides access the Pacific Crest Trail.

Historic Lodges

Lakes Basin Recreation Area has three Historic Lodges within its boundaries. Each has its own story and rustic Sierra charm. Much of the following information was gleaned from a brochure produced by the good folks at Elwell Lakes Lodge.

Historic Elwell Lakes Lodge

After 89 years the lodge has progressed from visitors sleeping on the ground to tent cabins and guest rooms. Built with craftsmanship this lodge has remained in the hands of the original family.

Historic Gold Lake Lodge

The first lodge here was built in 1912. In 1925 the main lodge burned to the ground and was reconstructed the next year. People arrived via horse and buggy or motor vehicle from the Blairsden Train Station. The lodge provides quality summer 'Sierra Nevada' style lodging and recreation.

Historic Gray Eagle Lodge

In 1924 the lodge was built along Graeagle Creek. It used the creek for hydroelectric power. Today, the lodge still prides itself on providing guests with a traditional vacation. Guests and others are always welcome to nightly summer activities.

Wildlife

Lakes Basin is home to a wide variety of wildlife. Martens, bears, mountain lions, bobcats, coyotes, foxes, owls, hawks, eagles, osprey, squirrels, rabbits, skunks, frogs, snakes, insects and many others live here. Keep in mind that you are the visitor here and this is their home. Observe the wildlife and don't disturb.



American Marten

About Lakes Basin Recreation Area

Many visitors and even residents have some confusion about the relationship between Lakes Basin and the Lakes Basin Recreation Area. If you are confused or just want to know, consider these facts;

1. Lakes Basin is the larger area that includes the Lakes Basin Recreation Area to the north.
2. Lakes Basin is managed by two National Forests with the boundary roughly along the ridgeline between Yuba River and Feather River watersheds. Tahoe National Forest manages the Yuba River part and Plumas National Forest the Feather River part.
3. Lakes Basin Recreation Area is managed by the Plumas
4. In 1926 the Secretary of Agriculture established the recreation area, setting it aside for its recreational potential.

Trails

Lakes Basin Recreation Area has over 30 miles of trails to explore. Some of the more popular loops and destinations are listed below. Contact the Beckwourth Ranger District Office in Blairsden for maps and information about these and other trails. A variety of organizations provide maintenance and repair of Lakes Basin Recreation Area trails. Much of the trail debris clean-up is accomplished by unidentified individuals. Thank, to all of you!

Frazier Falls Trail (1) - Easy 1 mile paved accessible trail to an overlook across from the falls. Springtime is the best time to view the falls. Trail use is restricted to foot and accessible traffic only. This trail is maintained by Lion's Club Volunteers.

- From Highway 89 take the Gold Lake Highway one mile south of Graeagle and drive 1.2 miles to Frazier Falls Road. Travel 3 miles along this narrow paved road to the trailhead.
- From Highway 49 take the Gold Lake highway at Bassetts Station. Take the unpaved Frazier Falls turnoff opposite from the entrance to Gold Lake.

Bear Lakes Loop (2)

Easy 2 mile loop starting at Bear Lake Trailhead passing by Big Bear, Little Bear and Cub Lakes.

- After 3.5 miles on Gold Lakes Highway turn at the Lakes Basin Campground turnoff. Small vehicles should proceed past the campground and to trailhead parking at the end of this narrow winding road. Large vehicles and trailers should park at the horse trailer parking area before the campground and about one mile from the trailhead.

Round Lake Loop (3)

Moderate 4 mile loop starting at the Round Lake Trailhead. This trail passes through mixed conifer forest, accesses an old mine site and skirts six alpine lakes before returning to the trailhead.

- After 3.7 miles on Gold Lake Highway turn at the Gold Lake Lodge turnoff and park in the parking area. The trailhead is at the southwest end of the parking area. Round Lake Trail is the upper trail and the lower trail is the Bear Lake Connector.

Smith Lake Trail (4)

Easy 2.4 mile in and back to Smith Lake. This trail connects to the Mt. Elwell Trail before Smith Lake and also continues past the lake to the Jamison Creek Trail.

- For both the Smith and Mt. Elwell options, after 2.1 miles on Gold Lake Highway turn at the Mt. Elwell Lodge turnoff. Before passing beyond the Gray Eagle Lodge gate turn onto the Smith Lake Trailhead access road. The trailhead is at the northwest corner of the parking area.

Mt. Elwell Loop (5)

Strenuous 6.5 mile loop starting at the Smith Lake Trailhead. Spectacular panoramic vistas of many lakes and surrounding peaks.



View of Sierra Buttes

Mills Peak Fire Lookout

At an elevation of 7342 feet, Mills Peak Fire Lookout overlooks Mohawk Valley, Sierra Valley and Lakes Basin and across to Beckwourth Peak, Mt. Elwell and the Sierra Buttes. Staffed during fire season, this active fire lookout helps protect a large part of Eastern Plumas County.

The lookout was first built in 1932 and improved by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933. After deactivation in 1970, it was modernized and reactivated in 2005.

Road Access is via Mills Peak Road just south of Gold Lake and north of Gold Lake Campground on the Gold Lake Highway. Trail access is via Mohawk Chapman Road located 1 mile west of Highway 89 on the Gold Lake Highway.

A small parking area is available about 200 yards west of the lookout. Many hikers and mountain bikers also visit this lookout via the Mills Peak Trail. Mills Peak Trail is one of the most popular mountain bike trails in Northern California

Visitors will find friendly helpful staff and a 360 degree range of view. Staff usually have the time to help visitors locate landmarks and share their fire related experiences with visitors.

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In Case of Emergency

Fire / Medical / Sheriff:

Call 911

A pay telephone is
located in Graeagle

