

Proud Lake boasts 4-season beauty and fun

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is trying hard to change the notion that recreational activities end in state parks after Labor Day. Multiple-use parks are "in," and throughout Michigan state park planners are focusing on expanding year-round recreation activities.

Proud Lake Recreation Area near Milford, six miles north of I-96 at the Wixom exit, is a first-rate example of this trend.

"After Labor Day people think we just shut the door, and the park's closed," said Proud Lake's park manager John Winters. "People can't get used to the idea you can come out any time of the year."

Winters views one of the biggest challenges of his job as getting people to use Proud Lake year-round. The administrator believes the park's many attributes will help make the job easier.

Proud Lake Recreation Area is one of the closest state parks to metropolitan Detroit. A 35-mile drive northwest of the city puts park visitors in touch with a wooded land shaped by the last glacier as it retreated from Michigan some 10,000 years ago.

"The irony is the land seemed worthless at one time — too hilly and craggy — yet turned out to be the most picturesque for recreation purposes," Winters said.

THE ORIGINAL 80 acres of the recreation area (bounded by the Huron River, Wixom Road, Proud Lake and private farms) were purchased in 1920 by the Montclair Hunt Club. By end of the 1930s the club owned more than 300 acres. A two-story lodge was built on the site of the present outdoor center.

First-time Proud Lake park users are startled to see rows of virgin jack, red and white pines dominating the landscape. The pine stands are the result of a tree-planting program initiated by the hunt club. At the time the state acquired the property in 1946, the club and other owners had planted more than 108,000 seedlings.

Winters said the present 3,700-acre park is unique because of the variety of activities the area can accommodate.

"Some state parks have only a beach," said Winters. "Proud Lake has activities for all seasons. And it's accessible — people can come out for only a short time if they desire."

The park will offer many recreational delights for the fall/winter season:

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— John Winters
Proud Lake park manager

• Hiking — nearly 21 miles of varied terrain including a marsh trail and climax forest. A new hiking trail bridge has been placed over the Huron River in conjunction with a new dam for the Proud and Moss Lake chain.

• Camping — a modern campground on Proud Lake features a heated toilet/shower building open all winter.

• Outdoor center — dormitory facilities for groups ranging in size from 32 to 128 for overnight stays of two or more nights. Ideal for family reunions, business retreats and church groups. A large activity building is also available on a limited basis for meeting.

• Hunting and fishing.

• Canoeing — on a scenic three-mile stretch of the Huron River. The 108-mile river starts in Commerce Township and empties into Lake Erie.

• Snowmobiling — separate area available when snow base reaches four inches or more.

• Cross-country skiing — a new ski center (located in the former nature center) will be open to provide comfort, refreshment and ski rental facilities.

WINTERS IS particularly enthusiastic about the new ski center. "It's brand new this year. We will see if we can't make skiing more attractive to everybody."

Alan Heavner, who operates a canoe rental near the park, will run the ski center. Heavner is equally enthusiastic about the center's potential and predicts the venture will take off.

"The ski center is set in the pines near the middle of the skiing area. The facility will provide a place to warm up and take a break and therefore allow people to do more skiing," said Heavner. The area will be open for nighttime skiing.

Heavner believes both the canoeing

and cross-country skiing offered at the park fit into the idea of providing wilderness beauty close to home.

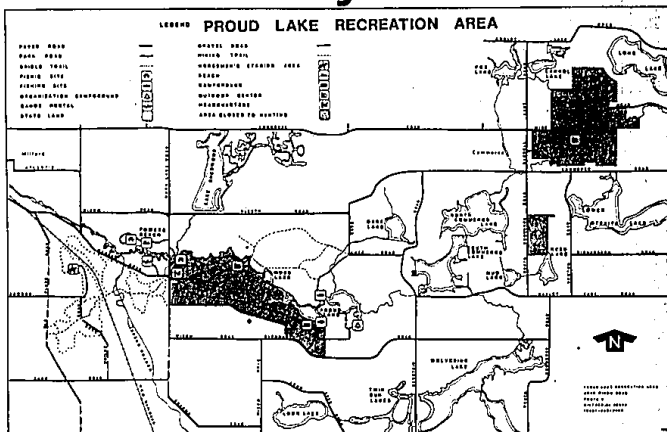
"People can enjoy a beautiful remote area and still go home for dinner," said Heavner.

Being close to home can sometimes be a drawback. John Winters notes that Proud Lake is occasionally a victim of the "too close to home" syndrome.

"People don't look at what is close to home," he said.

In the coming months, Winters' efforts will be geared to changing such notions.

For additional park information, call 855-2433.



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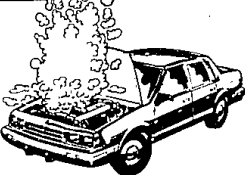
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