

CATARACT LAKE INFORMATION SHEET AND SELF-GUIDED NATURE WALK

WILDLIFE OF THE CATARACT LAKE AREA

BLACK BEARS

- > Seen fairly often in the area, but only rarely on this trail.
- > Up to 95% of its diet is vegetation.
- > In this state 75% are some shade of brown.
- > In Colorado, males average about 260 lbs; females, 150-215 lbs
- >The statewide population is estimated at 10,000 - 12,000.
- > Black bears swim well, climb trees and can run up to 25 miles per hour in short stretches.

IF YOU MEET A BEAR: Stay calm. As you back away slowly facing the bear, talk aloud to let the bear discover your presence. Do not make eye contact. Do not run or make sudden movement.

NORTH AMERICAN BEAVER

- > Largest rodent in North America, over 3 feet long, 30-60 lbs. Primarily nocturnal.
- > Became extinct in England & nearly extinct in N. America in the 19th century when beaver caps & coats were the fashion.
- > Beavers can swim under water up to 20 minutes.
- > They have fur-lined lips close behind their teeth so they can gnaw and carry sticks comfortably under water.
- > They have a second set of eyelids that are transparent to allow continuous underwater vision.
- > Gnawing keeps their incisors from getting too long.
- > They mate for life, which can last as long as 20 years.
- >It is often said that no mammal, other than humans, has done so much to change its surroundings.

MOOSE

- > The largest member of the deer family is a solitary animal that can be dangerous – observe only from a distance.
- > Bulls (males) stand 6 ft. at the shoulder & weigh up to 1,200 lbs.
- > Cows (females) weigh around 700 pounds.
- > The Colorado Division of Wildlife brought them in from Utah & Wyoming in 1978 & 1979. Now 180-250 live in the state.

MULE DEER

- >Bucks (males) weigh 150 to 250 lbs., does (females) weigh 100 to 150 lbs.
- >The most common large mammal in Colorado. Statewide population is approximately 600,000.

MOUNTAIN LION

- >Known by many names: cougar, puma, & panther.
 - >Geographical range: western Canada to Argentina.
 - >Colorado's largest cat weighing 130 pounds or more.
- IF YOU MEET A MOUNTAIN LION: Stay calm. Talk calmly yet firmly to it. Move slowly. Do not run. Raise your arms to appear large. If lion behaves aggressively throw stones, branches or whatever you can get your hands on. Do not crouch down or turn your back. If cougar attacks, fight back as hard as you can.

YELLOW-BELLIED MARMOTS

- > The largest Colorado ground squirrel lives in colonies.
- > Size: around 26 inches long, six to nine pounds.
- > Close relative of the woodchuck (groundhog).
- > Nicknamed "whistle pig" for its distinctive call. They also communicate with screams and tooth chatter.
- > Size: around 26 inches long, 6 to 9 pounds.
- > They are hibernators. Cataract marmots hibernate from late August or early September through May or early June.

PIKA

- >Tiny members of the rabbit and hare family that measure about 8 inches in length and weigh about 7 ounces. Although elusive and difficult to spot, they are active year-round. Their characteristic squeak is identifiable.

MUSKRATS

- > Size: 2 inches long (tail is 9 *), 2 pounds. Related to voles.
- > Often inhabit abandoned beaver ponds & lodges.
- > They are often confused with beavers, but are much smaller and their tail is not broad and flat like a beaver.

BIRDS SPOTTED AROUND CATARACT LAKE

American Robin	Mourning Dove
American Dipper	Northern Flicker
Broad Tailed Hummingbird	Red-Tailed Hawk
Canada Geese	Red-Naped Sapsucker
Downie Woodpecker	Ruby-Crowned Kinglet
Golden Eagle	Rufous Hummingbird
Grouse	Thrush
House Wren	Tree Swallow
Magpie	Warbling Vireo
Mallard	Western Tanager
Merganser	Yellow Warbler
Mountain Bluebird	White-crowned sparrow
Mountain Chickadee	

HUMMINGBIRDS

- ▶ Hummers are the only birds that can fly backwards.
- ▶ The majority at Cataract are Broad-Tailed Hummingbirds.
- ▶ Broad-tailed males have emerald green heads and wings, black throat patches that reflect rosy red in sunlight, and white chests.
- ▶ They are 4-5 inches long, weigh less than one ounce, and beat their wings as many as 50 times per second while hovering.
- ▶ They migrate each fall as far south as Central America.
- ▶ Rufous hummingbirds pass through the area as they migrate. They are smaller (3-4") and more aggressive than Broad-tailed hummers. Males are copper in color.

