

ALABAMA'S PUBLIC FISHING LAKES

Celebrating 50 Years of Good Fishing

By Jack Turner, State Lakes Supervisor, Montgomery, Alabama

Alabama's Public Fishing Lakes — more commonly known as Alabama State Lakes — are operated by the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The Division recently celebrated the State Lake Program's Golden Anniversary.

Crenshaw County Lake, the first State Lake, completed its first full year of operation in 1950. Fifty-two years later, Crenshaw County Lake is still in operation and going strong. In fact, the 2001 fishing season was among the most productive in its long history!

The continuing productivity of Crenshaw County Lake, even after a half century of intensive angling, should come as no surprise. Fish ponds have no time limit on good fishing. Properly built and managed, ponds like Crenshaw County Lake can support good fishing indefinitely.

The success of Crenshaw County Lake anglers during 2001 demonstrates the Division's commitment to the State Lakes Program. From the program's inception, the Division was determined that our State Lakes would provide Alabama's anglers with a quality fishing experience at a bargain price.

The State Lakes Program originated in the mid 1940s, when officials of the Alabama Department of Conservation



Opening day was a crowded one at this public fishing lake back in the 1950s.

saw a need to provide fishing opportunities in areas that lacked sufficient waters to meet demand. The Department authorized construction of 10 Public Fishing Lakes to meet this need, and the State Lakes Program was born.

Then, as now, the purpose was to provide quality fishing at an affordable price. Expensive equipment would not be necessary to catch fish from a State Lake. Accordingly, the lakes were designed for easy angling access. Extensive bank fish-

ing areas were developed and fishing piers were provided. Other amenities, such as a bait shop, boat ramp and rental boats would be provided. The lakes would be clean and safe, and they would be intensively managed to provide the highest possible yield of fish.

