

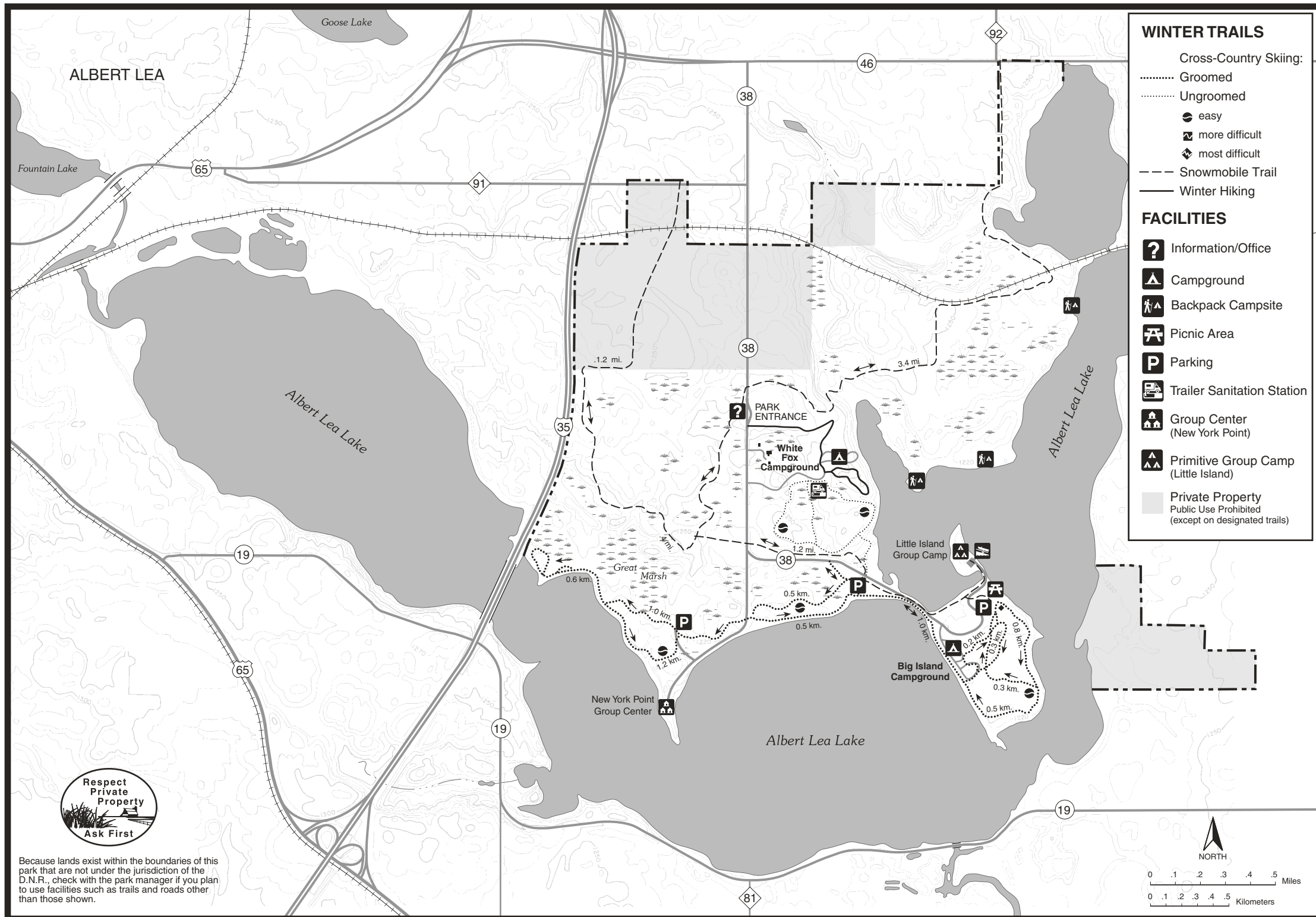
# MYRE-BIG ISLAND STATE PARK

## FACILITIES AND FEATURES

- 98 semi-modern campsites in two campgrounds
- 4 remote backpack camping sites
- 1 camper cabin
- 45 picnic sites
- 16 miles of hiking trails
- 8 miles of cross-country ski trails
- 7 miles of snowmobile trails
- 7 miles of mountain bike trails

## VISITOR FAVORITES

- Wildflowers on Big Island
- Bird watching on the oak savanna
- Hiking the esker
- Canoeing on Albert Lea Lake





## MYRE-BIG ISLAND STATE PARK

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Myre-Big Island State Park  
19499 - 780th Avenue  
Albert Lea, MN 56007  
(507) 379-3403

Department of Natural Resources  
Information Center  
500 Lafayette Road  
St. Paul, MN 55155-4040  
**(651) 296-6157 (Metro Area)**

1-888-646-6367 (MN Toll Free)  
TDD (Telecommunications  
Device for Deaf)  
(651) 296-5484 (Metro Area)  
1-800-657-3929 (MN Toll Free)

DNR web site: [www.dnr.state.mn.us](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us)  
State Parks page: [www.mnstateparks.info](http://www.mnstateparks.info)

MYRE-BIG ISLAND STATE PARK is located in Freeborn County three miles southeast of Albert Lea, on County Highway 38. Interstates 90 and 35 intersect just north of Albert Lea. Both interstates have signs directing visitors to the park. Exit 11 on Interstate 35 is the most convenient approach to the park. Highway map index: J-21.