SELF-GUIDED NATURE HIKE IS ON PAGES 2 AND 3

SELF-GUIDED NATURE HIKE

Numbered sign posts begin on the north side of the lake – and appear again at the end of the trail. There are no numbered posts on the portion of the trail that is within Eagles Nest Wilderness, a federally designated wilderness area. Signs in wilderness can only be for resource protection or directional signing for trails (at intersections).

This walk officially begins at the trailhead that is off the road leading past the locked gate in the parking lot. Left-right references indicate direction when facing the lake.

1. View of the falls and 13,400 foot Eagles Nest peak. Tumbling an estimated 800 feet over the slopes above, Cataract Falls is fed by Cataract Creek, which flows out of Tipperary Lake, about one-quarter the size of Lower Cataract Lake resting on a fir and spruce bench above. Tipperary, in turn, is fed by water flowing from Upper Cataract Lake, which sits in a basin below Eagles Nest Peak and is replenished by winter snowfall.

Eagles Nest is a classic example of the Gore Range peaks, bare summits of metamorphic schist and gneiss formed more than 300 million years ago. The range is named for Sir St. George Gore, an Irish baronet who toured the west on a hunting expedition from 1854-1857 and, by all accounts, took a fearsome toll of local wildlife. Legendary mountain man Jim Bridger was his guide, and although the range bears Gore's name, the Irish adventurer never actually made it to this area.

Forest Service Administrative Buildings are below.

2. The bark of aspen trees is often marked by elk bites, bear claws and human knives. Elk frequently munch on the tender aspen bark as a food source, while bears use their claws to get at the sweet sap below.

Humans and elk have marked the trees in this stand. Human knives are particularly destructive to aspens as they leave them vulnerable to numerous diseases and fungi that can kill the entire stand around the wounded tree.

Aspens trees are among the most interesting species in the forest. More information on aspen follows this section.

3. The remains of this huge Douglas fir tree, and a bigger one across the lake, may be all that is left of the forest prior to 1860, when European settlements took their toll.

Stand near the downed fir tree and look across the lake for a view of an old beaver lodge below a group of trees.

If you step just a few feet to the left of the numbered post you can look across the lake and below the waterfall to see a series of beaver dams built by the ever-busy Cataract Lake beavers. Scan the opposite side of the lake

to your left for a view of the lodge they abandoned prior to the 2003 summer season - a pile of aspen sticks stacked against the shoreline. If you take this hike in early morning or late evening, you may see and hear the beavers slapping their tails at human intruders.

The wooden gate just ahead on the trail is the entrance to the 133,000-acre Eagles Nest Wilderness. No motorized or mechanized vehicles are allowed beyond this point. There will be no more numbered posts until the trail leaves the wilderness. More information on wilderness areas follows this section.

Large boulders on the right feature beyond the Wilderness boundary have several holes that appear to have been drilled by mechanical means. Similar holes appear on other rocks along the trail. No one seems to be certain as to why they are here. Some say they were part of cable systems used to move cut trees during logging operations. Others think that they had something to do with trail construction, possibly as drill holes for explosives.

When you reach the western end of the lake you will find a large meadow filled with tall California Corn lilies, cow parsnip, native Colorado thistle and Monument Plants. Looking east across the lake you see the Williams Fork Mountains where Coon Hill is the highest point at 12,757 feet. Look through the shrubs between the trail and Cataract Creek to see beaver dams and the lodge that is currently inhabited by the Cataract Lake beavers.

Soon the trail will take you along side the wide, clear creek that is fed by Cataract Falls, which is the roaring sound you hear just up the trail. This spot provides a nice view of the beaver dams down creek. Up creek are many trees that have been blown down by winter storms. The constant moisture from the falls provides a more lush environment than most other spots on the trail.

A bridge marks the half way point on the 2-mile Cataract Loop Trail. There is no trail that goes up the falls and both human and canine visitors have been injured using braided social trails that look like they go to the top.