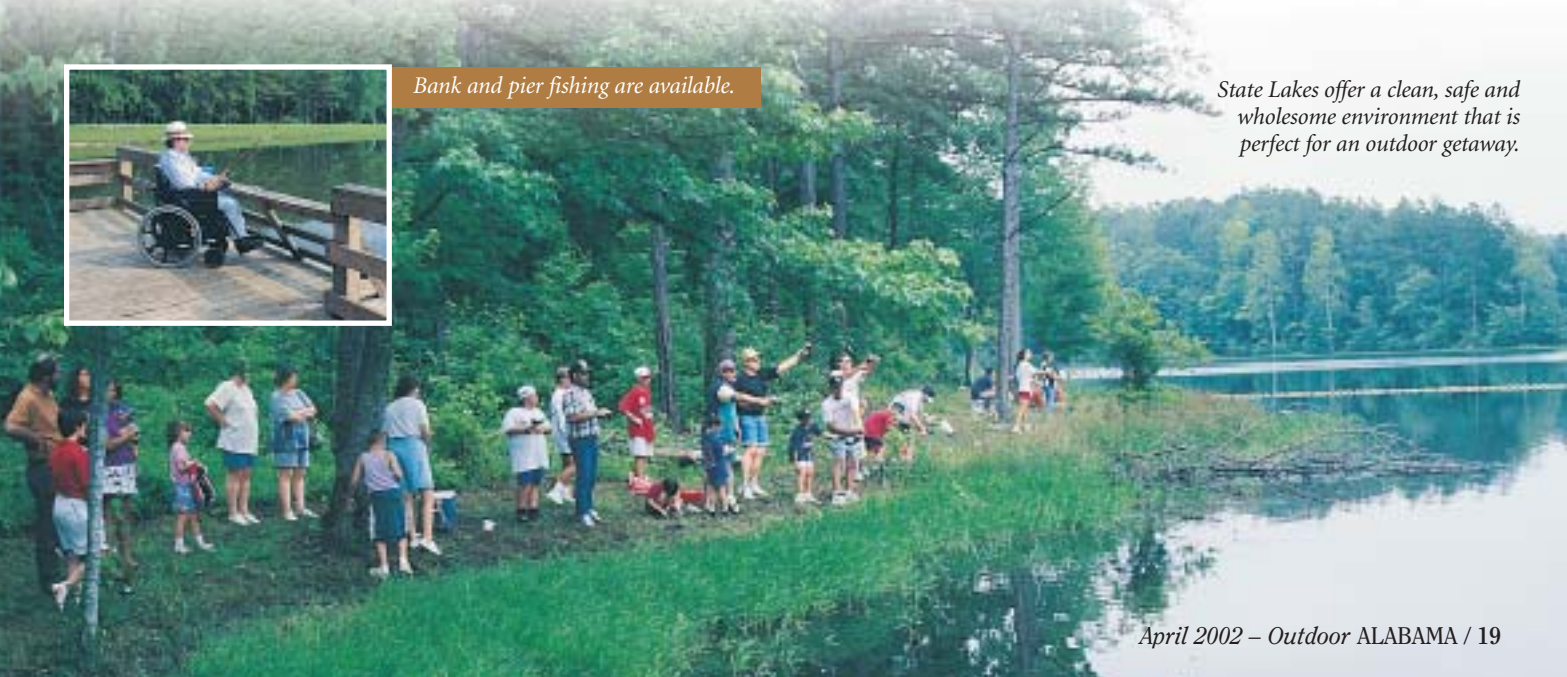
Modern Operations

More than 50 years later, the wise decisions of the program's originators are still paying dividends. The original State

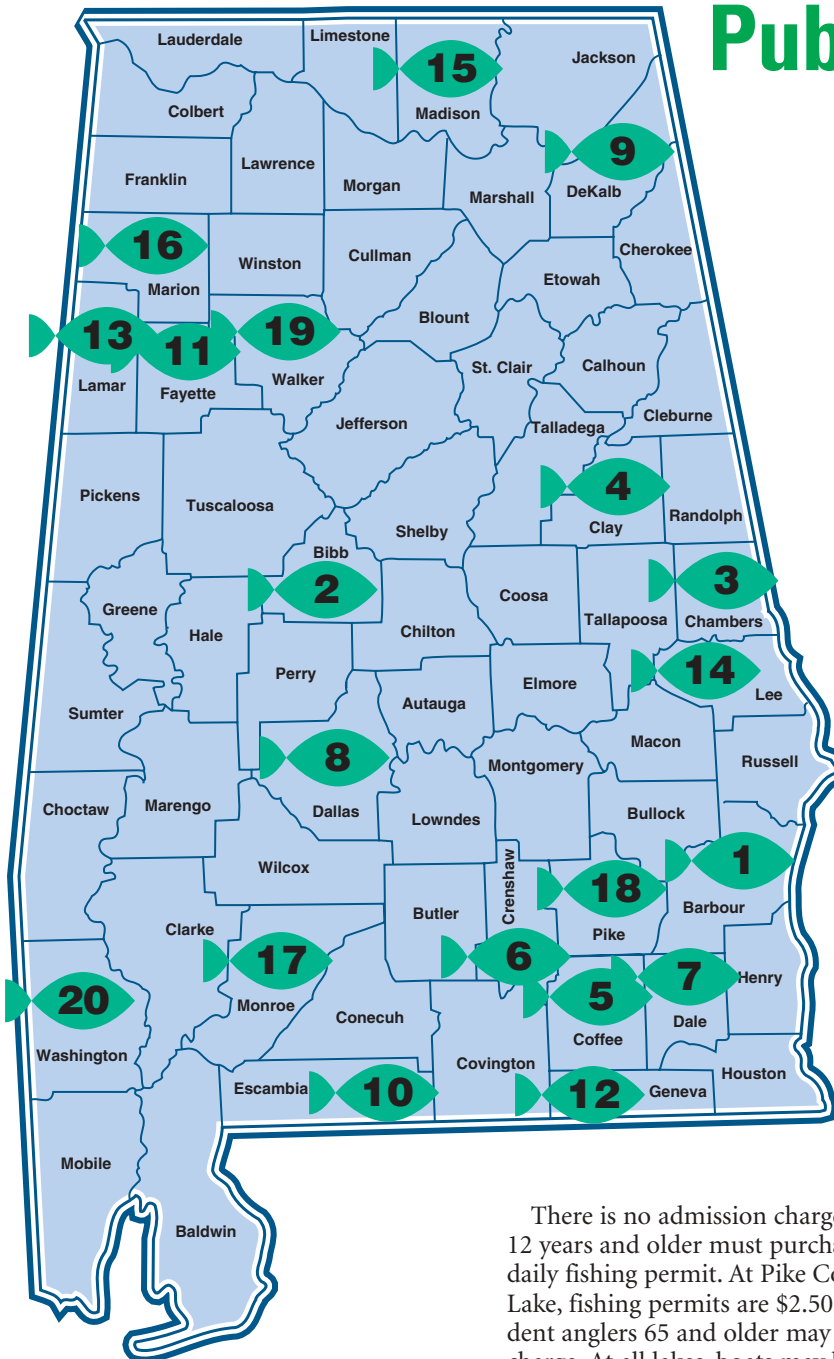


Bank and pier fishing are available.