**GENERAL DESCRIPTION:** Myre-Big Island State Park is an oasis of natural diversity in a prairie landscape surrounded by agricultural land uses. Unique features of this region's geologic, botanic and human history can be seen in this park.

**HISTORY:** Myre-Big Island State Park began as the vision

of Owen Johnson, a conservationist, amateur archeologist and life-long resident of the area. Through his efforts, Big Island (a 116-acre wooded island) became a state park in 1947. Since 1947, the park has acquired additional acreage and is now 1,596 acres.

**PREHISTORY:** Long before European settlers arrived, seasonal (and possibly year-round) villages were numerous around area lakes (including Albert Lea Lake). Evidence of human occupation of the area dates back over 9,000 years, and encompasses all four identified cultural periods (Paleo, Archaic, Woodland and Mississippian). Most of this evidence comes in the form of artifacts, including projectile points, axes, other hand-worked stone tools and pieces of pottery.

The level of human occupation covers thousands of years and leads archeologists to believe that this area was rich in natural resources such as wild game and harvestable wild food plants.

**GEOLOGY:** The rolling hills, shallow lakes and marshes of the park were formed as the last major glacier retreated from Minnesota 10,000 years ago. The glacial features found here include moraines, a moraine dam lake and an esker.

Big Island is located within the Bemis Moraine, a moraine complex which can be traced across Minnesota. Moraines are made up of irregular deposits of unsorted sand, gravel and other rock debris, left by the retreating glaciers. The results are the rolling hills you see here today.

As the glacier retreated, melt water filled the shallow basin behind the ridge formed by the moraine. This ridge served as a dam and formed Albert Lea Lake. Albert Lea Lake has a surface area of 2,600 acres and over 20 miles of shoreline.

Glacial lakes of this kind are short lived in geologic terms. Over time, the lake would gradually fill in. Humans, however, have accelerated this process through severe siltation from farming practices and commercial and industrial waste disposal. The result is a eutrophic lake (where an imbalance in mineral and organic content of the lake favors plant over animal life, thus choking out much of the animal life).

An esker—a winding ridge of sorted sands and gravels—is located in the north end of the park. As the glacier melted back, streams formed within the glacier. These streams carried sand and gravel to the end of the glacier, where the stream's speed dropped. Sand and gravel were dropped at the glacial edge forming a ridge. Since the esker formed at the terminus of the glacial stream, it's shape approximates that of the glacial stream.

**VEGETATION:** The original park vegetation was dominated by three types of communities: oak savanna, northern hardwood forest and wetlands.

Oak savanna is characterized by prairie interspersed with oak trees and oak groves. Typical prairie grasses include big and little bluestem, side-oats grama, porcupine, Indian and switch grasses. Flowering plants (forbes)

include lead plant, rattlesnake master, prairie clover, prairie smoke, bottle gentian, blazing star, black-eyed susan and numerous coneflowers. Oak savanna is the dominant community on the mainland.

The northern hardwood forest is found only on the Big Island. This plant community maintains itself and is typified by maple, basswood, ash, elm, ironwood, and red oak trees. Typical flowering plants on the Big Island include spring beauty, bloodroot, hepatica, Dutchman's breaches, ginger, and trout lily. The Big Island was protected from the fires which benefited the prairies and prevented the hardwood forest from being established on the mainland. Today, the Big Island remains an excellent example of northern hardwood forest.

Wetland plant communities are found throughout the park. Most are found in the prairie areas. Plants of these wetlands include cattail, sedges, prairie cord grass, water lily, arrowhead, marsh marigold, sundew, pitcher plant and wild iris. These wetland plants provide nesting sites, food and cover for a wide variety of wildlife.

Work has been done to return the park to its original vegetation pattern. These efforts include prairie management and restoration through controlled burning and seeding programs. Wetland rehabilitation is also being done, through disruption of old farm tiles, diking low areas and installing structures to control water levels.

**WILDLIFE:** The mixture of woods, prairie and wetlands provide habitat for a wide variety of animals. Big Island is one of the best birding spots in southern Minnesota.

Mammals include white-tailed deer, raccoon, red and grey fox, muskrat, opossum, squirrels and several bat species.

Raptors (or birds of prey) include American kestrel, marsh hawk, red-tailed hawk, rough-legged hawk, great horned owl and bald eagle (migrant).

Shore and wading birds include common egret, great blue heron, American bittern, sora and Virginia rail.

