

# The Oxbow

FROM THE NORTH DAKOTA STATE WATER COMMISSION

## Harmon Lake Recreation Area Opens

The new Harmon Lake Recreation Area, located on Otter Creek, eight miles north of Mandan on Highway 1806, is open for public use well ahead of schedule. Thanks to Mother Nature, above average runoff earlier this spring filled the new reservoir in just over a week, in what was expected to take a few years.

In response to the rapid filling of Harmon Lake, Morton County officials were caught off guard, not expecting to have to open or operate the new recreation area in the summer of 2009. But with the lake full, they wanted to provide the opportunity for the public to start using the Harmon Lake Recreation Area as soon as possible.

Currently, there are no bath-houses, picnic shelters, playgrounds, or horse facilities, and the trail system is not complete. But with a full lake there to be enjoyed, on June 19, Harmon Lake itself was officially opened for public use, along with limited primitive camping and picnic areas.

For now, camping at Harmon Lake Recreation Area is free. But, as facilities are developed years down the road, fees for camping and possibly day use, will be implemented.

To accommodate day and overnight users, the county has brought in portable toilets. In addition, there are two public sandy beach areas that have been constructed, and a public boat ramp and boat dock are in place. However, Harmon Lake is a no wake

waterbody, meaning boats must travel at a slow idle speed. Personal watercrafts are not allowed on the lake.

According to Morton County Parks Superintendent, Vern Davis, there has already been a fair amount of interest in Harmon Lake. Davis indicated that there have been a few families and other groups out at the facility camping every weekend since it opened. In addition, there have been many day users out to the facility taking advantage of the beaches, and fishing for trout that were stocked in the lake.

Earlier this spring, the North Dakota Game and Fish department stocked 1,500 "catchable" sized rainbow trout, and 1,500 cutthroat trout fingerlings. An additional fall stocking is also being considered by North Dakota Game and Fish.

Construction on Harmon Lake Dam (also known as Square Butte Dam Number 6) began in 2003, and it was substantially completed in the fall of 2007. The dam is 67 feet high and 2,100 feet long. The reservoir

itself has a surface area of about 145 acres, and is about 38 feet deep at its deepest point.

There are still more than \$6 million in additional improvements that need to be made. But when completed, the Harmon Lake Recreation Area will be nothing less than a first-rate facility. When completed, it will boast, among other things:

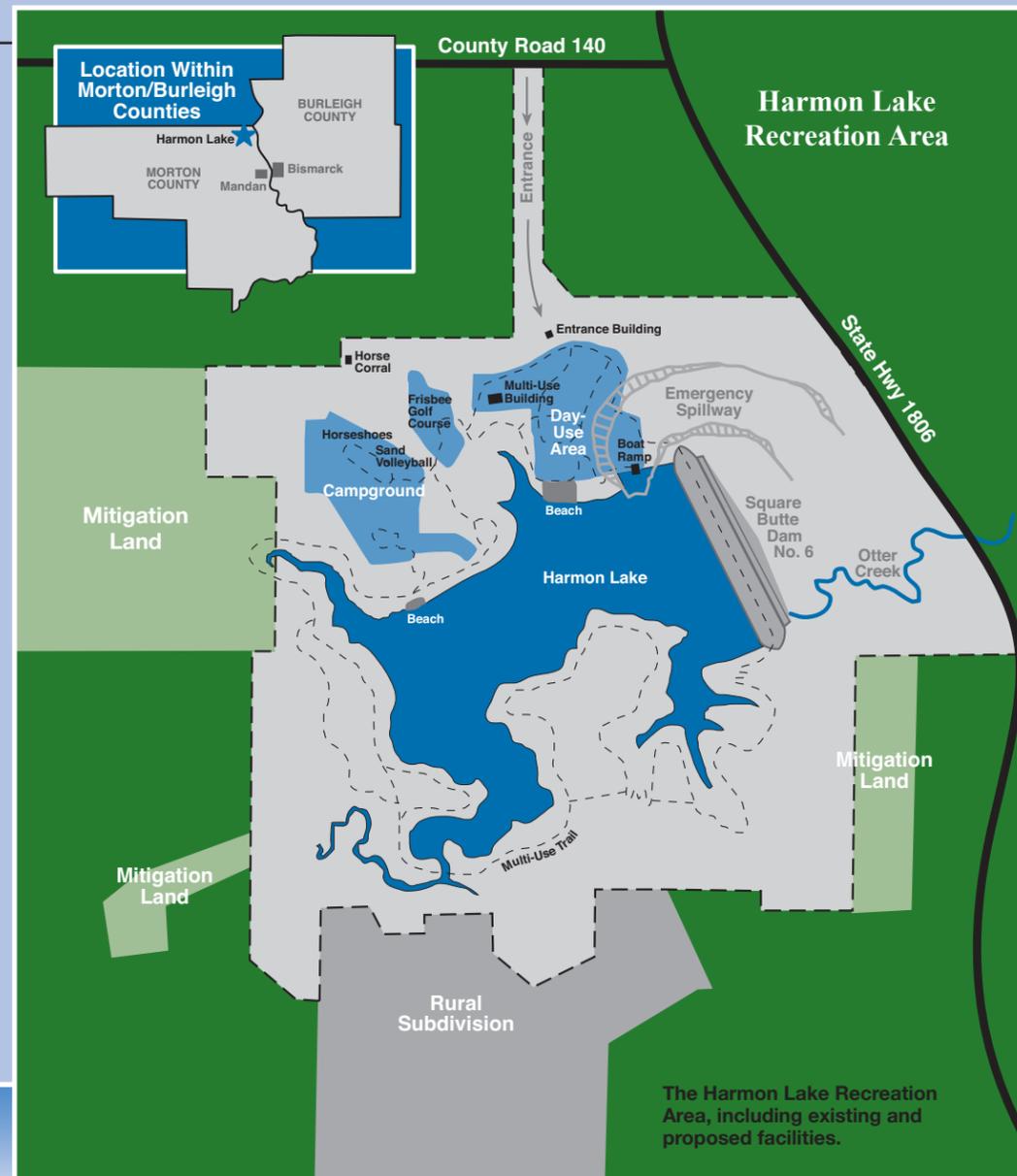


Rock fishing piers and a boat ramp provide excellent access opportunities for those who want to enjoy the new Harmon Lake.

- 75 camping pads with full utility access, and numerous tent camping and primitive camping sites;
- An entrance building and visitor center for check-ins and informational purposes;
- A four-season, multi-use building with adequate parking and a lake view deck, with the capacity to accommodate large group gatherings;



An aerial view of the new 145-acre Harmon Lake.



- Volleyball courts, playgrounds, shelters, and two public restrooms with showers;
- Fishing piers and a fish cleaning station; and
- Horseback riding facilities, with corrals, watering facilities, and expansive areas for riding.

The Morton County Water Resource District is currently seeking additional funds to complete the remaining facilities. The water board will also be responsible for operating the

dam. Recreation facilities will be managed and operated by the Morton County Park Board.

An eight-mile hiking and mountain biking trail with a footbridge is also planned for development. The trail is designed as a sustainable single track, unpaved trail that will allow walkers, hikers, birders, and bikers access to several areas throughout the Harmon Lake complex.

The Morton County Water Board applied for, and received a Recreational Trails Program Grant in the amount of \$120,000 through the U.S. Federal Highway Administration (and administered at the state level by North Dakota Parks and Recreation) to pay for the trail. As the local sponsor, the Morton Water Board will contribute another \$30,000 for the required local cost-share.

According to Ron Luethe, who works for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and serves as a representative for the International Mountain Bicycling Association, it is the intent of organizers to start certain elements of construction on the trail this year, and hopefully finish remaining elements next year, as funding allows.

Comparatively, Harmon Lake is much larger than McDowell Dam, Fish Creek Dam, and Crown Butte Dam, which are all relatively close to the Bismarck-Mandan area. Conversely, Harmon Lake is only about half the size of Sweet Briar Dam.

For more information about the new Harmon Lake Recreation Area, contact Vern Davis, Morton County Park Board, at 701-667-3363, or go to the Morton County website at [www.co.morton.nd.us](http://www.co.morton.nd.us). Click on "Morton County Parks."