About midway across the southern side of the lake look for the remains of a huge Douglas fir tree. This tree and the other one across the lake, provide a glimpse of the magnificent size of trees in the forest that existed here before the advent of timber harvesting around 1860. Giant Douglas fir was common in this forest when Europeans first arrived. It is unlikely we will ever see their size again.

During summer months, when rainfall is sufficient, Colorado blue columbine (the state flower) cover many of the meadows on this side of the lake.

Once you have passed the remains of the ancient tree, note the folded layers of rock that are visible across the lake. They are a striking example of the extraordinary forces of uplift that were responsible for building the Rocky Mountains beginning 300 million years ago. The clashing of tectonic plates and huge upwellings of molten rock from the earth's core were just two of the events that pushed layers of rock skyward, providing the basic building blocks later shaped by water, wind and ice into the striking summits we know today.

Look carefully for sturdy Douglas fir trees growing out of cuts in the rocky slope, where there appears to be no soil.

Further along the trail you will find an abandoned beaver pond that is currently inhabited by Muskrats. They often take over ponds abandoned by their larger rodent cousins. Muskrats can often be seen swimming across this pond, or feeding on the grasses along the lake shoreline.

The slope to the right of the muskrat pond typically is one of the best wildflower sites on the trail, awash in a rainbow of colors from early June through August. Species to look for include blue, red, and white columbine, green gentian (monument plant), scarlet gilia, Indian paintbrush, fireweed, penstemon, roses, geranium and sun flowers. The profusion of flowers often attracts squadrons of hummingbirds to this section of the trail.

Soon you will pass through the wooden fence separating the Eagles Nest Wilderness from other, less restricted parts of the White River National Forest. There is one more numbered sign post soon after you leave the wilderness.

11. At this point Cataract Lake flows into Cataract Creek, which tumbles down the slope through national forest and private lands, eventually reaching Green Mountain Reservoir, and joining the flow of Rocky Mountain snowmelt to the Colorado River.

This point also provides an excellent view of the lake, and the uplifting of the layered rock discussed earlier.

We hope you enjoyed the trail. If you will not be using this trail guide in the future, please deposit it into the box ahead so other hikers can use it. Thanks, and plan another visit soon to your national forest.

LOWER CATARACT LAKE
Dillon Ranger District
White River National Forest
United States Forest Service

WILDERNESS AREAS

In 1964 Congress passed The Wilderness Act. Its stated purpose is to protect places that "in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, wilderness is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."

Cataract Lake is at the northern end of the 133,688-acre Eagles Nest Wilderness, established by Congress in 1976. Its highest peak is 13,534-foot Mount Powell and it contains 180 miles of trails.

FACTS ABOUT CATARACT

- ▶ Cataract means waterfall in Latin. The term is applied to a series of rapids or falls caused by the flow of a stream over a rapidly sloping rocky bed.
- ▶ Cataract Lake is not a reservoir. It is a natural lake that is approximately one mile long and around 50 feet deep at its deepest point.
- ▶ The visible portion of the waterfall at Cataract Lake falls approximately 800 feet.
- ▶ Cataract Lake is at an elevation of 8,629 feet. It lies in the Montane Life Zone which ranges from 8,000 to 10,000 feet at this latitude in Colorado.
- ▶ Cataracts of the eye were so named because it is said the patient sees the world as if looking through a waterfall.
- ▶ The entire lake is within the Eagles Nest Wilderness. Docks cannot be constructed and boats with motors are not permitted in the lake.
- ▶ Contrary to popular opinion, Upper Cataract Lake is not directly above Lower Cataract Lake. It is a 5.5 mile hike up the Surprise trail.

PLEASE LEASH YOUR DOG.

EVEN OBEDIENT DOGS CREATE PROBLEMS AT CATARACT LAKE WHEN THEY ARE NOT ON LEASH. THEY HAVE HARRASSED AND KILLED WILDLIFE. ONE DIED WHEN HE FELL DOWN A ROCKY SLOPE.

TRAIL RECOMMENDATION:

If you enjoyed the Cataract Loop trail and would like to try another hike in the area, Eaglesmere trail provides more beautiful views of the lake. Drive out of the Cataract parking lot and turn left at the first road immediately after the Surprise Trailhead. The Eaglesmere trailhead is at the end of that road.

