



Massachusetts Birch Hill Dam

Birch Hill Dam is located in Royalston on the Millers River, 11 miles northeast of Athol and 75 miles northwest of Boston. From Gardner, it can be reached traveling 11 miles north on Route 68. The Lake Denison Recreation Area is located on U.S. 202 north of Baldwinville.

In conjunction with the dam at Tully Lake, Birch Hill Dam provides flood protection to Athol, Orange, and other communities on the Millers River. Birch Hill Dam also helps to reduce damages along the main stem of the Connecticut River.

Construction of the dam began in June 1940 and was completed in February 1942 at a cost of \$4.8 million. A New England Power Company power line and a portion of U.S. Route 202 were relocated.

The project consists of an earthfill dam with stone slope protection 1,400 feet long and 56 feet high; four gated rectangular conduits, each six feet wide, 12 feet high, and 34 feet long; and three concrete chute spillways, each with a concrete weir. The three weirs have a total length of 1,190 feet and have crest elevations that are 12 feet lower than the top of the dam.

There is no lake at Birch Hill Dam. Lake Denison, a natural lake situated within the project grounds, is located two miles upstream of the dam. The flood storage area of Birch Hill Dam, which is normally empty and is only utilized to store floodwaters, covers 3,200 acres and extends upstream through the towns of Royalston, Winchendon, and Templeton. The project and associated lands total 4,637 acres. When combined with the adjoining Otter River State Forest that is operated by the state, over 8,500 acres are available to the public. Birch Hill Dam can store up to 16.26 billion gallons of water for flood control purposes. This is equivalent to 5.3 inches of water covering its drainage area of 175 square miles.

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) leases over 4,221 acres of reservoir lands from the Corps upon which it conducts an extensive recreation and fish and wildlife management program. As a result, Birch Hill Dam is becoming increasingly popular as a recreational area. One of its main attractions is the 200-acre Lake Denison Camping Area, located upstream of the dam. It provides two separate camping locations totaling 150 campsites, each with a picnic table and fireplace. The North Area has 50 campsites, drinking water, and two sanitary facilities with hot showers. The East Area has 100 campsites, with tree and brush growth between each campsite, drinking water, and four sanitary facilities with hot showers and soapstone sinks.

Between the two camping areas is a trailer dumping station. The Lake Denison Camping Area also features a beach area on the 82-acre lake that offers swimming, sanitary facilities, a picnic shelter and change house, and a nearby boat ramp (gasoline boats excluded). Two picnic areas are situated on either side of the beach. The upper area has 25

picnic tables and 15 fireplaces, and the lower area has 12 picnic tables and 10 fireplaces.

In addition to the facilities at Lake Denison, Birch Hill Dam offers over 4,000 acres that provide a wide variety of recreational opportunities. A network of scenic trails skirts the reservoir and is used for walking, hiking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and snowshoeing. There is also a 40-mile dirt road network (except for 2.5 paved miles of old Route 202) that can be used for these same activities. A target range is available for sportsmen (state permits required), with firing lines set at 25, 50, 75, 100, and 200 meters. Visitors will also enjoy walking to the historic King Philip Rock, the site where Native American Chief King Philip held tribal meetings.

Birch Hill Dam features excellent fishing in a streamside environment. The state stocks brook, brown, and rainbow trout in Lake Denison, the Millers River, Priest Brook, Tarbell Brook, Sip Pond Brook, and Beaver Brook - all located within the project area. Lake Denison, a warm water lake, also has native smallmouth bass, pickerel, bullhead, shiners, and pumpkin seed. Native bass and horned pout can be found at Beaver Pond, also located on reservoir grounds. Ice fishing is permitted on Lake Denison and Beaver Pond. For hunters, the state stocks pheasant and a limited amount of wild turkey and rabbit. In-season hunting and/or trapping is also available for partridge, quail, white tailed deer, bear, fox, beaver, mink, muskrat, and squirrel. The reservoir area is patrolled by environmental police officers from the Massachusetts Division of Law Enforcement.