

TATANKA

YOUR GUIDE TO CUSTER STATE PARK | 2024



WELCOME TO CUSTER STATE PARK



Custer State Park — no place like home. Whether this is your first visit or a return visit to the park, please make our home, your home. Home is where your story begins. Countless times, staff learn from visitors that they fell in love, got engaged, or got married in the park. We also hear from many visitors who are keeping traditions

alive that started with their parents or grandparents. Visitors who are now bringing their children or grandchildren to the park. Regardless of what your story is, welcome to Custer State Park!

Now that you're here, it's time to start making memories that will last a lifetime. The park isn't going anywhere, we don't close, so take your time and enjoy the sights, sounds, and smells around you. Remember why you came—to forget the schedule, meetings, and the business of life to get away and relax.

If you feel overwhelmed with the possibilities, stop at the visitor center or Bison Center and ask one of our volunteers about their favorite things to do and see in the park. Some of my family's favorites are kayaking on Center Lake, hiking the Walk-In Fishing Trail, enjoying sunsets at Stockade Lake, driving the Wildlife Loop Road, and watching the begging burros and newborn buffalo calves running and jumping around. My favorite—forgotten fire trails—makes me feel like I have the park all to myself.

Whether you are camping or staying in a cabin, don't forget the peace and tranquility of sitting around a campfire, roasting marshmallows, and relishing in the day's journey as you plan tomorrow's adventures.

So make yourself at home, sit around a campfire, and let the worries of life go up in the campfire smoke as you anticipate the adventures ahead and cherish the memories until you return to make more.

Matt Snyder
West Regional Supervisor



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BROOKE SMITH | *Tatanka* Editor

The mission of South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks is to serve and connect people and families to the outdoors through effective management of our state's parks, fisheries, and wildlife resources.

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TATANKA | VOLUME 45 • 2024

Tatanka is the Lakota word for bison or buffalo.

CAMPING RESERVATIONS

1.800.710.2267

campsd.com

CUSTER STATE PARK

Park Office | 605.394.2693

custerstatepark@state.sd.us

custerstatepark.com

CUSTER STATE PARK RESORT

Information | 605.255.4772

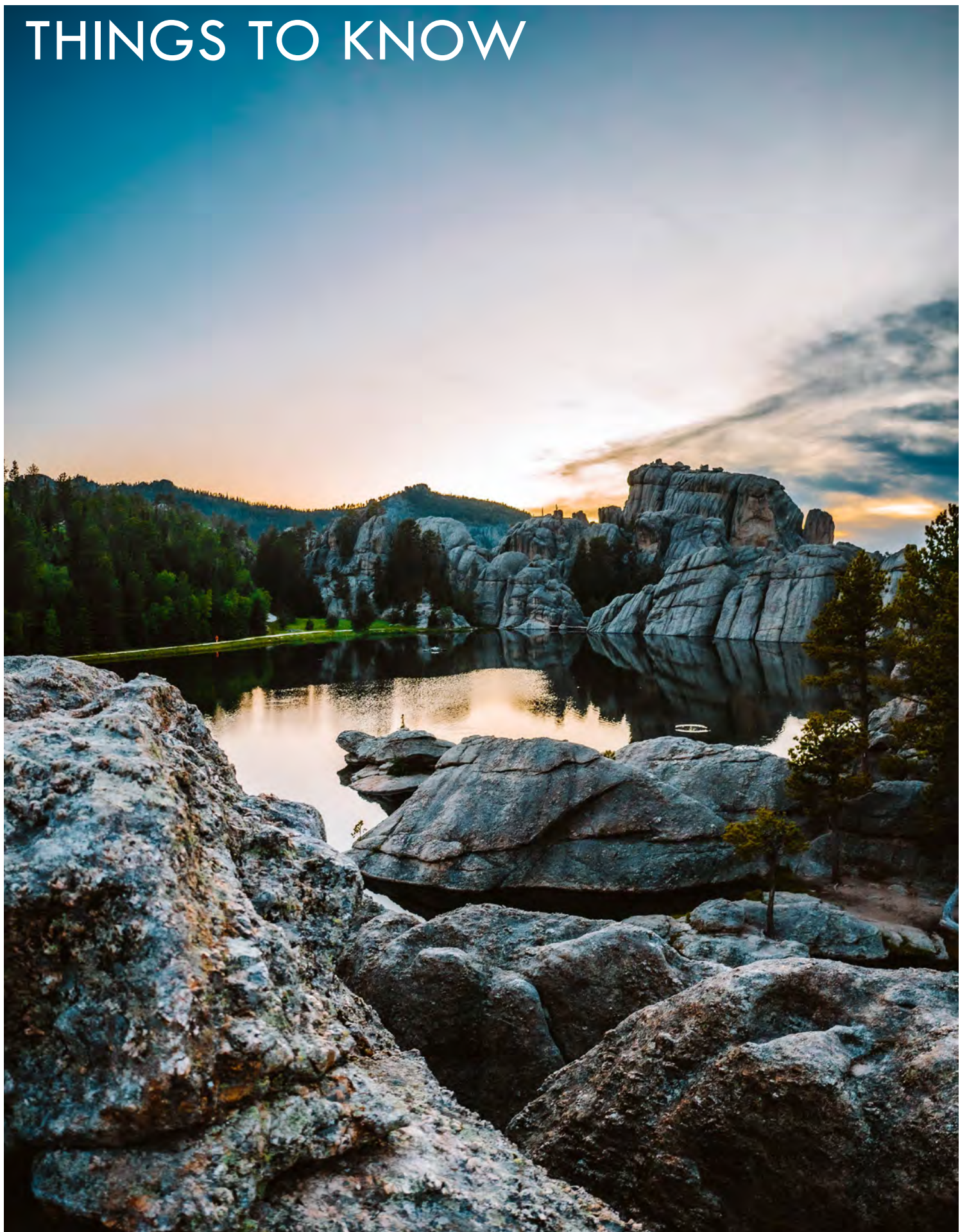
Reservations | 1.888.875.0001

info@custerresorts.com

custerresorts.com

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THINGS TO KNOW





SOUTH DAKOTA PARKS AND WILDLIFE FOUNDATION BECAUSE GREAT PLACES DON'T JUST HAPPEN!

Through the generosity of our donors, we have helped to make great places happen in Custer State Park! The Custer State Park Visitor Center, the Peter Norbeck Education Center, and the latest addition, the Bison Center on Wildlife Loop Road are all places we helped to bring to visitors like you. We'd love to see photos of you making memories at the many Great Places throughout the park.



Scan the code and share with us on social media!



PARKSWILDLIFEFOUNDATION.ORG

PARK RULES

Regulations are designed to protect both park visitors and park resources. Conservation officers enforce the park's laws and regulations.

» DO NOT APPROACH THE BUFFALO.

- » Do not feed or disturb wildlife.
- » All vehicles must stay on designated roadways.
- » Drones in South Dakota state parks are permitted but must follow state park and FAA rules and guidelines.
- » Open fires are prohibited unless in an approved fire grate located in campgrounds or picnic areas.
- » Pets need to be on a leash no longer than 10 feet. Pets are not allowed in any park buildings or on designated swimming beaches. Please clean up after your pet, and do not leave pets unattended. Service animals are welcome.
- » Removal of any natural or cultural features such as rocks or artifacts is prohibited.
- » Any person, regardless of their residency, who is able to lawfully possess a firearm/pistol can conceal their weapon without permit while in South Dakota.
- » Visitors are not allowed to jump or dive from bridges, rocks, or cliffs into any of the park's lakes.
- » Only state-sponsored geocaches are allowed in the park.

LOST AND FOUND

All lost and found items and records are kept at the park office. If you find or lose an item, stop at one of our entrance stations, visitor centers, or the park office and fill out a lost and found form.

PARK ENTRANCE FEES

An entrance license is required for all park visitors. Only people traveling non-stop on U.S. Highway 16A and south Highway 87 are exempt from this requirement. Entrance licenses are valid at all South Dakota state parks.

TEMPORARY ENTRANCE LICENSE

\$20/vehicle (1-7 consecutive days)

