

In the autumn, as tree leaves lose their green color, the lake reflects their beauty and challenges our perception. Our attention is drawn down, down into the waters, yet calls to mind thoughts of the forest taking a long breath that flows down into the deep dark of the roots and soil.



Life in the waters goes on. Aquatic vegetation begins to die off and begin to decay, releasing an oily-looking sheen on the surface of the water. The sheen is simply a part of a healthy annual aquatic system cycle. Tannins leached out of sodden oak leaves give the lake its typical shaded color.

Survival demands changes for many plants and animals when temperatures drop. Many of the lake inhabitants rely on the lake bottom to survive. Plants lose their leaves but keep their roots alive there to wait on warmer weather.

Amphibians and turtles nestle down in a blanket of mud.

Beavers have collected tree branches and sunk them under the surface water to feed on them even when the lake is frozen over.

Fish find warmer pockets of the lake and adapt to fluctuating temperatures.



Beaver

For many species, winter has pushed a “pause button” on their regular routines. A cover of ice can bring stillness, silence, a sense of waiting to exhale. The underwater community of animals use a variety of natural talents to survive until the return of movement, warmth, and light.



A CHANGING CLIMATE

Life in and around this lake has been slowly evolving since the day humans impounded Bear Creek. Natural elements have created a home for species who, in turn, have developed into a community. But today, global climate is changing quickly and may threaten this community. Stronger rainstorms may bring in too much sediment and choke the lake, The habitat created by animals such as beavers may be washed away. Warmer average temperatures may heat the waters and introduce more invasive species and algal blooms to threaten the lake’s healthy balance of elements, nutrients, and habitats.

Many people believe that this rapid climate change is due to human activity over the past century. If so, what can you do to help preserve and maintain these waters? A quick online search can provide you with steps you can take for the sake of the lake and your own community.

WATERCRAFT INFORMATION

The park offers many options for those who want to explore our waters. Kayaks, canoes, paddleboards, paddleboats and row boats are seasonally available daily from late May to early September for an hourly, half-day, or day-long rental fee. Ranger-led kayak and canoe tours are regularly scheduled and are suitable for beginner and experienced paddlers. For further information and to check out the park’s events listing go to: <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/bear-creek-lake>.

Those with their own personal watercraft can unload at the beach area and launch from the shoreline except within the designated swimming area. Two launch stations are available in the cabin area off of Otter Trail and Coyote Trail.

There is a boat ramp for larger boats. The ramp is located at the northern end of the lake by the dam. Trailer parking is available nearby. There is an additional fee to use the ramp. Only electric motors are allowed for use on the lake.



Great Blue Heron

The park gratefully acknowledges the artistic skills of Hilda LeStrange, who served at the park as a Virginia Service and Conservation Corps/ AmeriCorps member.

