

Chisago Lakes Water Trail

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Welcome to the Chisago Lakes Water Trail

History of the Lakes

Chisago Lakes: 10 lakes spanning 10 miles with over 5000 acres of water, pristine shore-lines, islands, and peninsulas. What Swedish settlers discovered in the 1850s still exists today for the enjoyment of both local residents and weekend visitors.

Originally called “Kichisaga” by the First Nation Ojibway people, the “fair and lovely waters” of this area were one large lake, which the Swedish settlers called Big Lake, then Swede Lake, and finally Chisago Lake. In the mid-19th century the lakes were used for water, food, ice, transportation, freight, and of course, recreation. The arrival of the railroad in the 1880s gave rise to lakeside resorts where guests enjoyed fishing, sailing, and boating; passenger steamers even carried guests on recreational cruises across the lakes.

The Chisago Lakes area welcomed a variety of events over the next several decades, beginning with an ice carnival in the early 1930s, hosted by local residents Arne and Bernie Swanson. That led to speed and figure skating contests, and the largest event of all in 1935: The Minnesota State Skating Championships, during which Lindström greeted about 1200 visitors.

When the railroad was closed in 1948, the channels connecting the bigger bodies of water were filled in to make way for the highway, and the resulting five separate water basins were named for the towns they abutted: North Center Lake and South Center Lake for Center City; North Lindström Lake and South Lindström Lake for Lindström; and Chisago Lake for Chisago City. Today, these towns are vibrant communities nestled among the lakes. The efforts to re-connect the lakes have been ongoing for nearly 80 years. In the mid-1940s, the channel between North and South Lindström was dredged and a navigable culvert installed, but that culvert didn’t remain passable.



It wasn’t until 2005 that another channel was re-established between North and South Center Lakes, and in 2012 - with the reconstruction of Highway 8 - the North and South Lindström connection was reestablished. Plans are underway to re-create the navigable connection between North Center and North Lindström; that final phase would reestablish the original Kichisaga Lake.



The Chisago Lakes System is incorporated into the greater Chisago Lakes Watershed and includes 24 lakes. Various connections between the lakes and a weir system control the water levels on the chain. The Chisago Lakes Lake Improvement District, established in 1976, is responsible for maintaining the ditches and weirs and regulating lake levels. The “fair and lovely” Chisago Lakes make a spectacular year-round getaway on the northeast side of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area.

Directions & Access to Trail

The water trail extends 10 miles, through 5000 acres, over 10 lakes connected by small channels or short portages. Trip ideas and loops are identified on the individual lake maps and the Chisago Lakes Water Trail website: ([insert website URL here](#))

The Chisago Lakes Area is only 35 minutes north-east of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area. From the south, follow I-35 north to Forest Lake and exit on Highway 8 to Chisago Lakes. From the north, follow I-35 south to the Stacy exit and head east, left, on CSAH 19 (Stacy Trail) to the Lakes area.

The Chisago Lakes Water Trail offers two trailheads. One at Kichisaga Park on South Center Lake; from Lindström, go south on CSAH 25 (Olinda Trail) to Glader Blvd., then go east to Kichisaga Park. The second trailhead is at the Green Lake DNR boat landing; from Hwy. 8, west of Chisago City, take CSAH 23 (Green Lake Trail) to Green Lake. The system can also be accessed through Minnesota DNR boat ramps, city and county parks, city beaches, lakeshore restaurants, and motels. The trail is well marked with lake, portage, and campsite signage.

Camping & Lodging

Please take breaks and camp only in designated public areas. Public restroom facilities are available at the area parks. Camping is permitted at designated sites only.

The following options are available.

Ojiketa Regional Park (Chisago City)
Campsites and cabins for rent, 651-257-4162.
lsinger@ci.chisago.mn.us

Allemansrätt Park’s Anderson Peninsula (Lindström)
Primitive sites accessible from the lake only. Available on a first-come, first-served basis. Self-registration fee charged at the campsite: 651-257-0620, or email: ContactUs@cityofLindstrom.us

Whispering Bay Resort (Center City)
612-860-3234 / www.whisperingbayresort.com

GrandStay Hotel & Suites (Chisago City)
651-213-3400

Chisago Inn & Suites (Chisago City)
651-257-8088 / www.chisagoinnandsuites.com

Lakeview Motel (Lindström)
651-257-6291

Välkommen Inn (Lindström)
651-257-4888 or 612-810-3070:
www.valkommeninn.com

Go Boat Motel (Center City)
651-213-6119 / www.goboatmotel.com

Summit Inn Bed & Breakfast (Center City)
651-257-4987 / www.summitinnbb.com

Lakes on the Water Trail

South Center Lake: 1,003 acres and the deepest lake in the chain at a maximum of 109 ft., and an average depth of 16 ft. It has a navigable connection with North Center Lake.

Ogrens Lake: 48 acres, mostly covered with cattails. Possibly navigable in high water. North Center Lake, 868 acres with a maximum depth of 46 ft., and an average depth of 10 ft. Downtown Center City is accessible from the city’s lakeshore property on the south end of the lake.

Bull Lake: 11 acres with a depth of 30 ft. or more. Sits within the City of Lindström’s Allemansrätt Park. It is accessible by portage from North Center and North Lindström Lakes.



North Lindström Lake: 225 acres with a maximum depth of 29 ft., and an average depth of 16 ft. A bridge-covered channel large enough for a pontoon to travel through connects North Lindström with South Lindström Lake.