ANNUAL PARK ENTRANCE LICENSE

\$36

SECOND ANNUAL PARK ENTRANCE LICENSE

\$18 with coupon

TRANSFERABLE PARK ENTRANCE LICENSE

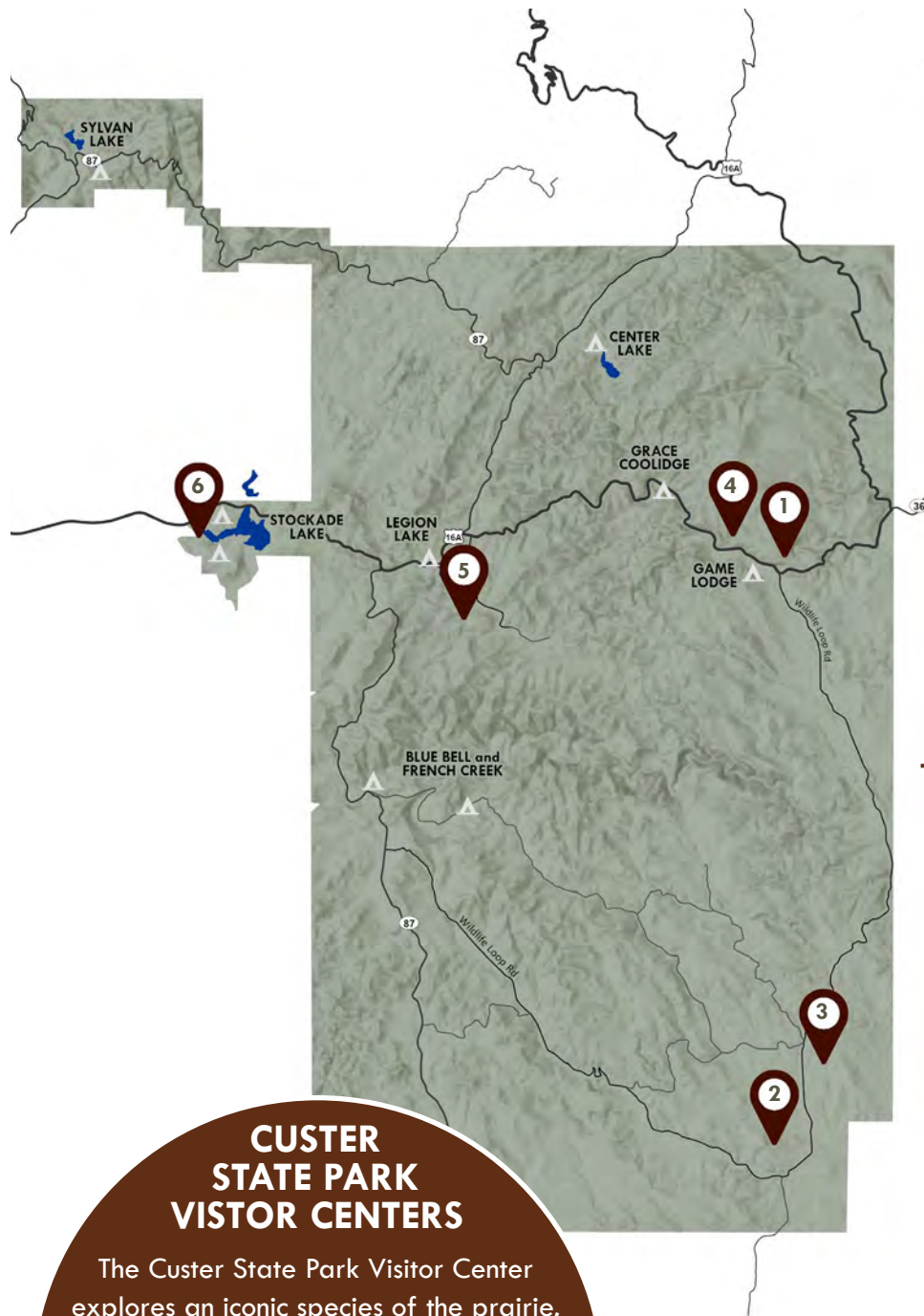
\$80

MOTORCOACH LICENSE

\$3/person per visit

(Valid only at Custer State Park)

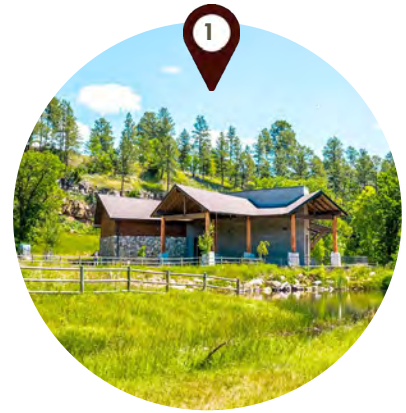
VISITOR CENTERS



CUSTER STATE PARK VISITOR CENTERS

The Custer State Park Visitor Center explores an iconic species of the prairie, the bison. Open year round, the visitor center is a great starting point for all of your adventures. Stop in and chat with the knowledgeable staff or take a break in the 100-seat theater and watch the 20-minute movie, "Spirit of Tatanka," narrated by Kevin Costner.

CUSTER STATE PARK VISITOR CENTER



Located at the junction of Wildlife Loop Road and Highway 16A.

MEMORIAL DAY - LABOR DAY

Open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

LABOR DAY - SEPTEMBER 30

Open 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

OCTOBER 1 - MEMORIAL DAY

Open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

THANKSGIVING, CHRISTMAS, AND EASTER

Closed

PETER NORBECK OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTER



Located on Highway 16 near the State Game Lodge.

The perfect place to play, explore, or take in an educational program.

MEMORIAL DAY – SEPTEMBER 30

Open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

OCTOBER 1 – MEMORIAL DAY

Closed

BISON CENTER



Located on Wildlife Loop Road.

The Bison Center tells the story of the park's bison herd.

MEMORIAL DAY – LABOR DAY

Open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

LABOR DAY - SEPTEMBER 30

Open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

OCTOBER 1 – NOVEMBER 5

Open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

NOVEMBER 6 – MEMORIAL DAY

Subject to seasonal closure

WILDLIFE STATION VISITOR CENTER



Located on Wildlife Loop Road.

Take a step back in time and learn about the prairie grass lands of Custer State Park and how staff, who once lived in this building, strive to keep in healthy.

MEMORIAL DAY – LABOR DAY

Open 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

LABOR DAY – SEPTEMBER 30

Open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

OCTOBER 1 – MEMORIAL DAY

Closed

BADGER HOLE HISTORIC SITE



Located 1/2 mile south of Highway 16A on Badger Clark Road.

This cabin was home to Badger Clark, South Dakota's first Poet Laureate.

MEMORIAL DAY – AUGUST 31

Open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

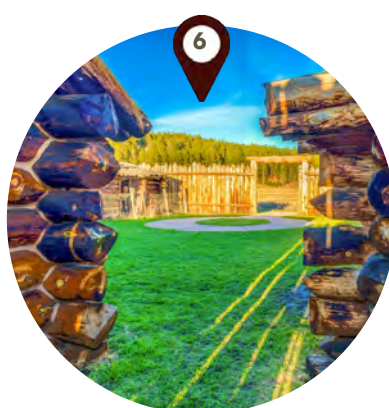
SEPTEMBER 1 – SEPTEMBER 30

Call 605.394.2693 for exact times

OCTOBER 1 – MEMORIAL DAY

Closed

GORDON STOCKADE



Located near the west entrance of the park on Highway 16A.

The Gordon Stockade is built on the original site of the the historic structure and tells the story of this short-lived illegal occupation in 1874-1875.

OPEN YEAR ROUND

CUSTER STATE PARK WILDLIFE

Custer State Park is one of the few places in the world to see an abundance of wildlife in their natural habitat. Visitors may encounter a variety of wildlife throughout the park's 71,000 acres, including along trails, in the campgrounds, and beside the road. Wildlife Loop Road is particularly known for its common sightings of buffalo, pronghorn, and prairie dogs, but keep an eye out for white-tailed and mule deer, elk, bighorn sheep, and a host of birds and smaller wildlife as well. For the best results, travel the loop during the early morning or later in the evening when wildlife are most active.

MANAGING THE WILDLIFE

Within the borders of Custer State Park, staff help manage the wildlife populations through several means.

RESEARCH

Working with several colleges, park staff have conducted a number of research projects on many of the animals found in the park, including monitoring where the bison graze and migrate. This is an ongoing project, and in the summer of 2024, you may still see collars on certain bison. Other past projects include elk movements and grazing patterns, as well as bobcat and mountain lion numbers.

Through research projects such as these, the park hopes to better understand how the animals of the park use the area, so we can fine tune our management practices.

HUNTING

Some animal species in the park are managed through hunting programs. Hunting helps reduce the size of the populations, preventing overcrowding within the park, which ensures adequate habitat for all our animals. Species managed through hunting include bison, elk, deer, pronghorn, mountain lion, and turkey.

AUCTION

Some of the bison and burros are sold at our annual auction. This is another way for the park to reduce the size of the herds and prevent overcrowding within the park.

KEEP YOUR DISTANCE

When viewing wildlife, please remain in your vehicle or stay at least 100 yards from bison, elk, and other animals. Regardless of distance, if any wild animal changes its behavior due to your presence, you are too close. Please back away.

PLEASE DON'T FEED US!

Feeding the park's wildlife is prohibited. Feeding any wild animal can be dangerous to both you and the animal.

PARK SAFELY

Stopping, parking, or standing in the road is dangerous. Large vehicles have limited visibility. Other drivers may be distracted by wildlife and scenery. Stay aware of traffic at all times.

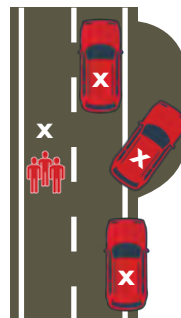
- » Use pullouts to stop.
- » Park with all four tires fully to the right of the white line.
- » When your vehicle is moving, keep doors closed and arms, cameras, and children inside.
- » Do not stop your vehicle in the road or block it with tripods, chairs, or other objects.
- » If wildlife are nearby, stay inside your vehicle.



SAFE
PARKING



UNSAFE
PARKING



WILDLIFE



© Scott Korsten

WILDLIFE

BISON



The park is home to as many as 1,450 head of North American bison, more commonly known as buffalo. Bison can grow to 6 feet tall and weigh more than 2,000 pounds. They are considered the largest native terrestrial mammal of North America. Herds are often seen in the southern part of the park. Ask staff at the visitor centers for bison locations

COYOTES



Coyotes hunt in all habitats of Custer State Park. Their diet is varied, but consists mainly of small mammals. Coyotes may live as solitary individuals, in pairs, or small family groups in both rural and urban areas of the park.

BIGHORN SHEEP



A herd of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep was reintroduced to Custer State Park in 1922. Rams (males) have thick, curled horns, and ewes (females) have smaller curved horns. Herds are often seen near the French Creek and Grace Coolidge Natural Areas.

MOUNTAIN LIONS



Chiefly nocturnal and reclusive toward humans, mountain lions are found within the Black Hills and Custer State Park. These predators feed on several species, including deer, elk, rabbits, and wild turkeys.

BIRDS



The park's diverse habitat makes for exciting bird watching. Visitors can find the mountain bluebird, white-winged junco, golden eagle, prairie falcon, and western tanager, to name but a few.

ELK



Elk are the second largest member of the deer family with only moose larger. Mature bulls grow and shed heavy, wide antlers each year. They are shy and seldom seen during the daytime hours. They are best found in early morning or evening hours.

MOUNTAIN GOATS



The mountain goat was not found in South Dakota until 1923, when it was introduced to the Black Hills. Today, they are found in the granite outcroppings and crags around Black Elk Peak, Needles, and Mount Rushmore areas. The all-white mammal feeds on grasses, ferns, moss, and lichen among other high-elevation plants. Both sexes have sharp, slender, black horns.

PRONGHORNS



Pronghorns, commonly referred to as antelope due to their similar appearance, live on the open grassland. The name pronghorn comes from the buck's large pronged horns. The horn sheaths are shed each year. The fastest land animal in North America, pronghorns can run 60 mph for great distances.

BURROS



The burros in Custer State Park are not native to the Black Hills. They are descendants from the herd that once hauled visitors to the top of Black Elk Peak. The rides were discontinued years ago and the burros were released into the park.

PRAIRIE DOGS



The black-tailed prairie dog is found on the dry, upland prairie. It is a rodent that lives in large social groups called towns. Prairie dogs get their name from their bark-like call.

