

Nicatus Islands and Conservation Easement

In 2000 the Bureau acquired from Robbins Lumber Company fee ownership of 78 islands in Nicatus Lake, and a 22,120-acre conservation easement on working forestlands for the entirety of T40 MD and the southeast corner of T3 ND. The islands range from a collection of large rocks to several large islands. The easement includes all of the western and northern shoreline of Nicatus Lake and the frontage on West Lake, and effectively extinguishes the development rights on the parcel. The acquisition of a 200-acre fee parcel on the eastern shore of the lake connects this parcel to the Duck Lake Unit, providing more than 50,000 acres of contiguous, publicly-held conservation lands. Robbins Lumber retained the right to manage timber, while granting public recreation management responsibility to the Bureau. Bureau staff incorporated this responsibility into the Duck Lake Unit management regime at the time of acquisition. An additional island, Dayton Island, was acquired as a gift from The Nature Conservancy. There is a camplot lease agreement with the former owners on a portion of the island itself, with the remainder available for general public use.

Primary access to the easement property is along the Morrison Ridge Road between the Nicatus Stream Road and the 32-00-0 Road, providing easy access to drive-to campsites on Upper and Lower Oxhead Ponds (five sites) and Loon and Crystal Ponds (two sites). The launching of boats also takes place at these sites, although these sites were not designed and constructed for that purpose. There is some erosion and overuse of an ATV access campsite. General upkeep and maintenance of these sites has required significant effort by Bureau staff.

Six water access camp sites are available on Nicatus Lake on the easement lands, with one located on the Duck Lake Fee Connector parcel along the east shore, and seven others on West Lake. Two sites on Nicatus Lake have walk-to access and are listed as requiring fire permits.

A boat launch site on West Lake is located on the northwest shore near the Nicatus Stream Road. Public launching on Nicatus Lake has been an area of issue and focus since the Bureau acquired the easement. Although there is an area just off the Nicatus Stream Road that has been used for boat launching; the site provides very little space with no opportunity for expansion. Boat launching and parking for a fee typically takes place at nearby Hemlock Lodge.

The 78 state-owned islands acquired from Robbins Lumber and a portion of Dayton Island provides opportunities for primitive camping at some sites and day use at others. Fire permits have not been issued for these sites, though unauthorized fires are common. There are no signs, kiosks, or privies available for visitors to these islands. Signs designating certain islands as day use only may be posted in the future.