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WASHOE LAKE

History – Washoe Lake is a eutrophic, shallow body of water located between Reno and Carson City. It covers an area of 5,800 acres at spillway stage and consists of Big Washoe Lake, Little Washoe Lake and the marsh area (Scripps Wildlife Management Area) connecting the two. The shallowness of the big lake (max. depth 12 feet) and the nearly daily winds, account for the turbidity of the lakes. Washoe Lake has fallen victim to extensive droughts in the past, the most recent occasion being the drought of 1987-1994, which left the big lake completely dry in 1992, 1994 and then again 2004.

Pertinent Information – Washoe Lake is managed as a warm water fishery and contains white bass, Sacramento perch, channel catfish, brown bullhead catfish, carp, wipers (white bass x striped bass hybrid) and possibly white crappie (survival is not confirmed). Fishing is best in late spring, early summer and early fall. The best time to catch fish in the spring and fall is in the daytime, usually late afternoon, while the best fishing hours during the summer occur at night when the water temperatures cool down. White bass fishermen are most successful in August and September. Population sampling in 2007 produced channel catfish up to 6 inches and white bass up to 9 inches. Angler Questionnaire data from 2007 found 386 anglers fishing that averaged 0.78 fish per angler day. The Nevada Division of State Parks manages Washoe Lake State Park, which includes three facilities along the east side of the lake. The park offers two boat launches, picnic areas, camp sites and bathroom facilities. Contact the State Parks office for day use fees.

Stocking – Since 2004, when the lake dried up, Washoe Lake has been stocked with white bass, channel catfish, wipers, brown bullheads and white crappie. In 2009, white bass and channel catfish will be stocked. Data collected in 2006 and 2007 confirms that natural reproduction has occurred in the white bass and channel catfish populations.

Regulations – Season is open year around, any hour of the day or night. Limit is 10 game fish of which not more than 5 may be catfish. Scripps Wildlife Management Area is closed to trespass February 1 through June 30.

Biologist Forecast for 2009 – Washoe Lake dried up in 2004, although Little Washoe Lake retained water and fish. Big Washoe Lake partially filled in 2005, completely filled in 2006, but will not completely fill in 2009. The Department has been stocking white bass and channel catfish and fishing should be fair in 2009.

Boating Regulations – At Washoe Lake State Park Boat Ramps - 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. Be wary of changing weather conditions. Washoe Valley regularly experiences high winds in the afternoons, which can pose a hazard to unsuspecting boaters.

Health Advisory - Due to elevated methylmercury levels, the Nevada State Health Division has issued a health advisory that recommends no consumption of white bass from Little and Big Washoe Lakes. Please visit NDOW's web site (www.ndow.org) for more details.



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Access – Washoe Lake is located along U.S. 395 in Washoe Valley between Carson City and Reno. The park can be accessed by turning onto East Lake Blvd from US 395, the newest boat launch is located at the southeast corner of the lake. The old north boat launch, which is a smaller facility, is located at the south end of Lakeshore Drive. From East Lake Blvd., turn west onto Lakeshore Drive then drive south until you get to the park. Little Washoe Lake, located at the north end of East Lake Blvd, also has day use facilities with restrooms and beach areas. The day use fee is good at all three areas. Access to the west side of the lake can be achieved by taking the Bellevue Road exit off US 395.