WHITE-TAILED DEER



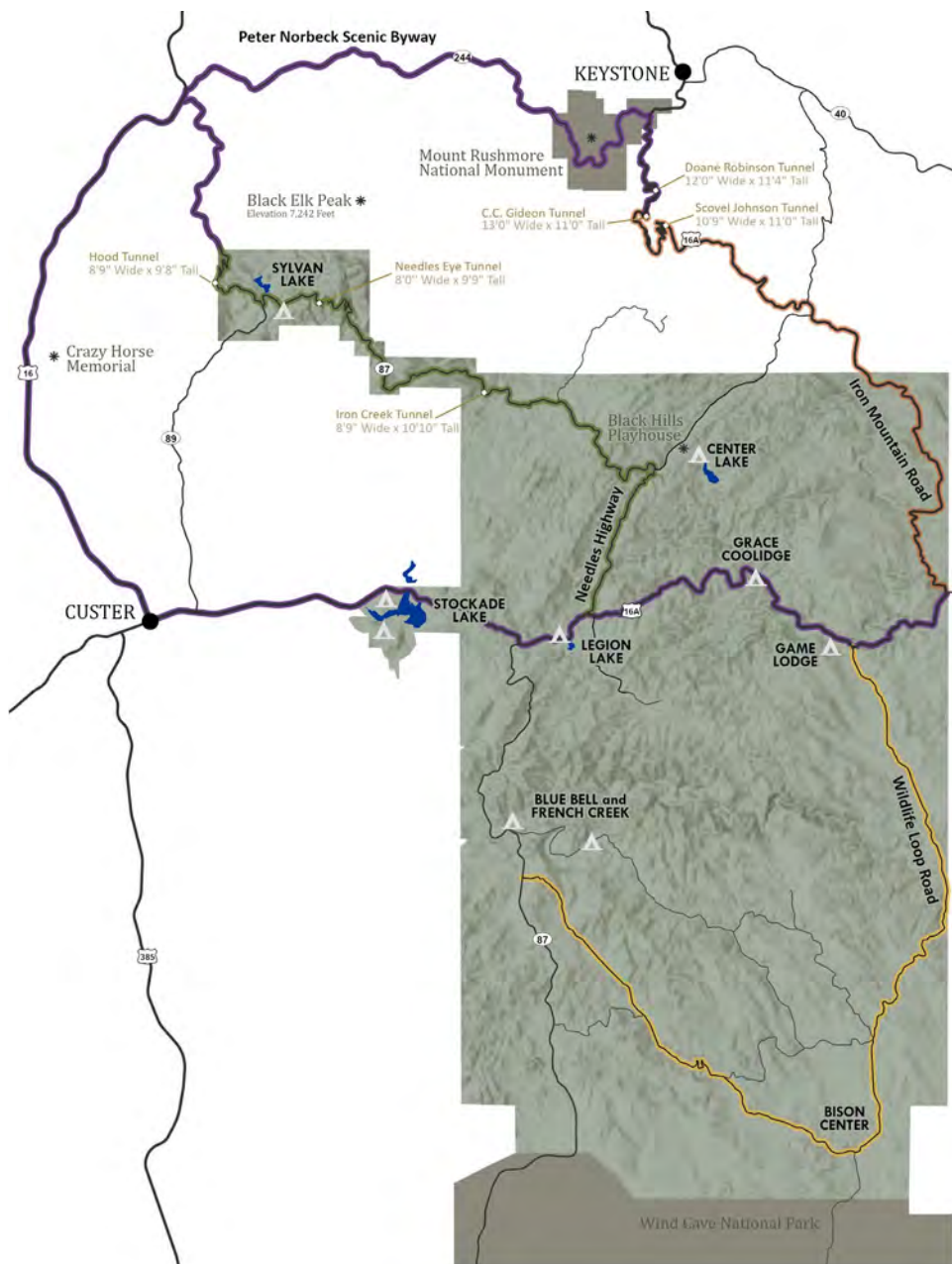
White-tailed deer live mainly in the timberlands. As its name implies, the white-tailed deer has white hair on the underside of its tail. When the animal runs, the tail is flipped up and looks like a waving white flag.

MULE DEER



These deer are aptly named for their large ears. Their black-tipped tails, which are short and narrow, are carried down when the deer runs. Mule deer often bound with a stiff-legged gait as if bouncing on powerful springs when they flee.

SCENIC DRIVES



TUNNEL INFORMATION

Tunnels are found on three highways in or near Custer State Park. Drivers of travel trailers, campers, recreational vehicles, and buses should be aware of the tunnel sizes. *Note: The following tunnel measurements are the most current.*

IRON MOUNTAIN ROAD — US 16A N

Doane Robinson

12' 0" Wide
11' 4" High

C.C. Gideon

13' 0" Wide
11' 0" High

Scovel Johnson

10' 9" Wide
11' 0" High

SYLVAN LAKE ROAD — SD 87/89, NORTH OF SYLVAN LAKE

Hood Tunnel

8' 9" Wide
9' 8" High

NEEDLES HIGHWAY — SD 87 N

Needles Eye Tunnel

8' 0" Wide
9' 9" High

Iron Creek

8' 9" Wide
10' 10" High

Roads are subject to seasonal temporary closures.

TAKE YOUR TIME

These winding drives are best enjoyed at a slower pace. When making plans, please allow ample time to travel at a safe speed – generally 25 miles per hour or slower.

"You're not supposed to drive here at 60 miles an hour. To do the scenery half justice, people should drive 20 or under; to do it full justice, they should get out and walk."

- PETER NORBECK

WILDLIFE LOOP ROAD

18 MILES*



EXPECT TRAVEL TIME OF ABOUT 45 MINUTES.

OPEN YEAR-ROUND

The 18-mile Wildlife Loop Road takes visitors through the open grasslands and pine-speckled hills that much of the park's wildlife call home.

**from the Visitor Center to Blue Bell Entrance Station*

PETER NORBECK

SCENIC BYWAY



EXPECT TRAVEL TIME OF 2-3 HOURS.

SUBJECT TO SEASONAL CLOSURE

The Peter Norbeck Scenic Byway complements the park's three scenic drives and includes some of the most dramatic natural and historic features in the Black Hills.

Sites include the Needles, Mount Rushmore, and a bird's eye view of the rocky peaks and forested hills of the Black Hills National Forest.

IRON MOUNTAIN ROAD

18 MILES



EXPECT TRAVEL TIME OF 45 TO 60 MINUTES.

SUBJECT TO SEASONAL CLOSURE

This winding road runs between Mount Rushmore National Memorial and the junction of US 16A and SD 36. Constructed in 1933, only a portion of this road lies within the park, but it is a must-see.

Along the highway, visitors will find wildfire exhibits, pigtail bridges, magnificent Black Hills scenery, and tunnels that frame Mount Rushmore.

NEEDLES HIGHWAY

14 MILES



EXPECT TRAVEL TIME OF 45 TO 60 MINUTES.

CLOSED IN THE WINTER

The Needles Highway is more than a 14-mile road – it's a spectacular drive through pine and spruce forests, meadows surrounded by birch and aspen, and rugged granite mountains. The road's name comes from the needle-like granite formations which seem to pierce the horizon along the highway.



PHOTO © KIM BRUNDAGE

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Custer State Park has a variety of programs available year round. The park offers programs such as water sports, fishing, hiking, or outdoor skills. Our Junior Naturalist program will engage younger visitors in outdoor learning. Programming is free and open to all ages; however, a park entrance license is required.

NATURALIST PROGRAMS

JANUARY – APRIL

Monthly Programs

Pick up schedule at the Custer State Park Visitor Center.

MAY – SEPTEMBER

Daily Programs

Pick up schedule at any visitor center, also posted in campgrounds.

OCTOBER – DECEMBER

Weekly Programs

Pick up schedule at the Custer State Park Visitor Center, also posted in campgrounds.

STURGIS MOTORCYCLE RALLY

AUGUST 2-11, 2024

Every August, thousands of motorcyclists visit the Black Hills during the annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. Below are upcoming rally dates, so you can either join 'em or avoid 'em.

August 1-12, 2025

August 7-16, 2026

JANUARY

January 1

First Day Hikes

FEBRUARY

February 10-11

Valentines Weekend

MARCH

March 17

Bluebird Box Workshop and Hike

MAY

May 1

Summer Trail Challenge Begins

May 17-19

Military Appreciation Weekend

JUNE

June 1

National Trails Day Event

SEPTEMBER

September 26-28

31st Annual Governor's Roundup Up Arts Festival

September 27

59th Annual Governor's Buffalo Roundup

OCTOBER

October 18-19

Halloween Night Hike

NOVEMBER

November 2

59th Annual Fall Classic Bison Auction

November 28

Winter Trail Challenge Begins

November 28 – January 4

9th Annual Festival of Trees and Caching Through the Snow Events

EVENTS ARE SUBJECT TO WEATHER. MORE INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND AT THE VISITOR CENTERS OR AT CUSTERSTATEPARK.COM.

BUFFALO ROUNDUP



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE?

The park began to gather the herd back in the 1960s when the decision was made to eradicate the disease brucellosis from the herd. The herd was certified brucellosis free in 1965 allowing the sale of live animals. Since that time, the roundup has been used in conjunction with the fall sale as a way to manage the size of the herd and to provide an opportunity to brand and vaccinate the calves.

Studies show that during normal moisture years, the park's grassland can support about 1,400 head of bison. That number fluctuates depending on rainfall and the available rangeland forage. The buffalo are on their own to forage. The park does not supplement their food supply.

The park inventories the range conditions each year and determines the number of buffalo to be sold at the fall auction in November. To keep the buffalo numbers compatible with available forage, the size of the herd varies. This year there are about 1,400 buffalo in the herd.

For Custer State Park, the Buffalo Roundup is a management tool to prepare for the annual buffalo sale. The event is open to the public and attended by thousands of guests each year.

It truly is a magnificent sight to see—buffalo rumbling across the plains driven by cowboys and cowgirls on horseback. It takes you back to days gone by and lets the spectators catch a glimpse of old west history.