State Lakes offer a clean, safe and wholesome environment that is perfect for an outdoor getaway.



Public Fishing Lakes Contact Information



Lake	Manager	Telephone
1 Barbour County Lake	Judy Ingram	(334) 775-7123
2 Bibb County Lake	Edward Rains	(205) 938-2124
3 Chambers County Lake	Joe Garrett	(334) 864-8145
4 Clay County Lake	Gene Simmons	(256) 488-0038
5 Coffee County Lake	Peggy Fremd	(334) 897-2131
6 Crenshaw County Lake	Katie Byrd	(334) 335-4374
7 Dale County Lake	Bill Brooks	(334) 774-0588
8 Dallas County Lake	Kenneth Smith	(334) 874-6066
9 DeKalb County Lake	Pete Little	(256) 657-3000
10 Escambia Co. Lake	Clyde Chandler	(251) 809-0068
11 Fayette County Lake	Joyce Harkins	(205) 932-6549
12 Geneva County Lake	Eleanor Tillman	(334) 684-6488
13 Lamar County Lake	Thomas Parker	(205) 695-8283
14 Lee County Lake	Dwight Lake	(334) 749-1275
15 Madison County Lake	Angela Bates	(256) 776-4905
16 Marion County Lake	Mickey Goggans	(205) 921-7856
17 Monroe County Lake	Wayne Jordan	(251) 789-2737
18 Pike County Lake	Heidi Hendrickson	(334) 484-9610
19 Walker County Lake	Kenneth Hyche	(205) 221-1801
20 Washington Co. Lake	Kay Buie	(251) 846-2512

Lakes objective — quality fishing at a bargain price — is as relevant in the 21st Century as when the first lake was built. The objective is still achieved in the same manner — easy access, quality bank fishing, and other amenities, such as rental boats, launch ramps and covered fishing piers (which make it possible to fish deep water without using a boat).

Visitors may enjoy the lakes without even fishing. State Lakes offer a clean, safe and wholesome environment that is perfect for an outdoor getaway — for example, a church function, a picnic or family reunion, or simply a quiet walk in a peaceful woodland setting.

There is no admission charge. Anglers 12 years and older must purchase a \$2 daily fishing permit. At Pike County Lake, fishing permits are \$2.50, and resident anglers 65 and older may fish at no charge. At all lakes, boats may be rented for \$3 or launched for \$2. Fishing licenses and a variety of tackle, fish bait, and other fishing supplies, as well as drinks and refreshments, are available at all the lakes.

The program now includes 23 State Lakes located in 20 counties that encompass 1,912 surface acres of water. All the lakes contain largemouth bass, bluegill, redear sunfish (shellcracker), and channel catfish. Crappie are also present in many lakes, and channel catfish are restocked annually.

Alabama's State Lakes are operated entirely with user fees. These fees are derived from the sale of fishing licenses, and from a federal excise tax on fishing

and boating supplies. These funds are directed back to Alabama's fish management agencies through the Federal Aid in Sports Fish Restoration program. No General Fund money is used in their operation.

North Alabama

The story in north Alabama is **Madison County Lake**, located just east of Huntsville. Due to complex interactions between the lake's fish species, this lake's fishery declined during the late 1990s. The Division implemented a comprehensive plan to re-establish sportfish populations in the lake. The plan was a rousing success. When the lake re-opened for fishing in March 2001, its bluegill, crappie and catfish fishery was as good as ever!

Clay County Lake, in Delta, Alabama, is one of the 10 original State Lakes. Clay County Lake, which is actually comprised

of three small lakes, is noted for outstanding bluegill fishing. In addition, a covered pavilion is available for picnics. Middle Clay, which is the largest of the three, usually offers the best all around fishing, while the Lower Lake is known for trophy bluegill. A covered pavilion is located at the Middle Lake.

DeKalb County Lake, one of the most scenic lakes in the system, is located south of the Tennessee River in the small town of Sylvania. Overnight, self-contained camping is permitted at DeKalb County Lake, so the beautiful scenery can be enjoyed around the clock. The lake also has two covered pavilions.

Fayette County Lake, like Crenshaw County Lake, is one of the 10 original State Lakes. Like Crenshaw County Lake, it still maintains a productive fishery. Fayette is a good lake for catfishing, and recently has produced good bass fishing as well.

Marion County Lake, south of Hamilton, is a relatively small lake at 37 surface acres. It has long been known as an outstanding catfish lake. Marion County Lake also has a recently completed covered pavilion.