Waterfowl include wood duck, mallard, blue-winged teal and Canada goose.

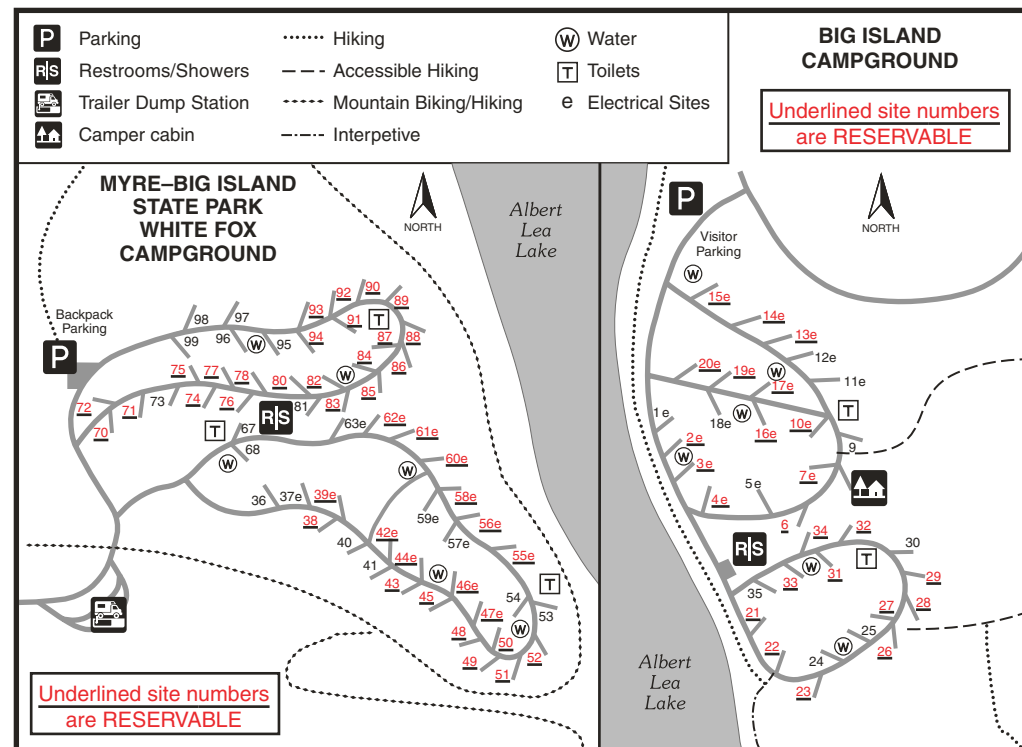
Song birds include indigo bunting, eastern bluebird, rose-breasted grosbeak, northern oriole and eastern wood pewee.

Other birds include ring-necked pheasant, ring-billed gull and hairy, downy and pileated woodpeckers.

A bird of special interest is the white pelican. Pelicans are becoming a common sight on Albert Lea and other area lakes, especially during fall migration. These large (wing spans up to 6 feet) fish-eating birds find abundant and accessible food in the shallow waters of area lakes.

Fish in Albert Lea Lake include black bullhead, carp, northern pike and various species of minnows and panfish.

Reptiles include eastern and red-sided garter snakes,



northern red-bellied snake and northern brown snake.

Amphibians include western painted and snapping turtles, leopard and wood frogs and eastern tiger salamander.

**GROUP CAMPS:** The New York Point Group Camp has a dining hall, craft building, flush toilets, showers, fire rings and tent sites. The dining hall has running water, gas stove and refrigerator.

The Little Island Pioneer Group Camp is a primitive group camp located one block north of the picnic grounds. Facilities include picnic tables, fire rings and pit toilets.

Anyone interested in renting either group camp should contact the park manager.

**INTERPRETIVE SERVICES:** Inquire at the park office about interpretive opportunities.

### SO EVERYONE CAN ENJOY THE PARK . . .

- The park belongs to all Minnesotans. Please treat it with respect and help us to protect it by following the rules.
- The park is open year-round. On a daily basis, the park gate is closed from 10:00 P.M. to 8:00 A.M. the following morning except for registered campers.
- Camp only in designated locations.
- The use of firearms, explosives, air guns, slingshots, traps, seines, nets, bows and arrows, and all other weapons is prohibited in state parks.

- Pets must be restrained on a leash no longer than six feet. Pets are not allowed in park buildings.
- Park in designated areas only.
- Motor bikes and other licensed vehicles are allowed only on park roads, not on trails.
- Enjoy park wildlife and plants but please respect them. Do not pick or dig up plants, disturb or feed animals, or scavenge dead wood.
- Build fires only in designated locations—fire rings or fireplaces. Wood is available for purchase from park staff. Portable stoves or grills are permitted.
- Daily or annual permits are required for all vehicles entering a state park. They may be purchased at the park headquarters or the Information Center in St. Paul (see "FOR MORE INFORMATION" to left).

*This information is available in alternative format upon request.*

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