IF YOU'RE GOING... **BUFFALO ROUNDUP** FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2024

- » The roundup takes place near the corrals on Wildlife Loop Road.
- » Two viewing areas are set aside for spectators — the north and south viewing areas.
- » Parking begins at 6:15 a.m., please plan to arrive early.
- » The Buffalo Roundup will begin at 9:30 a.m. Guests must stay in the viewing areas until the herd is safely in the corrals (usually around noon). Testing, branding, and sorting will begin 30 minutes after the Roundup is complete and will go until all animals have been run through the corral system.
- » Reservations are not required.
- » Food concessions available on site.
- » Free park entrance Friday, Sept. 27.

BUFFALO ROUNDUP ARTS FESTIVAL SEPTEMBER 26-28, 2024



Enjoy three days of continuous music, entertainment, and food, along with over 100 arts and craft booths near the State Game Lodge on Highway 16A. Visit with artisans and crafters from across the Midwest as they exhibit and sell their wares.

HIKING TRAILS



CUSTER STATE PARK TRAIL CHALLENGE

The trail challenge began as a way to invite visitors to hike the trails of the park and experience a variety of landscapes. There are now two challenges, one in the summer and one in the winter. Scan to learn more.



BADGER CLARK TRAIL

1.2 mile loop (1.6 km) | Moderate

Trailhead location: Park at Badger Hole parking lot, trail starts right of the cabin. *Located behind the historic Badger Hole, this trail winds through a mixed pine and hardwood forest and along rocky hillsides.*

BARNES CANYON TRAIL

4.7 miles one way (4.8 km) | Moderate

Trailhead location: Wildlife Loop Road | Turn on the airport road on the north end of the loop road. A second trailhead is located on the Badger Hole Road.

BISON CENTER TRAILS

Red Dog Trail: 1 mile loop (1.6 km) | Moderate

Bison Trail: 3 mile loop (4.8 km) | Moderate

Trailhead location: Located just east of the Bison Center, these two loops wind through mixed grass prairie of the park.

BLACK ELK PEAK TRAIL #4

3.25 miles one way (5.2 km) | Strenuous

More up and down hill than #9

Trailhead location: South of Sylvan Lake on Needles Highway (87), shares Little Devils Tower trailhead.

BLACK ELK PEAK TRAIL #9

3.3 miles one way (4.8 km) | Strenuous

Trailhead location: Park at Sylvan Lake Day Use Area and walk east.

CAIRN TRAIL

0.3 miles one way (1.6 km) | Easy -

Moderate. **Trailhead location:** South end of the Peter Norbeck Outdoor Education Center parking lot.

CATHEDRAL SPIRES TRAIL

1.5 miles one way (2.4 km) | Moderate to

strenuous. **Trailhead location:** South of Sylvan Lake on Needles Highway (87) along the north side of the road. Can also be accessed by hiking Black Elk Peak Trail #4. There is a sign indicating the branch for Cathedral Spires.

CENTENNIAL TRAIL

Reference trail specific brochure.

CREEKSIDE TRAIL

3 miles one way (4.8 km) | Easy

Trailhead location: Can be accessed at multiple points from visitor center to Grace Coolidge Campground.

FRENCH CREEK NATURAL AREA

12 miles one way (19 km) | Moderate to strenuous | No marked path on over 7 miles of the trail, hikers walk around/through brush and cross the creek several times.

Trailhead location: East | South of the airport on Wildlife Loop Road. West | Inside Horse Camp

GRACE COOLIDGE WALK-IN AREA

3 miles one way (4.8 km) | Moderate

Trailhead location: South | At Grace Coolidge Walk-in area across Highway 16A from Grace Coolidge Campground. North | Across from shower house at Center Lake. *Trail has 15 creek crossings with no bridges, which may be difficult. Hikers will get wet. There is poison ivy along the trail. The lowhead dams provide excellent fishing.*

LEGION LAKESHORE TRAIL

Less than 1 mile loop (1.6 km) | Easy

Trailhead location: At west end of fishing dock parking lot.

LITTLE DEVILS TOWER

1.5 miles one way (2.4 km) | Strenuous

Last half mile is a steep rocky incline with large granite boulders you will need to scramble over.

Trailhead location: Less than one mile south of Sylvan Lake General Store on Needles Highway (87), clearly visible from the road.

LOVERS LEAP TRAIL

4 mile loop (6.4 km) | Moderate to strenuous

Mostly uphill to start with some rocky hills.

Trailhead location: Behind School House Facilities building directly across from Peter Norbeck Outdoor Education Center, next to the resort wedding pavilion.

LOST TRAILS

3.5 miles (5.6 km) | Moderate to strenuous

Trailhead location: Two trailheads, one at the south end of the Center Lake beach parking area. The other, at the Center Lake boat dock.

PRAIRIE TRAIL

3 mile loop (4.8 km) | Moderate. One steep

hill at halfway point. **Trailhead location:**

On Wildlife Loop Road south of prairie dog towns, toilet at trailhead.

STOCKADE LAKE TRAIL

1.5 mile loop (2.4 km) | Moderate Includes

a short rocky incline for the first half.

Trailhead location: Across from swim beach on Stockade Lake Drive.

SUNDAY GULCH

3.2 mile loop (4.8 km) | Strenuous

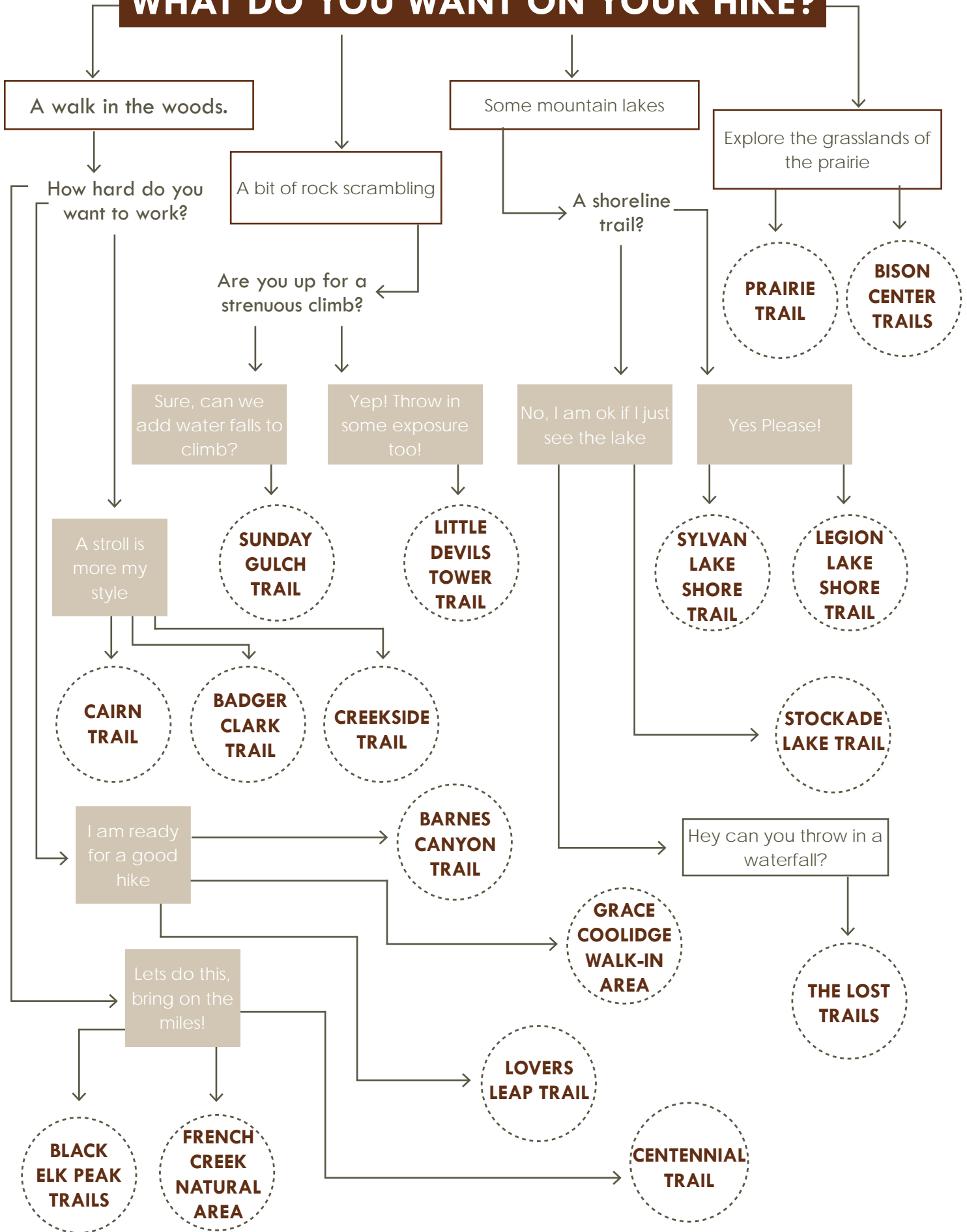
Trailhead location: Follow Sylvan Lakeshore Trail, trailhead is behind the dam.