Only a few miles to the south lies **Lamar County Lake**. This lake is outstanding for its bluegill fishery. It also has a seasonal crappie fishery, as well as good bass fishing.

Walker County Lake, near Jasper, also provides good fishing. During the last three years, more than 70,000 pounds of fish have been removed from this lake, and fishing remains as good as ever! Crappie, catfish and bluegill are the mainstays, and in recent years the bass fishery has improved as well. Anglers may also enjoy resting under a covered pavilion.

Central Alabama

Chambers and Lee County Lakes, are both located in the Auburn-Opelika area. Chambers County Lake is one of the largest in the system at 183 acres. This scenic lake supports a good crappie and bream fishery, and produces a number of trophy bass. It also has a covered pavilion.

Lee County Lake has historically been an excellent crappie lake. The crappie fishery declined during the mid 1990s, but now seems on the rebound. Both

crappie and bream harvest have improved for five consecutive years. Both Lee and Chambers are also good for catfish.

Bibb County Lake lies just north of Centreville, and is within easy driving range of Tuscaloosa and Birmingham. During the two previous years, this lake has produced more 10-pound and larger bass than any other State Lake. It has also a good catfish lake and has recently developed a crappie fishery. The lake has picnic areas and a scenic covered pavilion.

Dallas County Lake, located 14 miles south of Selma, is the most productive State Lake in the system. Year after year, Dallas County Lake ranks near the top in bluegill, bass, and catfish production. In 2001, anglers saw the development of a substantial crappie fishery. Dallas County Lake also has a well-deserved reputation as a trophy bass lake.

Monroe County Lake, north of Monroeville, was drained in 1998 and reopened to fishing in 2000. Since re-opening, it has been far and away the leading bluegill producer — over 62,000 bluegill and shellcracker have been harvested! In addition, Monroe County Lake has been historically a good catfish lake. It also has a covered pavilion for picnics and reunions.

Pike County Lake, in Troy, is a relatively small lake at 45 acres, but it supports a big fishery. Bass, bluegill, crappie and catfish have all done well at this lake, and it is highly recommended for all of those species.

South Alabama

Barbour County Lake, between Eufaula and Clayton, is one of the system's best producers. The lake is known for catfish, but lately, bream and bass fishing has been good as well.

Luverne's **Crenshaw County Lake** is perhaps the best all-around lake in the system. It is probably best known for its crappie, but fishing for catfish, bream and bass is also excellent. The lake now has a new covered pavilion

Coffee County Lake, near Elba, is almost as old as Crenshaw County Lake. Like Madison County Lake, this lake's fishery declined during the late 1990s. A recovery plan was implemented in 1990, and already the bream population is

recovering. Though fishing was not good in 2001, an excellent bream season is projected for 2002.

Dale County Lake, in Ozark, is operated in cooperation with the City of Ozark. Historically, Dale County Lake has supported a very productive fishery for all species, and currently holds the State Lakes record for bluegill (2.7 lbs.), shellcracker (4.2 lbs.), and bass (14.9 lbs.). In addition, visitors may enjoy a covered pavilion and a scenic walking trail.

Escambia County Lake, located east of Brewton in the Conecuh National Forest, is the largest State Lake at 184 surface acres. Escambia County Lake contains Florida bass and enjoys a wide reputation for trophy bass. Though few people seem aware of it, its bluegill fishery is even better!

Geneva County Lake consists of two lakes, approximately 30 acres each. Upper Geneva is known for excellent catfishing. Lower Geneva suffered a fish kill during 2001, and is currently closed. It should re-open to fishing in 2002 or 2003.

Washington County Lake was the first State Lake stocked exclusively with Florida bass; not surprisingly it is known for trophy bass. The lake record — 14.6 pounds — was the official state record when caught. Washington County Lake also has a covered pavilion, and self-contained camping is allowed.

Operating Schedule

The lakes are in operation from February 1 through November, and are closed during December and January. From February 1 through June they are open six days a week. After July 1, most lakes are closed an additional weekday.

The lakes are normally open from daylight till dark. During the summer, some lakes may designate a night fishing period, during which fishing is allowed until midnight.

Operating schedules sometimes differ from the above, so anglers are advised to check with lake managers beforehand. The location of the lakes, the names of each lake's resident lake manager, and the manager's telephone number are listed with the map.



For More Information

☒ Alabama Fisheries Section
64 North Union St.
Montgomery, AL 36130

☎ 334-242-3471

🌐 www.dcnr.state.al.us/agfd/lakes.html

