

# Otter Lake

Otter Lake is one of the most heavily used recreational areas on Fort Richardson. Some reasons for this popularity include easy accessibility, great fishing, boat and equipment rentals, cabin rentals, handicap accessible restrooms, camping facilities, picnic facilities, playground equipment, and excellent wildlife viewing opportunities.



## **Physical Data** (adapted from ADF&G's Anchorage Stocked Lakes Series)

<http://www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/region2/lakemaps/html/LAKEANCH.stm>

U.S.G.S Map Ref.:	Anch. B-8, T14N, R3W, S24
Elevation:	100'
Volume:	469.7 Acre Ft
Mean Depth:	5.6'
Game Fish Present:	Rainbow Trout, Landlocked Salmon, Pike (illegally stocked)
Geographic Location:	N 61 17', W 149 44'
Surface Acres:	84
Maximum Depth:	23'
Shoreline Length:	1.5 miles

## Stocking

Otter Lake is stocked annually by the state (see Table 1 and 2 below), although in recent years the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has decreased its stocking effort due to the presence of illegally introduced pike (see Table 1 below). The presence of pike in Otter lake is a potential problem because Otter Lake, unlike several other FRA lakes, supports fish stocks throughout the winter, thus giving the pike population a chance to increase.

Several conditions have to be met in order for fish to survive in a lake through the winter months including sufficient depth and surface area to resist complete freeze-up as well as sufficient dissolved oxygen levels. Otter Lake, at 84 acres and over 20 feet deep, has sufficient water volume to resist complete freeze-up and is thought to contain warm springs, both of which help to provide sufficient oxygen levels for supporting fish over winter.

These conditions, besides allowing for the survival of the unwanted pike, also allows for the survival and growth of the stocked rainbows. Otter Lake thus consistently produces the largest rainbows of all of the FRA lakes. Every year rainbows of several pounds are caught with the record rainbow caught in 2001 weighing in at 6lb 8 ounces.

Table 1. Sport Fish Stocking Plan for Otter Lake (adapted from ADF&G's *Statewide Stocking Plan for Recreational Fisheries 2003*)

Species	Lifestage	Target Release Date	Projected Numbers of Fish Stocked per Year				
			2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Rainbow	Catchable	25 May	9,000	6,500	5,500	4,500	5,500
Rainbow	Catchable	19 Jun	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Total			10,000	7,500	6,500	5,500	6,500

Table 2. Sport Fish Stocking Report for Otter Lake (adapted from ADF&G's Sport Fish Hatchery Program—Fish Stocking Update)

[http://www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/statewide/hatchery/stocking\\_search/html/stock\\_search.cfm](http://www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/statewide/hatchery/stocking_search/html/stock_search.cfm)

Species	Year	Total Number of Fish Stocked per Year
Rainbow	1998	6,994
	1999	60,822
	2000	10,941
	2001	10,159
	2002	5,418
	2003	7,342

## **Facilities**

Cabin rental, boat rental, fishing equipment rental, handicap-accessible outdoor restrooms (no running water), fire grates, picnic tables, playground, volleyball nets, baseball field, camping, wildlife viewing area. For more information call Outdoor Recreation at 384-1475 or visit their website:

## **Northern Pike and the Future of Fishing on Otter Lake**

Reports of pike in Otter Lake began to come to the attention of FRA Environmental Department personnel two years ago and have since increased in frequency. Personnel from the Otter Lake boathouse have, on several occasions this summer, reported large pike cruising by the boathouse. In addition, several pike have been harvested this summer by anglers, including one 28 inch specimen.

The ability to over winter in Otter Lake, when combined with a ready food supply (stocked fish, indigenous forage fish, waterfowl young, frogs, small mammals, etc.) and good spawning habitat (weedy shallows) could allow pike numbers to rapidly increase. As pike numbers increase, predation on stocked rainbows will also naturally increase until fewer and fewer rainbows will survive long enough to be harvested by anglers.

Should such an increase occur, ADF&G will further restrict and may well even eliminate its Otter lake stocking program. This would be a great loss for the hundreds of recreational fishermen that enjoy the great rainbow fishing at Otter lake every year.

### **There are several ways that you can help:**

- I. **Never illegally stock any species of fish anywhere in Alaska.** Pike pose little threat overall to the population of prey species in their traditional habitats, where predator-prey relationships are well-developed. However, when introduced into habitats that have traditionally not hosted such a voracious predator, pike can nearly exterminate the prey base. Remember that it is illegal to move or transport any live fish from the waters of Alaska without a permit from the Department of Fish and Game. You are also not allowed to introduce any live fish into the waters of Alaska without a permit from the Department of Fish and Game. These actions are against the law, and are punishable by fines of up to \$5,000 and/or a year in prison.
- II. **When you catch a pike on Otter or any other Anchorage area lake—keep it.** If you do not personally eat pike, consider donating it to someone who does, or to a local charity. There are NO bag and possession limits for northern pike on FRA lakes—keep all that you catch. Remember, however, that the State of Alaska has strict laws regarding waste of sport caught fish—so if you don't eat pike, please give it away.
- III. **Report any illegal stocking** by calling Alaska Fish and Wildlife Safeguard @ 1-800-478-3377 or FRA Conservation Office @ (907) 384-3175 or Alaska State Troopers @ (907) 428-7200

For excellent information on the pike problem in Southcentral Alaska, visit the ADF&G pike webpage: <http://www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/Region2/areas/anch/html/pikepage.stm>

## **Otter Lake's Loons, Trumpeter Swans and Other Waterfowl**

Otter Lake is known for its waterfowl, primarily for its pair of nesting loons and trumpeter swans. Protection of remaining habitat for these sensitive waterbirds is of primary importance as human disturbance throughout the Anchorage area is causing significant reductions in their numbers and former territory. Please observe loons, trumpeter swans and other waterfowl from a distance. An excellent place to view waterfowl is from the Wildlife Observation Platform located at west end of the lake along the Otter Lake Nature Trail.

### **Notes**

- Fishing from shore can be quite productive for small rainbows but for the best chances at a larger rainbow bring a small boat or rent one from the Otter Lake Boathouse (remember that all boaters must wear life jackets) and paddle out to the deepest part of the lake.
- Swimming in the lakes of Fort Richardson is prohibited.
- Remember that it is your responsibility to help keep Otter Lake and the rest of Alaska clean and wild. Please take your trash with you, including your discarded fishing line. There is nothing more disheartening than to arrive at your intended camping or fishing spot only to find the scattered remains of someone else's camp. Besides being unsightly, this rubbish can also attract and food-condition bears, injure other people (i.e. cuts from broken glass, puncture wounds from discarded hooks, et cetera), and injure or kill wildlife. Take pride in our wild areas and help protect them for future generations—carry out your trash.