SYLVAN LAKESHORE TRAIL

1 mile loop (1.6 km) | Easy to Moderate

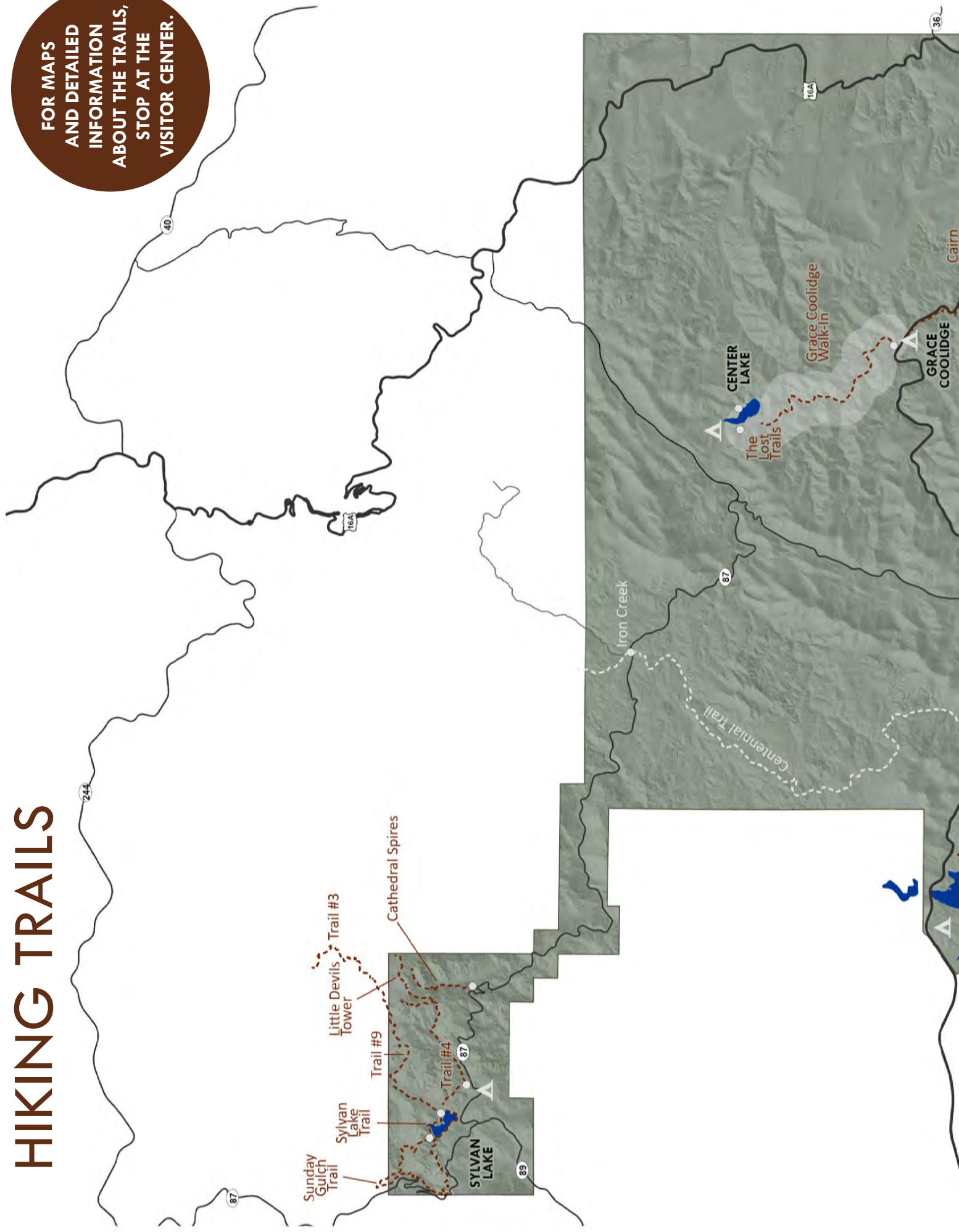
Trailhead location: Can be accessed from any portion of Sylvan Lake.

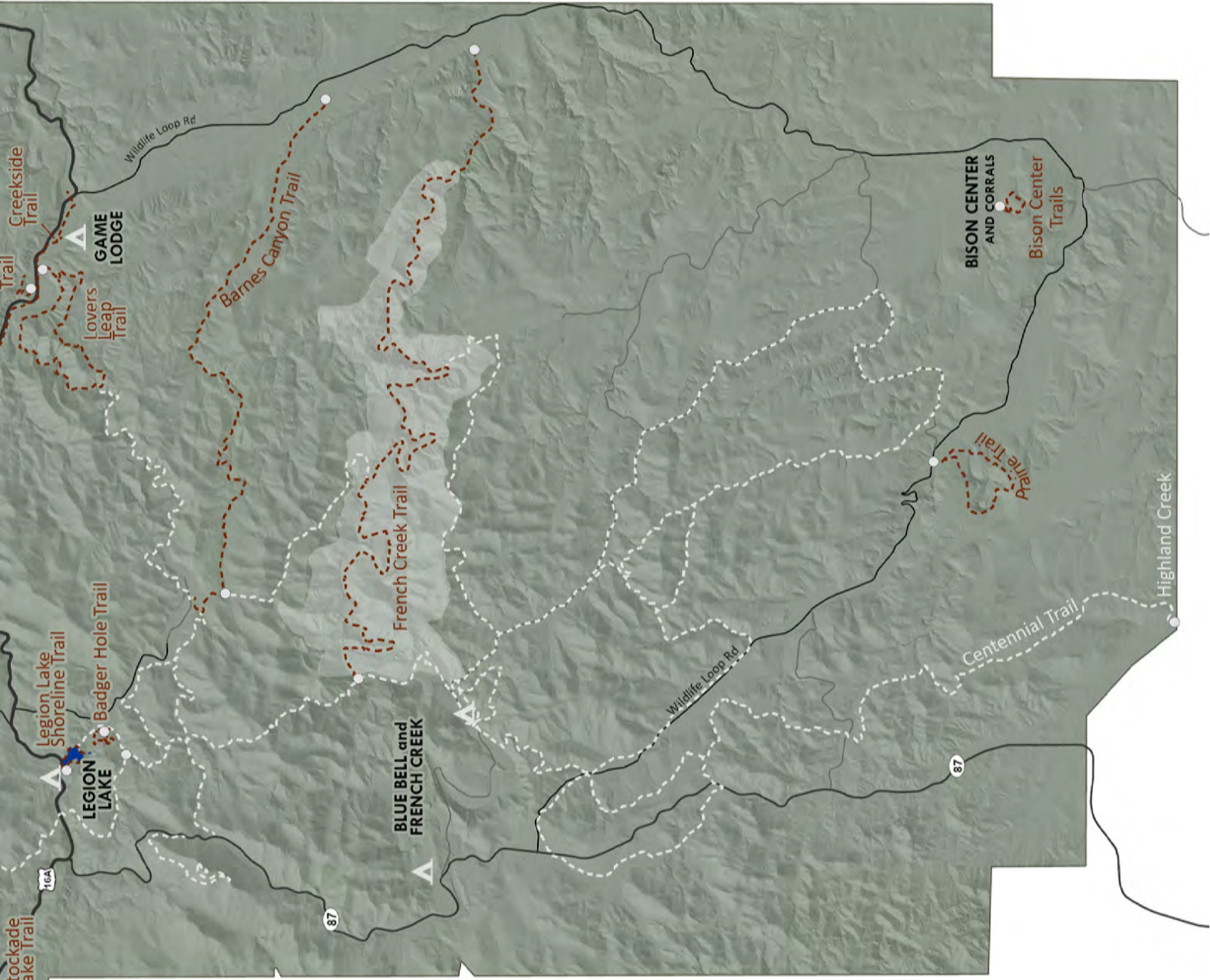
WHAT DO YOU WANT ON YOUR HIKE?



HIKING TRAILS

FOR MAPS
AND DETAILED
INFORMATION
ABOUT THE TRAILS,
STOP AT THE
VISITOR CENTER.





TRAIL RATINGS

EASY | The trail mainly follows level ground with very little elevation change.

MODERATE | Parts of the trail include more inclines, hills or elevations changes. May have more technical terrain such as rocky or root-covered trail, loose gravel on inclines, or narrow paths.

STRENUOUS | Much of the trail includes very steep slopes and rocky areas. May include; a long, steady climb; many steps or stairs; and roots, slippery rocks or other difficult terrain

- Trailhead
- Hiking Trail
- Horse or Multi-Use Trail

OPEN YEAR-ROUND

WINTER ROADS

Note some roads may be closed during the winter. Please check SD 511 for the most up-to-date road information.

Beat the winter blues and escape to the park! During the months of January, February, and March, the park offers a variety of programming from ice fishing to winter survival to guest speakers.

Winter is a great time to explore the park; the season brings a quiet serenity to the place, and there are fewer visitors to share it with. During the winter, the park takes guests on a series of guided hikes. If there is enough snow, guests can experience snowshoeing throughout the park, free of charge!

Snowshoes are available for check out from January to March. Stop by the visitor center to get fitted and learn which trails are best suited for snowshoe hiking.

During the month of December the visitor center takes on a holiday feel with the Festival of Trees. Local businesses and community partners decorate trees which are on display, and visitors can vote for their favorite.

WINTER TRAIL CHALLENGE

Get out and explore Custer State Park with the Winter Trail Challenge. The challenge runs from Thanksgiving until the spring. At one point along each trail, there is a 2024 Winter Trail Challenge Selfie Sign. To complete the Trail Challenge, participants must hike all the listed trails and collect a selfie at each Winter Trail Challenge Sign.

Each year the trails and the challenges change, so make sure to stop at the visitor center and pick up this year's official flyer.

WINTER



- » Park is open, however Needles Highway is closed to non-motorized traffic
 - » Tends to be quieter
 - » Winter Trail Challenge
- » Snowshoe checkout available (January-March)
- » Winter programming including hikes, ice fishing and snowshoeing

SPRING



- » Wildlife babies
- » Spring bird migrations
- » Trees begin to bud
- » Warm weather begins to arrive
- » Restaurants, lodges, and activities open in May with limited hours

SUMMER



- » All facilities open
- » Daily summer programming
 - » All roads open
- » All restaurants, lodges, and activities open with full hours

FALL



- » Buffalo Roundup (end of September)
 - » Halloween Night Hike
 - » Fall colors
- » Restaurants, lodges and activities close near the end of October

LAKEs AND STREAMs



HABITAT STAMP

A habitat stamp is required for anyone 18 years of age or older when purchasing a fishing license. The annual fee for the habitat stamp is \$10 for South Dakota residents and \$25 for nonresidents. A habitat stamp is not required for the one-day fishing license.

Habitat stamp dollars associated with fishing license sales fund aquatic habitat projects on public waters across South Dakota.



SWIMMING



Swimming is allowed at the park's five lakes: Center Lake, Legion Lake, Stockade Lake, Sylvan Lake, and Game Lodge Pond.

There are no lifeguards on duty. Jumping from cliffs and rocks into the water is illegal and strictly prohibited. Pets and glass containers are prohibited from all zoned swimming beaches.

BOATING



For your safety, wear a personal flotation device (PFD), or life jacket, whenever you are on the water. PFDs are mandatory for all people riding in a boat on South Dakota waters.

Boating is permitted within Custer State Park with the following restrictions:

- » Sylvan Lake, *Electric motors only*
- » Legion Lake, *Electric motors only*
- » Stockade Lake, *All boats allowed*
- » Center Lake, *Only slow, non-wake boating allowed*

Boat ramps are available at Stockade and Center Lakes.

FISHING



Fishing is allowed anywhere in Custer State Park. A valid South Dakota fishing license is required and can be purchased online at gfp.sd.gov.

Anglers will find rainbow, brown, and brook trout in the park's waters. Only one trout from a Black Hills stream can exceed 14 inches, but there is no minimum size restriction. Daily limit is 5.

