

Willow Springs Lake

The Arizona Game and Fish Department constructed Willow Springs Lake in 1967 to provide water-oriented recreation opportunities for the public. In this respect, the department succeeded beyond anyone's expectations. Willow Springs Lake is one of the most visited lakes in the region, due in part to its proximity to the Phoenix area and cool temperatures.

Location – Willow Springs is located 23 miles east of Payson on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, immediately adjacent to Highway 260. Access the lake by way of Forest Road 149, which is paved.

Description – Willow Springs Lake is situated at 7,500 feet. Its surface area is 158 acres, with an average depth of 60 feet.

It is a deep lake that maintains good water quality. For this reason, it is stocked weekly, from May through September, with catchable-sized rainbow trout. The lake also contains self-sustaining populations of largemouth and smallmouth bass, some reaching trophy size.

Amenities – The lake has a paved boat ramp, a barrier-free toilets, two picnic ramadas and two boat beaches. Campers can stay at one of two nearby campgrounds. Close to the lake, Sinkhole Campground is operated by a concessionaire, and is open year-round. Newly renovated, it contains 26 camping sites, barrier-free toilets, and drinking water supplied from a tank. The camping fee here is \$12 per vehicle per night. A second campground, the much larger Canyon Point Campground, is located 3 miles east of Forest Road 149, adjacent to Highway 260. It boasts 100 single-family sites, plus two group sites that can accommodate up to 40 people and 70 people respectively. The campground has potable water, a shower building, dump station and barrier-free toilets. Some sites have electricity. Daytime and evening programs on nature-related topics are presented in the campground amphitheater from Memorial Day through Labor Day. The campground is open from May 1 to October 31. Fees vary from \$20 per night per vehicle for the most basic site to \$24 for a site with electricity. Group site rates vary from \$60 to \$150. Reserve a site at Canyon Point Campground by visiting www.reserveusa.com on the web or by calling (877) 444-6777.

Fishing Techniques – Shore anglers fishing for trout can try night crawlers or Power Bait. When weather gets hot in the summer, fish at deeper depths, between 10 and 20 feet down. Boat anglers should try trolling with a Super Duper, Panther Martin or small, gold Kastmaster lure, and, if all else fails, troll with cowbells. Bass anglers, try spinner baits, jigs and night crawler rigs around underwater structure. Lures and flies imitating crayfish are a good way to attract bass because the lake is loaded with this non-native predator.

Special Notes – Statewide fishing regulations apply and a trout stamp is required for anglers fishing for or catching trout. The daily bag limit is six trout and unlimited bass (any species). Trout bag limits are halved for unlicensed anglers under the age of 14. Boat motors are restricted to electric or 10 hp or less gas motors.

