

### 36.

## WALKER LAKE

History - Walker Lake is located 12 miles north of Hawthorne and 55 miles south of Fallon off U.S. 95. It is a terminal lake (lake with no outlet) that is fed by the Walker River. Walker Lake is a remnant of the ancient Lake Lahontan that once covered most of the Great Basin 50,000 years ago. The native Lahontan cutthroat trout still inhabit Walker Lake, but the fishery is now maintained by hatchery stocks. River barriers prevent any natural reproduction. Upstream water demands have decreased lake levels by 130 feet since the turn of the century. The decreased water levels have led to increased levels of dissolved solids (salts) and increased the alkalinity to near lethal limits for all fish life in the lake. An increase in lake elevations or a decrease in dissolved solid levels is needed to secure the future of the lake.

Pertinent Information - Walker Lake is 17 miles long and 5 miles wide, with a maximum depth of 80 feet (2003). The only fish remaining in the lake are Lahontan cutthroat trout, tui chub, and to a lesser extent, Tahoe suckers. The lake stratifies from June through September and surface temperatures can reach 75°F at the surface. Fishing is generally toughest during this time when trout suspend in deeper water. During October and November, trout have been found near the surface (1-15 feet deep) in open water. They then move into the shore zone areas around December. Boaters typically have the highest catch rates, especially when fish are offshore or suspended, but shore anglers do well from December to May. Under ideal environmental conditions, cutthroat trout can live up to 9 years and achieve weights greater than 10 pounds. In Walker Lake, however, the salinity and alkalinity have increased to near lethal limits. Currently, fish have been ranging in size from 13 to 20 inches and from 1 to 2 ½ pounds. Angler creel surveys in 2008 found that 338 anglers caught 84 trout for an average catch rate of 0.25 fish per angler day. Check at the local stores to determine fishing depth. Spoons and flatfish are the most productive lures. Shore fishing can, at times, be productive. Again, spoons are the preferred tackle. Camping - Both improved (Sportsmen's Beach) and primitive camping are available at the lake.

Stocking - Approximately 70,000, 6-inch cutthroat trout are stocked in March by NDOW and the US FWS. Ten thousand of the fish are reared at Mason Valley Hatchery (NDOW) and 60,000 are reared at the federal hatchery at Gardnerville (Lahontan National Hatchery). All the fish will probably be released into the Walker River immediately upstream of the lake to acclimate them.

Regulations - Season is open year round, any hour of the day or night. Possession is 5 trout per day or in possession. There are no restrictions on tackle, however, live minnows must be obtained from within the Walker River drainage.



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**Boating Regulations** - At Walker Lake State Recreation Area and Sportman's Beach - All boat harbors and other areas designated by buoys are zones in which a vessel must be operated at a speed that leaves a flat wake, but in no case may a vessel be operated at a speed in excess of 5 nautical miles per hour. No boating is allowed within a 100-yard radius of the Rose Creek confluence on the southwest side of the lake.

**Biologist Forecast for 2009** - Dropping lake levels will most likely result in few fish over three pounds being captured. Angling is best from March to May and mid September through December. The cutthroat trout average 13 to 20 inches in length. Walker Lake is at a point where any future lake drop could lead to salt concentrations that might prove lethal to fish.

**Access** - Walker Lake is 55 miles south of Fallon along U.S. 95. The lake lies 12 miles north of the town of Hawthorne. Access from the west is on U.S. 95A 50 miles west of Yerington. Access roads can be sandy, so use caution. The boat ramp at Sportsman's Beach is practically unusable, but try the ramp at the State Park Beach just south of there on the other side of the Cliffs. You'll need four wheel drive to launch your boat.