It is legal to use artificial lures, flies, worms, or other bait. A variety of sport and panfish are found in Stockade Lake including northern pike, bass, perch, crappie, bluegill, and bullhead.

Licenses, bait, and tackle are available at each of the four resort areas. For daily limits and rules, please refer to the *2024 Fishing Handbook*, available at the visitor centers and the park office. The handbook is also available online at gfp.sd.gov and on our mobile app, Go Outdoors South Dakota.

FISHING LICENSE FEES

LICENSE	RESIDENT	NON-RESIDENT
ONE-DAY	\$8	\$16
THREE-DAY	N/A	\$37
ANNUAL	\$28	\$67

CAMPING



CAMPING RESERVATIONS

Reservations required

Campsites and group areas can be reserved one year in advance.

Camping cabin reservations can also be made a year in advance, but must be made at least two days prior to your arrival.

Fees

Camping fees vary per campground. There is an additional non-refundable reservation fee of \$7.70 for nonresidents.

A \$2 fee is assessed to all phone reservations.

Camping fees for the entire stay must be paid at the time the reservation is made.

A park entrance license is not included in camping reservation fees and must be purchased separately.

Cancellations

Cancellations can be made by calling 1.800.710.2267.

Cancellation fees are charged if:

- » *Cancelling a campsite within 7 days of the reservation - cancellation fee is one-half of one night of the camping fee.*
- » *Cancelling a camping cabin within 30 days of the reservation - cancellation fee is one-half of one night of the rental fee.*
- » *Cancelling a campsite at French Creek Horse Camp in Custer State Park within 30 days of the reservation - cancellation fee is one-half of one night of the camping fee.*
- » The reservation fee that is assessed to all phone reservations and out-of-state residents is non-refundable.

SAME DAY RESERVATIONS

Center Lake Campground

- » All open sites can be reserved beginning at 6 a.m. MT on the day of arrival.
- » Checkout time is noon MT.

NON-PROFIT YOUTH CAMPING AREAS

The park offers two primitive areas (Shady Rest and Center Lake) for non-profit youth tent camping only. Call 1.800.710.2267 for reservations. Reservations are not available online.

CAMPSITES



Camping is permitted only in designated areas. One camping unit permitted per site. A camping unit is any one hard-sided camper and/or one or more tents, if all occupants meet the definition of family (parents or grandparents and their minor children) or do not exceed six people. Checkout time is noon.

CAMPING CABINS



Locations: Blue Bell, Game Lodge, Stockade South, French Creek Horse Camp

About cabins: Sleep four to five people; linens are not included; check-in time is 4 p.m.; checkout time is 11 a.m.; no smoking or cooking in the cabins.

Amenities: Heating and air conditioning, electricity, picnic table, fire ring, porch, bunk bed and double bed, table, benches.

GROUP CAMPING



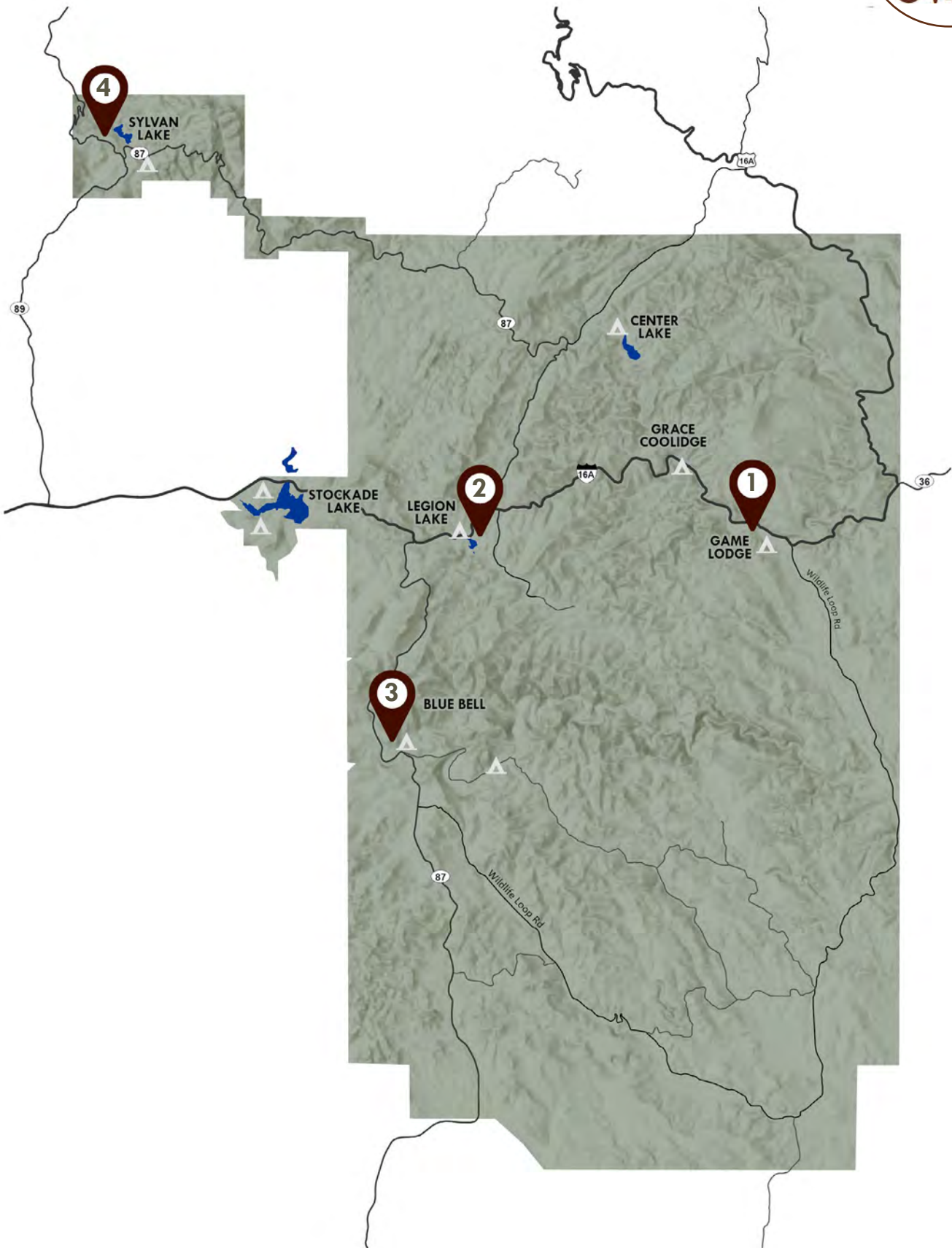
Group campgrounds are located near Stockade Lake and the Game Lodge Campground. These areas feature picnic shelters, vault toilets, fire grates, picnic tables, and water on site. Showers and flush toilets are available within walking distance from the campgrounds. Evening programs are located nearby on most nights during the summer. Designated swim beaches can also be found close by. Call 1.800.710.2267 for reservations. Reservations are not available online.

PRIMITIVE CAMPING



For a primitive outdoor experience, backpackers should try the French Creek Natural Area. Hikers using this area can camp anywhere along the canyon bottom. Open fires are prohibited. Campers must self-register at the stations located on each end of the natural area. The fee is \$7 per person, per night.

CUSTER STATE PARK RESORTS



STATE GAME LODGE



Picture yourself in a gentle mountain valley, surrounded by stately ponderosa pines and oak, birch, and aspen trees of changing hues. The native stone and wood State Game Lodge was built in 1920 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It served as the “Summer White House” for President Calvin Coolidge in 1927 and was visited by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1953.

LEGION LAKE LODGE



Named for the American Legion Post that once leased the land, Legion Lake is a quiet lakeside retreat. It's perfect for lakeside patio dining, summer picnics, and lazy days at the beach. You can fish, boat, and swim at Legion Lake, or rent a variety of watercraft vehicles. You can also pick up fishing licenses, park passes, and all the supplies you might need at the Legion Lake General Store.

BLUE BELL LODGE



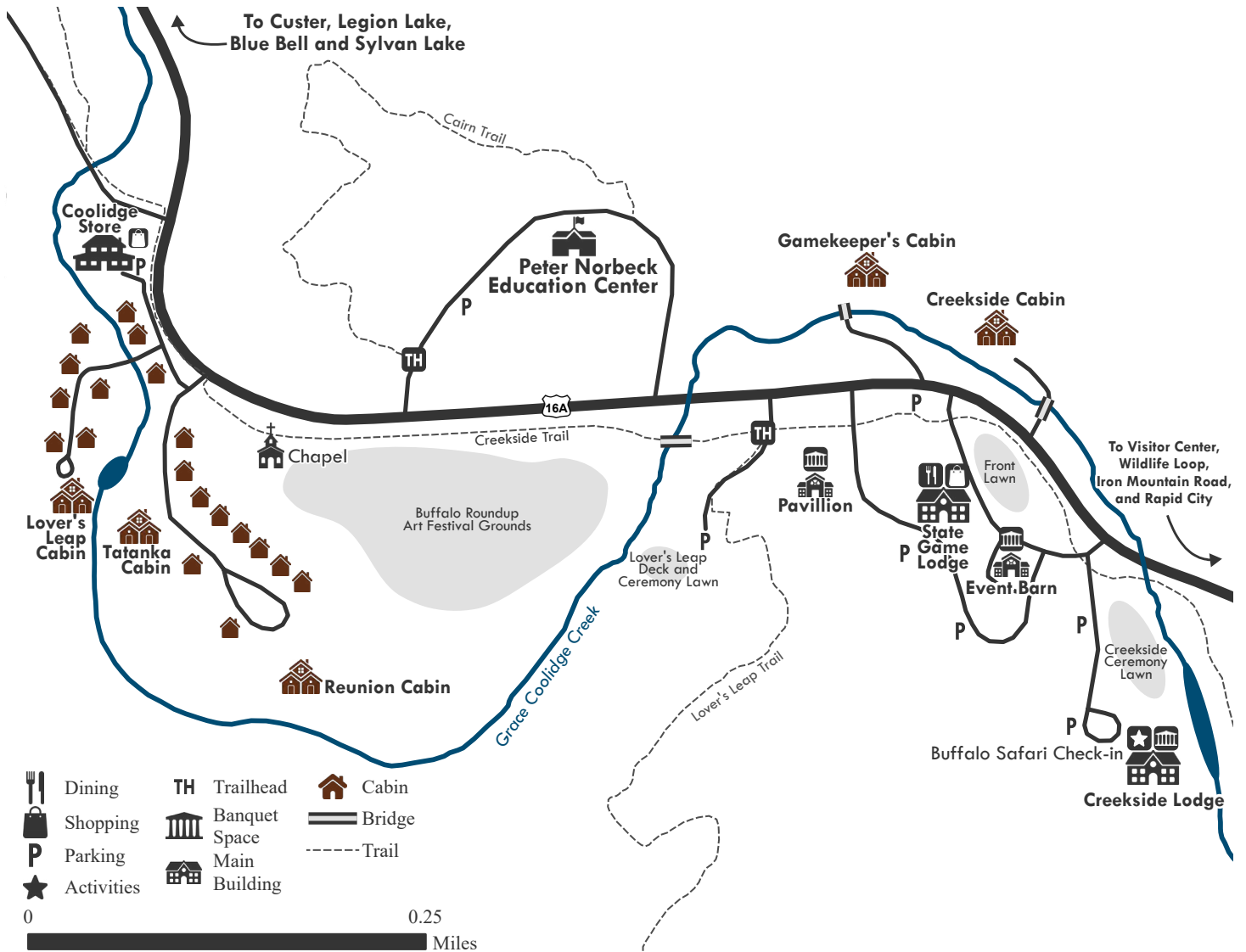
Live like the cowboys of old. Head on over to the prettiest little log-cabin ranch hideaway. Saddle up for a trail ride through the park's hidden spots. Gather around for our evening chuckwagon cookouts, a Blue Bell tradition with live entertainment!

