

PENNSYLVANIA'S NATURAL LAKES

A common inquiry of both DEP and DCNR staff is about natural lakes in Pennsylvania. Do we have any? How many? Where are they?

Pennsylvania does have some large man-made reservoirs—Raystown, Pymatuning, Allegheny and Wallenpaupack to name four of the largest. But does Pennsylvania have any natural lakes?

The Commonwealth encompasses at least 76 natural lakes that have a surface area of 20 acres or more. And that's not counting our largest natural lake—Lake Erie. While all of these lakes began life as natural lakes some of them have been enlarged by adding an impoundment at the outlet. This is true, for example, of Pennsylvania's second largest "natural" lake—Conneaut in Crawford County.

Where are Pennsylvania's natural lakes? Not surprisingly they are all in the northwestern and northeastern corners of the state—the areas covered by the glaciers during the most recent Ice Age—the late Wisconsinian, a mere 13,000 to 20,000 years ago. Wayne County in the Poconos is as close as we get to Minnesota, with 25 natural lakes over 20 acres. Neighboring Pike and Susquehanna counties are second and third in number of natural lakes. Together, these three counties account for three-quarters of Pennsylvania's natural lakes.

What this list does not include are the many smaller natural lakes—many of them in these same formerly glaciated areas. An example is beautiful Pine Lake—a State Forest natural area in Pike County. Not surprisingly, most Pennsylvania towns with "lake" in their names are in the same areas of the state. A quick count on a road map shows five in Wayne County, four in Susquehanna County and at least two in Pike County. And then there's Lakemont near Altoona—if you're from that area, let us know how it got its name.

The 10 largest natural lakes in Pennsylvania are Conneaut Lake in Crawford County (929 acres), Porters Lake in Pike County (224 acres), Canadotha Lake in Crawford County (170 acres), Sandy Lake in Mercer County (150 acres), Silver Lake in Pike County (138 acres), Gold Key Lake in Pike County (124 acres), Giles Lake in Pike County (114 acres), Newton Lake in Lackawanna County (112 acres), Beach Lake in Wayne County (111 acres) and Coxtown Lake in Wayne County (110 acres).

(Contributed by Keith R. Gentzler, Office for River Basin Cooperation)