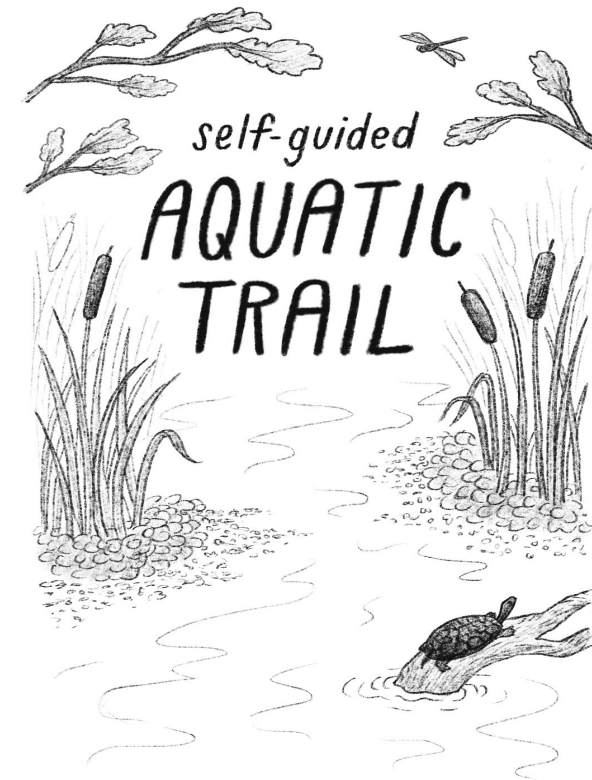


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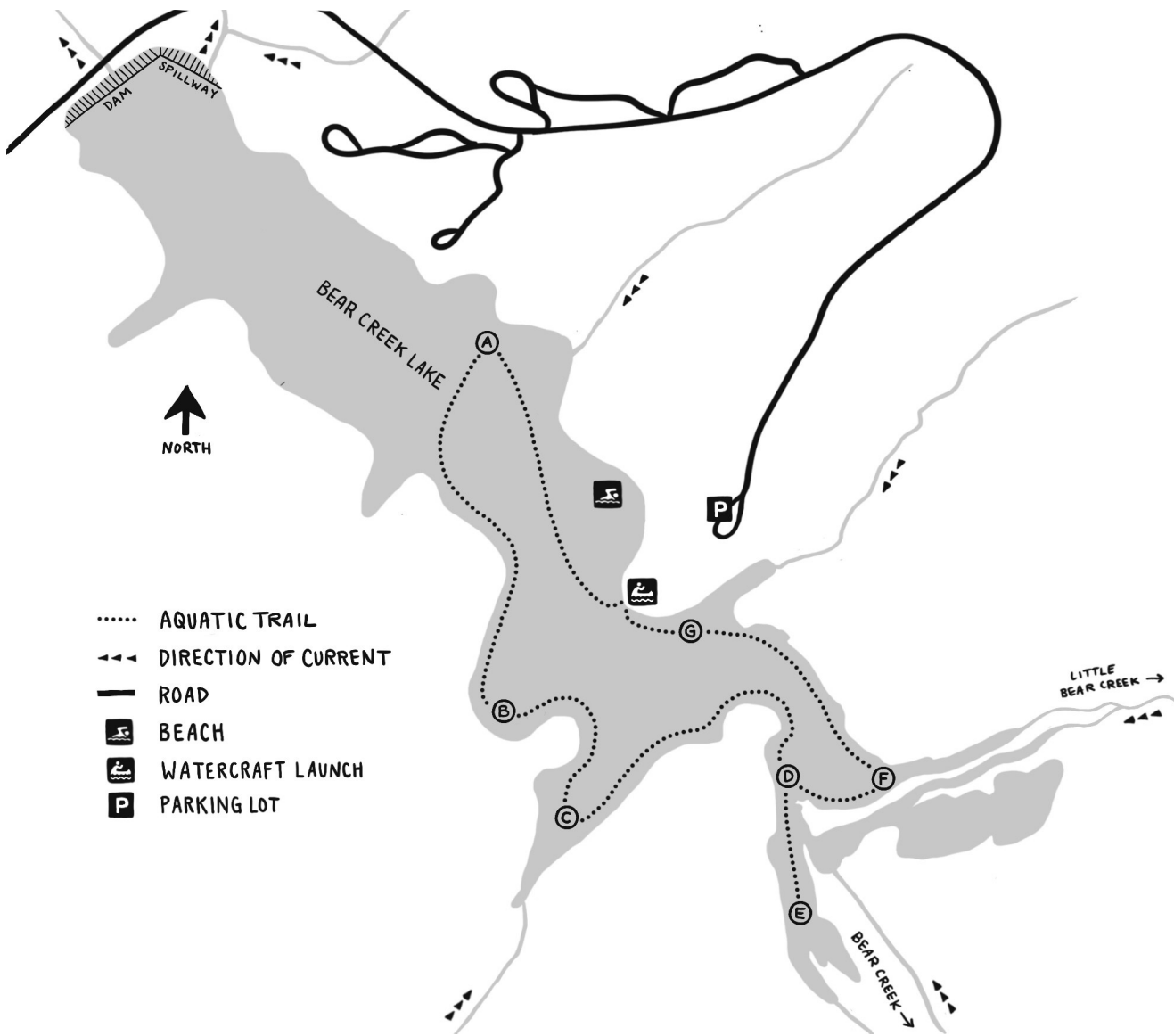
Virginia State Parks

BEAR CREEK LAKE STATE PARK

“Bear Creek Lake State Park is a haven of recreational resources in a unique Virginia environment – a legacy handed down and held in safeguard for future generations.”



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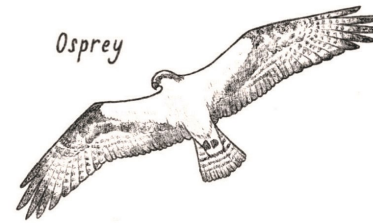
A) Wide Water

How did this lake come to be? If you look toward the far Northwest side of the lake, you'll find a clue! There is a road that goes along the top of a dam, and a spillway is off to the right. Late in the 1930s, men hired through the federal New Deal era Works Progress Administration built the dam and spillway. But that's just a piece of the story... what was here before the dam was built?

B) Forest View. There once was only a creek where this lake is now, surrounded by an ancient forest. This area is home to the Monacan people. In the 1700s, colonists cut down the forest to create farmland. Then, in the 1930's, the federal government acquired the land to allow the surrounding forest to grow back. Once the dam was built, the landscape changed again to include the lake you're paddling in now. Why do you think having a lake was considered important?

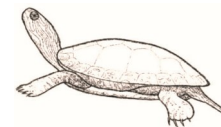
C) Turtle Corner

Many people love to relax and play in the water. We use this lake for recreation, but we aren't the only ones here. What other types of creatures share this space? Look into the sky and up into the trees. Maybe you'll spot an osprey diving for a fish, or a bald eagle perched high in a tree. You may even hear a kingfisher's loud laughing call! What other animals might you find?



D) Meeting of the Waters

The water you see here has flowed from two creeks: Bear Creek and Little Bear Creek. Look along the shallow edges of the lake...the edge habitat is where many creatures find shelter, food, or a place to lay their eggs. Perhaps you'll see a painted turtle basking in the sun, or a great blue heron waiting patiently for a fish to swim by. Some animals that live here are very secretive – the river otters and beavers that swim through these waters usually stay hidden under the surface when humans come around.



Eastern Painted Turtle

E) Cattail Alley

It's very shallow here – just a few feet deep. Welcome to our wetland! Over time, Bear Creek has gradually moved sediment from upstream into the lake. That sediment has slowly built up, allowing aquatic vegetation to get a foothold and thrive, altering the viewscape. Wetlands are essential to the survival of many species in Virginia and around the world. Many birds, amphibians, mammals, reptiles and insects rely on this habitat throughout their lifecycle. Pause and listen – do you hear insects humming or frogs peeping? Even these tiny creatures play hugely important roles in the ecosystem.



F) Wetland Way

Look closely at the water surface. Maybe you'll see the splash of a fish snatching an insect, or whirligig beetles zooming along as they skim the surface for tiny bugs. At the shoreline are grasses and sedges and emergent aquatic plants that provide safe hiding places for tiny creatures like minnows, tadpoles, and dragonflies. On hot summer days this area provides a cool place for larger animals such as deer to lay quietly. As you paddle back, think of all the creatures around you going about their day – flying above, swimming below, hiding just out of sight.

G) Reflection Point

This lake was originally made by humans for recreation, for people like you to enjoy! We share this environment with many types of plants and animals. What are some ways we can show care and respect for this place that so many creatures call home?