CATARACT LOOP TRAIL

Distance: 2 miles
Estimated hike time: 1-1.5 hours
Elevation change: 100 feet

FLOWERS & PLANTS SEEN AROUND THE LAKE

Arrowleaf Balsamroot	Mountain Bluebell
Blue-Eyed Grass	Mule's Ears
Blue/ Canada Violet	Owl Clover
Blueberry	Oxeye Daisy
Blue Flax	Oregon Grape
Bunchberry Dogwood	Osha
California Corn Lilly	Paintbrush
Calypto Orchid	Pasqueflower
Chokecherry	Pipsissewa (Prince's Pine)
Cinquefoil	Penstemon (Tall one-sided & Clustered)
Colorado Blue Columbine	
Colorado Thistle	Pussytoes
Cow Parsnip	Prairie Smoke
Dandelion	Rabbit Bush
Elephant Head	Red Baneberry
Fairy Slipper Orchid	Red Columbine
False Forget Me Not	Sage Brush
Field Mint	Salsify
Fireweed	Scarlet Gilia (Fairy Trumpet)
Geraniums (Fremont & Richardson)	Serviceberry
Goldenrod	Silky Crazyweed
Green Gentian	Skunk Cabbage
(Monument Plant)	Sneezeweed
Harebell	Snowberry
Heartleaf Arnica	Snowy Fleabane
Houndstongue	Subalpine Fleabane
Kinniknick	Squashberry
Larkspur	Sulphur Buckwheat
(Duncecap & Little)	Sunflower
Lupine	Vetch
Mariposa Lily	Wild Iris
Monk's Hood	Wild Rose (Rose Hips)
Mountain Ash	Wood Nymph
	Yarrow

*Oxeye daisies should not be admired at Cataract Lake. They are non-native plants that have become noxious weeds in this area. They were brought into Summit County as a decorative plant that escaped people's gardens and are taking over the country side, crowding out native plants.

ADMIRE FLOWERS, BUT DON'T PICK THEM. LEAVE THEM HERE FOR OTHERS TO ENJOY AND TO LET THEM SEED TO MAKE MORE FLOWERS FOR NEXT SUMMER.

DO NOT DAMAGE OR REMOVE NATURAL FEATURES
Cutting on trees leaves them vulnerable to disease and is illegal. Removing natural features such as rocks, flowers, and leaves is also against the law.

TREES AROUND CATARACT LAKE

ASPEN: Quaking Aspen, also called Trembling Aspen
 >So named because their leaves flutter at the slightest breeze. Fluttering makes more efficient photosynthesis.
 > Aspen reproduce clonally, sending up shoots from their root system to start new trees. When you look at a group of aspen, you see one organism.
 > Botanists say aspen trees may be the oldest living organisms on earth. Individual trees in a clone may not live past 40 years, but some clones may have been active for more than 10,000 years.
 > Aspen are an *invader* species, growing in areas that were cleansed of other trees, usually by fire, cutting or disease. Their dominance is short lived because conifers (spruce & fir) seed and grow in shaded ground under aspen trees. Eventually, the conifers grow tall, block the sun and crowd out the aspens. The root systems of the clone may lie dormant under a conifer forest for generations, waiting to spring back to life when fire, timbering, or disease clears the forest.
 > Researchers have noted a gradual loss of aspen stands in the west. One theory blames global warming. Another says that the decline is due to the fact that aspens are a disturbance species. They regenerate after fire, wind storms, or timber harvesting has cleared an area for them. Over the last few generations we've had less disturbance because we fight fire to protect property. Less disturbance means diminished opportunity for aspen. When fire wins a fight, aspen are ready to return.

LOGEPOLE PINE
 >Another *fire-dependent* or *pioneer* species. Their pine cones burst open when heated to between 113 and 122 degrees Fahrenheit by the flames of a wildfire. Seedlings quickly take hold after a fire has passed.
 >It is one of the most widely distributed pines in North America and is the only conifer that is native to both Alaska and Mexico. It got its name because Native American used its slender trunk as poles for teepees.

OTHER TREES AROUND CATARACT LAKE
 Douglas Fir Blue Spruce Mountain Willow
 SubAlpine Fir Engelmann Spruce*

How to tell the difference between spruce and fir:
Fir needs are "flat and friendly" while spruce needles are "sharp and spiky."