SYLVAN LAKE LODGE



At the top of Needles Highway, stay at Sylvan Lake Lodge and see Custer State Park's crown jewel for yourself. Rich in history and natural beauty, the lodge is situated in a spot suggested by architect Frank Lloyd Wright—within a hillside forest of pine and spruce trees, in harmony with the beauty of the rugged landscape. This stone and timber lodge sits atop the sloping hills and the breathtaking beauty of Sylvan Lake.

STATE GAME LODGE



LODGING AND SHOPPING

888.875.0001



As the largest resort in the park, the State Game Lodge features both hotel rooms and cabins. Choose from historic lodge rooms in the main lodge, a wing of hotel rooms attached to the main lodge, modern hotel rooms at Creekside Lodge, and single-family cabins in the valley. We also feature a number of group specialty cabins like our Reunion Cabin and Tatanka Cabin. Don't miss the gift shop and the historic Coolidge General Store.

DINING ROOM

605.255.4541



Be part of the grand ambiance that harkens back to the state dinners of the 1927 Summer White House. Enjoy the view from the historic front porch. Open daily all season long for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Dinner reservations recommended but not required.

BUFFALO SAFARI TOUR

605.255.4541



Named "Top 10 Safaris in the US" by MSN.

1.5 – 2 hours

BUFFALO SAFARI TOUR WITH CHUCKWAGON COOKOUT

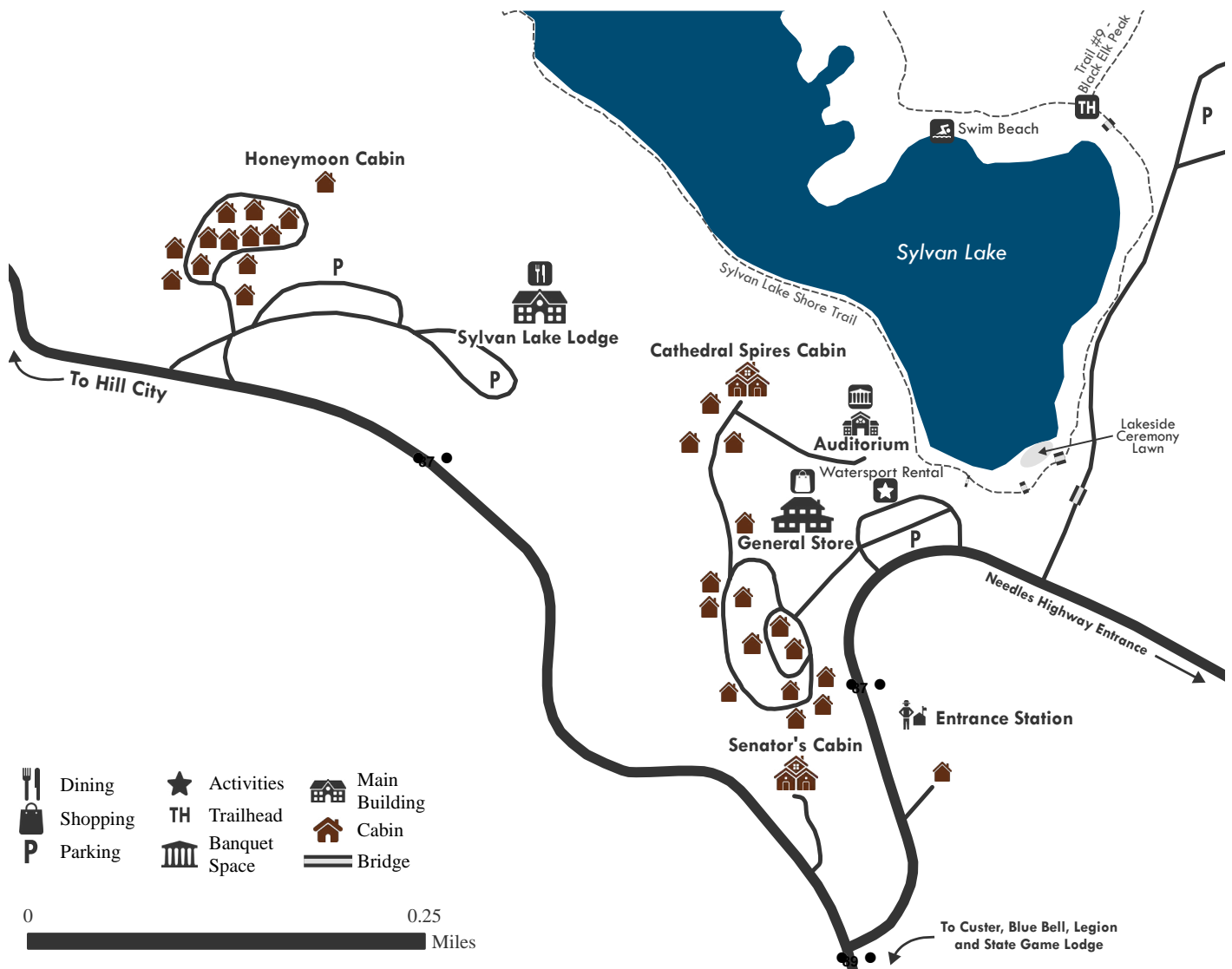
605.255.4541



1.5 hour Jeep tour, followed by Blue Bell Lodge's Chuckwagon Cookout. *(More on page 35)*

3.5 - 4 hours

SYLVAN LAKE LODGE



LODGING

888.875.0001



Rich in history and natural beauty, the stone and timber lodge is situated in a spot suggested by architect Frank Lloyd Wright—atop the sloping hills and the breathtaking beauty of Sylvan Lake. Featuring single-family cabins, honeymoon cabin, and the group Cathedral Spires Cabin within walking distance to the lake.

RESTAURANT, VERANDA AND GREAT ROOM LOUNGE

605.574.2561



Fresh, locally-sourced ingredients grace the dinner table at Sylvan Lake Lodge. Double-peaked wooden ceiling, hardwood floors, and stone fireplace. Make reservations on the stone veranda for al fresco dining with fabulous vistas of the Black Hills.

Open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.
Reservations recommended.

SHOPPING

605.574.2561



Quick, casual comfort food enjoyed lakeside, ice cream, coffee, and general store and gift shop.

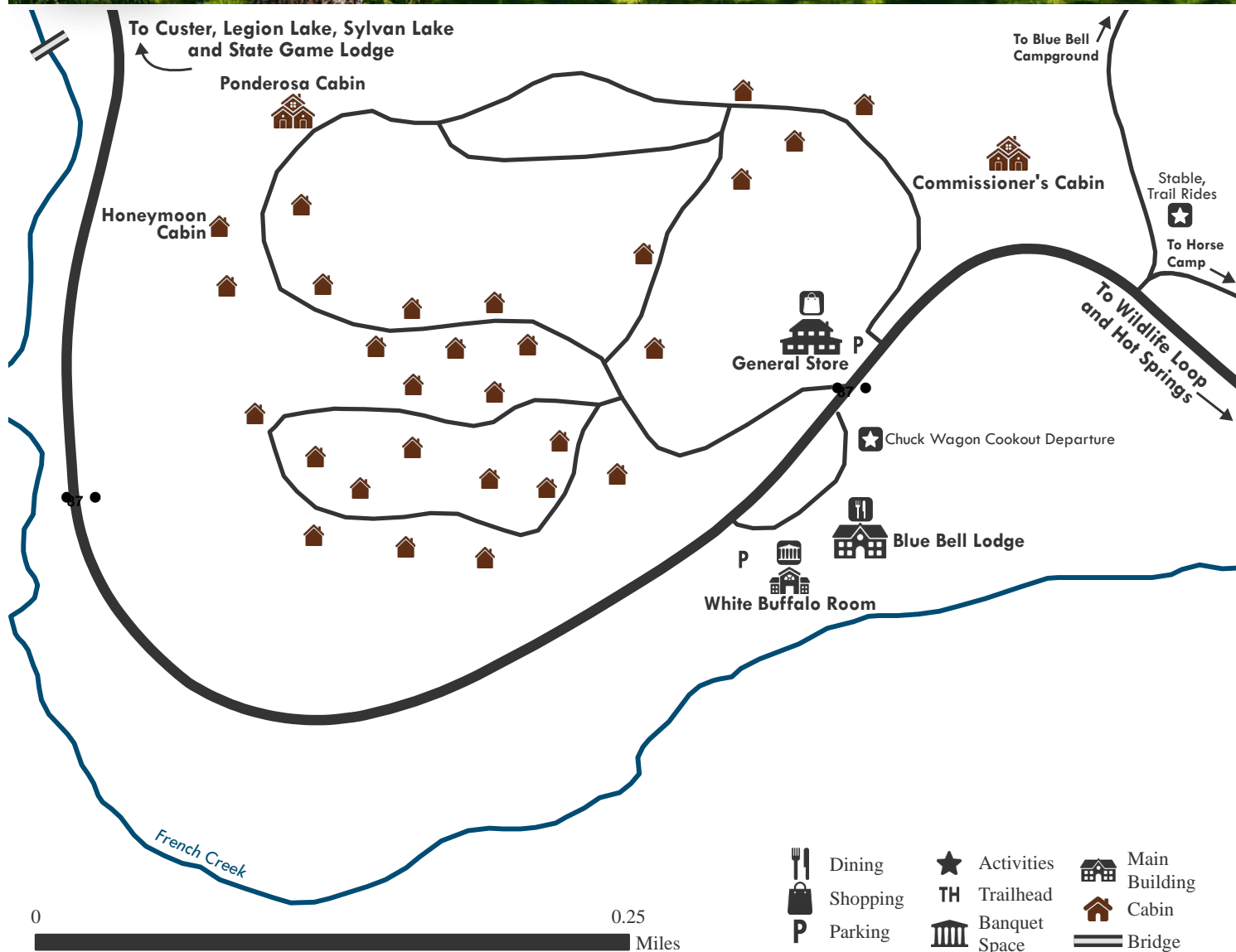
WATERCRAFT RENTALS

605.574.2561



Canoe, kayak, and paddleboard rentals available from the store. First-come, first-served. Life jackets provided with rental.