South Lindström Lake: 450 acres and 34 ft. average depth. South Lindström has access to Lindström’s downtown from the Lindström Beach.

Chisago Lake: 873 acres of water and a maximum depth of 32 ft. Connected to South Lindström Lake.

Little Green Lake: 224 acres, and **Green Lake** 1,714 acres, were not part of what the Swedes called Big Lake, but they are considered part of the Chisago Lakes Chain of Lakes. Ojiketa Regional Park sits on Green Lake.

Lake Martha: 21 acres and accessible by portage from Green and Chisago Lakes; the portage requires crossing Hwy. 8 at the Old Towne Road signalized intersection.



All of the lakes are considered excellent for fishing (species include black crappie, bluegill, largemouth bass, northern pike, and pumpkinseed - a variety of sunfish). The DNR periodically stocks the lakes with walleye and other fish. Bass, ice, and carp fishing tournaments are held annually in the area. Because many of the lakes are small and undeveloped, visitors often get a sense of being in the wilderness. Yet, there are many homes on the bigger lakes, and weekends and holidays lend themselves to heavy boat traffic.

Future Connections

Linn Lake: 176 acres and an average depth of 9 ft., is at the top of the watershed. Its outlet flows into South Center Lake and is accessible by a tough portage through Kichisaga Park.

Pioneer Lake: a small 77-acre lake accessible by a very short portage through the Chisago County Government Center property. This lake offers access to the historic Chisago Lake Lutheran Church. There is no public access to this lake. School Lake, 106 acres, currently has no access from Lake Martha, but the lake is accessible from Chisago City’s Rotary Park.

Lake Mattson: 24 acres, connected to School Lake. Kroon Lake, a 181-acre lake, currently not accessible by water trail; however, it does have a DNR boat ramp on the east side.

Wallmark Lake: 150 acres averaging 9 ft. deep, and boasts two explorable half-acre islands. Currently no public access on this lake.

Year-Around Activities

The water trail provides opportunities to canoe, kayak, and paddle board in summer, and to experience the best of winter. Summer activities include swimming, fishing, bird watching, hiking the local trails or wilderness parks, and snowshoeing.



The lakes are prime winter ice fishing and snowmobiling venues. The water trail offers a unique route for snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, or fat-tire biking - or a winter picnic at one of the adjacent parks.

The communities offer a year-round wide variety of dining options, locally roasted coffee, fresh sweets and bakery goods, eclectic shopping and antique stores, lodging, and other recreation options.

For Your Safety

The Chisago Lakes Water Trail was created to be shared by local residents and visitors to this suburban area. While on the trail, watch for boats in summer (and snowmobiles in winter). Paddlers need to be prepared mentally and physically to deal with unexpected weather conditions, and should possess the paddling skills necessary to assure their own safety and that of others. Lake winds - especially on the larger lakes - can pick up unexpectedly and create large waves, the power of which should not be underestimated. Please monitor local weather conditions before setting out on the water. The following rules and guidelines will keep everyone safe on the water trail.

- ▶ Always wear an appropriately sized and fitted U.S. Coast Guard approved **personal floatation device**;
- ▶ Be familiar with **dangers of hypothermia** and **dress appropriately** for possible cold water and weather;
- ▶ Seek instruction and practice kayak, canoe, and paddle board skills, including rescues, before paddling on Chisago Lakes;

- ▶ Always **let someone know where you are** going and when you are expected to return;
- ▶ Know the skill level of other paddlers in your group. Discuss safety issues before leaving shore;
- ▶ Pay attention to motorized boat (and winter snowmobile traffic) while on the lakes;
- ▶ To prevent a collision, **there must be a bright white light on board** each kayak, canoe, or paddle board after sunset;
- ▶ **Carry a light**, especially if using the lakes after dark in winter;
- ▶ Learn how to use **maps and a compass** for navigation before setting out on the lake;
- ▶ Anticipate changes in **weather, wind, waves and snow** by monitoring a weather or marine VHF radio, staying aware, and using common sense;
- ▶ **This trail map is not adequate for sole use as a navigational aid.** USGS topographic maps and NOAA charts of the Chisago Lakes Area can be obtained from a variety of sources, including kayaking or camping gear retailers.
- ▶ All watercraft (including non-motorized canoes and kayaks longer than 9 ft.) must be **registered** in Minnesota or the state of residence.
- ▶ **Plan** each trip and daily travel distances in relation to experience, fitness, and an average kayaking/canoeing/skiing speed of 2-3 mph;

- ▶ Bring kayak/canoe wheels for portages;

Drinking Water

Drinking water is not provided at the campsites. Be prepared to treat all water from the lakes. Bring your own water or buy water in any of the downtown areas along the way.

Return Trip Options

The Chisago Lakes Water Trail is unique in Minnesota outside of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Because the trail is on lakes, not a river, it is possible to loop back to any starting point. For those who choose to canoe the length of the trail there are several options to get back to their launch point.

- ▶ Leave a car or bike at either end of the trail;

- ▶ Walk/run back to the starting point; the trail’s two ends are not more than 5 miles apart;

- ▶ Call a local taxi: Northern Lights Taxi Transportation (612-325-4813);

- ▶ Hire an outfitter;

Portages and Transport

Bring wheels for your canoe and kayak, it will help with the portages. Please look for white laminated signs directing you to lakes and portages.

Respect Private Property

This is a suburban Water Trail; please respect private homes and property along the shore! Please take your breaks and camp only in designated public areas.