

Nelson Reservoir

Anyone who's driven from Springerville to Alpine has seen Nelson Reservoir. A long and narrow lake, it follows the Nutrioso Creek Valley for nearly a mile. Fish that remain in Nelson Reservoir after summer stockings can grow to good size, making it a popular fishing site with local anglers.

Location – Nelson Reservoir is situated at 7,412 feet on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. It is easily accessed by driving south on Highway 180/191 about 7 miles from Eagar. The lake sometimes freezes for short periods during the winter, but typically is open to fishing year-round.

Description – Nelson Reservoir is located on Nutrioso Creek. It has 90 surface acres with a maximum depth of 24 feet and an average depth of 8 feet. When the lake stops spilling in the spring, it is stocked with up to 20,000 catchable-sized rainbow trout until Labor Day. Stocking may end sooner if water quality conditions become unfavorable. Nelson Reservoir is subject to algae blooms and excessive weed growth as summer progresses. The lake contains native bluehead suckers and illegally introduced black crappie and green sunfish. The lake once contained brown, cutthroat and brook trout, but none remain today.

Amenities – At the dam on the north end of the lake, there is a small boat ramp, paved parking, a barrier-free fishing platform and barrier-free restroom. Two additional barrier-free fishing platforms can be accessed from this parking area by way of a newly constructed, handicap-accessible trail. There is also a dirt parking lot and barrier-free toilet at the upper, south end of the lake. The boat ramp at this location is usable only when the water level is high. There is no camping near the lake; the nearest camping being the Alpine Divide campground approximately 11 miles south of the lake, just off of Highway 180/191.

Fishing Techniques – When the lake is first stocked in late spring, just about anything works. Try spinners such as Panther Martins or Z-rays, artificial flies and bait, especially night crawlers. As the weather warms, fish deeper with bait rigs. In the fall and spring, try trolling with wooly buggie flies or Panther Martin spinners, or suspend a night crawler below a bobber. The south end of the lake can become difficult to fish in late summer because of weed growth.

Special Notes – Special regulations apply at Nelson Reservoir. The bag limit is six trout; three for unlicensed anglers under the age of 14, from April 1 through August 31; however, there is no bag limit on rainbow and brown trout from September 1 through March 31. Boat motors are restricted to either electric or 10 hp gas motors or less.