BLUE BELL LODGE



CABINS AND SHOPPING

888.875.0001



Head on over to the prettiest little log cabin hideaway. With only 30 cabins in total, Blue Bell's are some of the most peaceful and most sought-after cabins in the park, featuring the group Ponderosa Cabin that sleeps up to 24. The general store and gift shop offer gas and firewood.

SCENIC TRAIL RIDES

605.255.4700



The most peaceful, scenic ways to experience the park's trails. All levels welcome! One-hour (most popular), Two-hour, Half or Full Day.

Lil Buckaroo Rides also available!

SALOON-STYLE RESTAURANT, LOUNGE, AND PATIO

605.255.4531



Enjoy saddle stools at the bar! Specialty burgers, South Dakota dip, salads, and buffalo. Open daily all season long for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

HAYRIDE AND CHUCKWAGON COOKOUT

605.255.4531

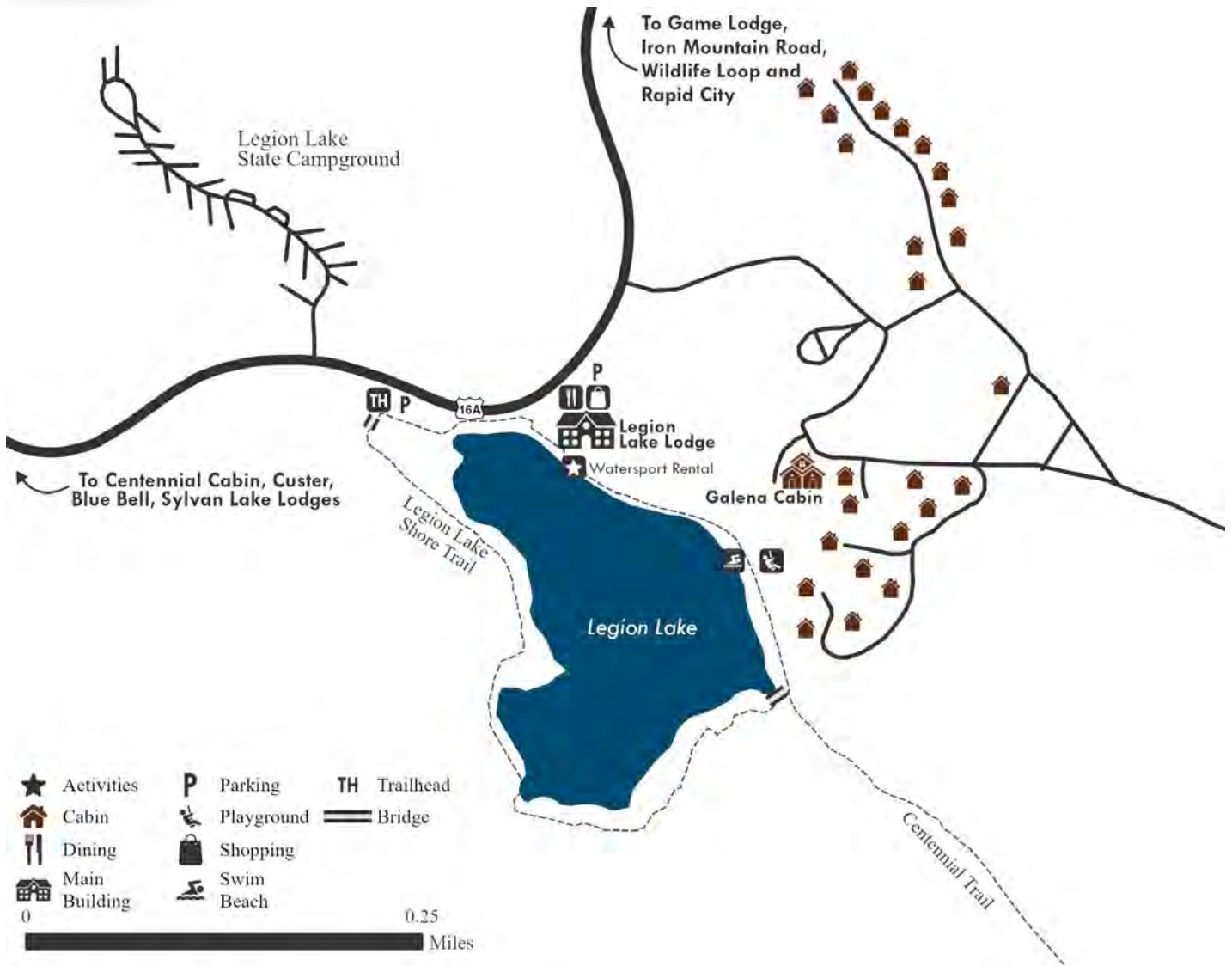


Evening scenic wildlife hayride tour with live entertainment and a steak dinner!

3 hours, return back around dusk

Top rated!

LEGION LAKE LODGE



CABINS

888.875.0001



Come to the water's edge. Single-family resort cabins within easy walking distance to the lake, Legion Lake Lodge, and watercraft rentals.

SHOPPING

605.255.4521



Gift shop features limited general store products. Stop in for picnic drinks, snacks, gifts, and toys.

DOCKSIDE GRILL

605.255.4521



Delight in a day at the water's edge. Small plates, salads, sandwiches, and all-day favorites. Tap beer and specialty coffee.

Open daily all season long for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

WATERCRAFT RENTALS

605.255.4521



Canoe, kayak, and paddleboard rentals available from the store. First-come, first-served. Life jackets provided with rental.

BLACK HILLS PLAYHOUSE

Black Hills Playhouse is located at 24834 S Playhouse Road in Custer State Park. A park entrance license is required.

PERFORMANCE TIMES

WEDNESDAY - SATURDAY

7:30 P.M.

TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, AND SUNDAY

2 P.M. MATINEE

Visitors advised to arrive 1/2 hour before curtain, reservations recommended.

For tickets, call 605.255.4141 or purchase online at blackhillsplayhouse.com.



SCAN FOR
TICKET PRICES,
SHOW TIMES,
AND DESCRIPTIONS



JUNE 9 – 23

TEENS 13+/ADULTS



JUN 30 – JUL 14

G/FAMILIES



JUN 21 – AUG 4

PG 13/ADULTS



AUG 11-17

PG13/ADULTS

FIRST TIME ATTENDING
BOGO **2024**
BLACK HILLS PLAYHOUSE

Present this coupon for Buy One Show Ticket, Get One Free discount. Contact info is required. No online sales. Discount offers may not be combined.

BLACK HILLS PLAYHOUSE **2024**
\$3 OFF THEATRE PERFORMANCE
Present this coupon for discount or use online with code CSP24. Discount offers may not be combined.

AREA STATE PARKS

Your Custer State Park entrance license is valid at all South Dakota State Parks including Angostura and Sheps Canyon Recreation Areas near Hot Springs, Bear Butte State Park near Sturgis, and Rocky Point Recreation Area near Belle Fourche. An additional trail pass is required for the George S. Mickelson Trail. There is no fee for Spearfish Canyon Nature Area.



1 ANGOSTURA RECREATION AREA

Located 10 miles southeast of Hot Springs, off US 18/385
605.773.2866

Angostura Reservoir is a water-lover's haven in the southern Black Hills. With plenty of room for boating, fishing, swimming and camping, this recreation area attracts visitors to its clear waters and natural sand beaches.

2 BEAR BUTTE STATE PARK

Located 6 miles northeast of Sturgis off SD 79
605.347.5240

Mato Paha or "Bear Mountain" is the Lakota name given to this site. The mountain is sacred to many American Indian tribes. A rugged two-mile hike to the summit rewards visitors with a view of four states.

3 GEORGE S. MICKELSON TRAIL

Runs 109 miles from Edgemont to Deadwood
605.584.3896 | **Additional pass required**

The George S. Mickelson Trail runs through the heart of the Black Hills. The trail's gentle slopes and easy access enables people of all ages and abilities to enjoy the scenery.

4 ROCKY POINT RECREATION AREA

Located 8 miles east of Belle Fourche off SD 212
605.773.2408

A popular fishing and boating park, Rocky Point Recreation Area is located on the 8,000-acre Belle Fourche Reservoir.

5 SHEPS CANYON RECREATION AREA

Located 6 miles south of Hot Springs on SD 71, 5 miles east on Sheps Canyon Road | 605.773.2866

Nestled along Sheps Canyon Bay, Sheps Canyon Campground is the newest campground on Angostura Reservoir. It offers great access to the boat ramp and excellent shore fishing opportunities.

6 SPEARFISH CANYON NATURE AREA

Located 1 mile west from the Scenic Byway at Savoy on FDR 222 in Spearfish Canyon | 605.584.3896

Spearfish Canyon Nature Area is considered one of the most beautiful locations in the Black Hills. The water feeding Roughlock Falls flows into Spearfish Canyon from Little Spearfish Creek.



CUSTER STATE PARK

