

# McKinley Lake



**Description:** McKinley Lake is a moderate-sized (15.8 acres), remote glacial cirque lake located within designated Wilderness in the Rattlesnake Creek drainage near Missoula at ~ 6,860 ft elevation. To increase storage volume, the lake has been artificially impounded by a dam at the outlet. This structure elevates the normal surface water elevation, but may also increase annual water level fluctuations.

**Location:** T15N, R18W, Section 31; Latitude N47.0177°, Longitude W113.9210°; Nearest Town: Missoula, MT  
Surrounding land ownership: Lolo National Forest (Missoula Ranger District). McKinley Lake lies in the southern portion of the Rattlesnake Wilderness Area at the head of Lake Creek.

**Access:** Although this lake is geographically close to the city of Missoula, access is difficult. There are several USFS routes from which to choose. Route distance and difficulty vary, but all require non-motorized travel. Common starting points are the trailheads at West Fork Gold Creek (Trail # 52), Ravine Creek in lower Grant Creek (Trail # 34), or in lower Rattlesnake Creek at the main Rattlesnake National Recreation Area trailhead (Gated Road #99). Please refer to USFS maps for specific travel routes and connecting trail numbers. Total travel distance from trailheads to lake ranges from 8-16 miles.

**Camp Sites and Use:** McKinley Lake lies in a remote setting that receives light use. There is an established trail to the lake and two campsites; one on each end of the dam embankment. 'Leave no trace' camping and recreating is essential, as this lake lies within designated Wilderness.

**Angling Opportunity:** McKinley Lake supports a wild rainbow trout population with limited natural reproduction. Shoreline topography and access lend well to shoreline angling from most of the lake perimeter.

**Stocking History:** McKinley Lake was historically stocked with rainbow trout and has not been planted in recent decades. There are no plans to stock in the future as the rainbow trout population is self-sustaining.

**Angling Pressure:** Estimated angling pressure from Montana state-wide mail surveys in 2005-2009 was low and averaged < 25 angler-days per year.

**Other Nearby Lakes:** There are seven lakes (> 1 acre) within a mile of McKinley Lake and three of these are fish-bearing. Carter Lake (~ 0.6 mi to the northeast on USFS Trail #534), Worden Lake (~ 0.8 mi to the north on USFS Trail #534 and spur), and Cliff Lake (~ 1 mi to the southeast on USFS Trails #534, #517, and #330) can all be accessed via established USFS trails from McKinley Lake.



**Montana Fish,  
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Surface Area: 15.8 acres

Max Depth: 28.3 ft

Volume: 210.6 acre-feet

LLID:1139210470177

