

# Jennings Randolph Lake

Nestled between Garrett County, Maryland and Mineral County, West Virginia

**J**ennings Randolph Lake is one of the region's least known bodies of water and recreational sites. Located along roads not often traveled in Mineral County, West Virginia, and in Garrett County, Maryland, the lake offers excellent facilities in a serene mountain setting. A man-made lake on the Potomac River, it has also improved the quality of life for residents downstream since its creation more than twenty years ago.

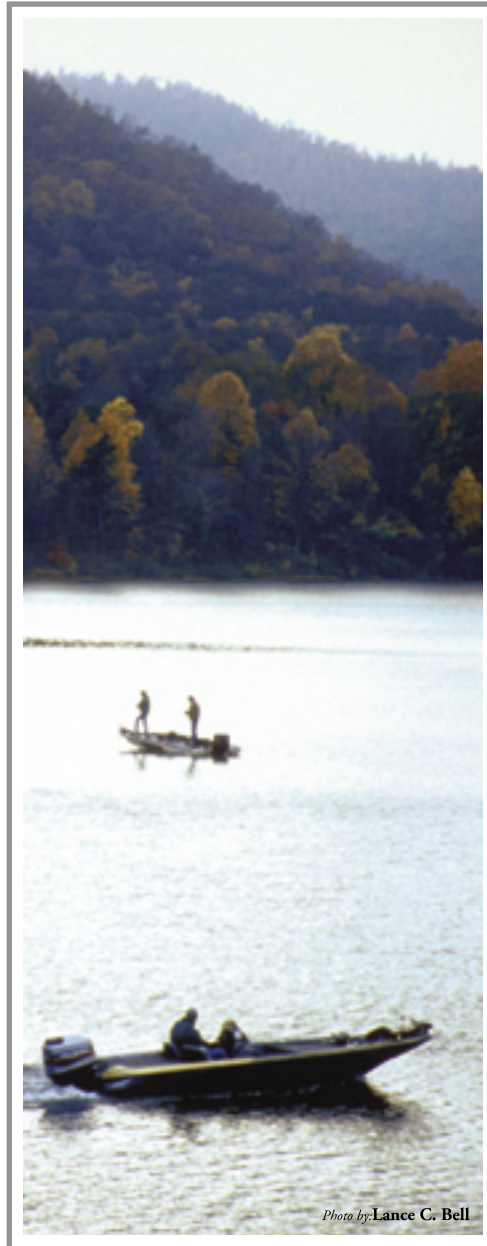
Mineral County's largest lake was conceived with several purposes in mind. One of the most important focused on improving the water quality in the Potomac River that had become tainted with mine acid drainage. This was a byproduct of old deep coal mining operations that dotted the river valley for decades. A conservation pool (lake) that could be treated and monitored for temperature and pH was deemed to be essential for improving the river's water quality. At the same time, such a lake would provide for industrial waste mitigation and sediment control along the entire watershed. Metropolitan communities along the lower Potomac River understood that an impoundment would provide an improved water supply for their sanitary commissions, particularly in Washington, D.C., and Fairfax, Virginia. This timed release of water would offer a more consistent flow downstream, especially during summer droughts when metropolitan residents frequently suffered through water shortage concerns. Conversely, a dam would help to prevent major flooding that had long plagued river communities.

Final proposals for the lake included recreational site development. With a multipurpose environmental and recreational proposal in order, the plan was introduced and

subsequently authorized by Congress under the Flood Control Act of 1962. Bi-state congressional support enabled initial plans to move forward and supplemental funds to be appropriated for lake development over the years. A key sponsor was United States Senator, Jennings Randolph (D WV), who successfully championed the Upper Potomac dam project and several other flood control plans across the nation. The best location for the proposed dam was deemed to be on the North Branch of the Potomac River, an area that separates Garrett County, Maryland, from Mineral County, West Virginia, approximately five miles north of Elk Garden, West Virginia. A rolled-earth dam and rock-filled dike created a 5.5 mile conservation pool that was first called "Bloomington Dam," in recognition of its proximity to the small community just downstream. The dam was renamed in 1987 to honor U.S. Senator, Jennings Randolph.

Perhaps the most noticeable feature on the lake today is a concrete control tower that regulates the discharge rate from the impoundment to maintain a desired lake level throughout the year. The tower extends 331 feet from the lake bottom with approximately 50 feet being visible above the water's surface. Ten, six-foot diameter

intake gates are located on the tower at different elevations. Continuous monitoring of the lake for its pH, temperature, and conductivity allows for targeted discharges of water downstream. Water is discharged from the tower into a two-thousand foot long tunnel carved into solid rock, causing a roaring sound that is often a source of inquiry by visitors.



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Long time residents have witnessed an amazing renaissance of the Potomac River. More than a century of industrial waste, mine acid drainage, and lack of sewage treatment plants along the watershed degraded the Potomac River's water quality so that few species of fish could survive. Since the construction of Jennings Randolph Lake and mine reclamation work, the upper river now boasts world-class fishing. Four Maryland state records have been established at the site including a 14 lb., 4 oz Walleye, a 13 lb., 7.5 oz. Brown trout, a 7 lb., 4 oz Cutthroat, and a 6 lb., 2 oz. Brook Trout. During the past four years, more than two-million Walleye fry have been released into Jennings Randolph Lake and over 17,000 Rainbow Trout, Cutthroat, and Brown Trout have also been released. Fishing contests are held annually from May through September. Jan Gonzales, Park Manager, points out that there is a bonus for fishermen who try their luck at the lake, due to a reciprocal agreement between Maryland and West Virginia that permits angling from either shore with only one valid state license. For those who prefer swifter water, the Mineral County Park and Recreation Commission recently began leasing more than fifty acres of land just downstream from the lake at Barnum so that sportsmen may rent rustic cabins to conveniently access the river.

Fishermen also have options regarding what type of vessel to use. Bill Donnellan, Chief Park Ranger, notes that, "We have an unrestricted lake. Fisherman may use either electric or motor powered boats. Our lake also offers two launch sites for easy access." Howell Run Boat Launch is located off Rt. 46 and has two concrete lanes that parallel a floating dock, a parking lot, and restroom facilities. A similar ramp is located on the Maryland side, off Rt. 135, Mt. Zion Road. The Maryland

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site is operated by state of Maryland Department of Natural Resources personnel. Both launching facilities are lighted from April until late fall.

Camping and fishing are natural partners and the Robert W. Craig Campground provides amenities to benefit recreational campers and fishermen. Full time attendants tend to eighty-two campsites. Seventy sites have electrical services for RV-ers and general use water hydrants are located approximately every five sites. Hot showers, flush toilets, horseshoe pits, an amphitheatre and a campground store round out the facilities. A pavilion, equipped with ten picnic tables, interior lights, and two large grills, is available for public parties and reunions. Jan Gonzales reflects that, "Our campground is family oriented and we get many repeat visitors. Our campers tell us they like boating and fishing without having to constantly look over their shoulders because of crowded conditions. Jennings Randolph Lake is really a get-a-way place." While still a serene lake, camping visits are increasing 5% annually.

Remoteness brings undeniable enjoyment to campers who wish to experience rugged hillsides, unspoiled wilderness and natural beauty. More specialized events add to the list of possibilities in a wilderness setting including four weekends of whitewater in April and May, allowing for kayaking, and water rafting between the hills of West Virginia and Maryland. Located 30 minutes from Oakland, Maryland, and one hour from Cumberland, Maryland, Jennings Randolph Lake is more accessible than one would imagine. The east-west route of Interstate 68 provides visitors easy travel to the recreational opportunities at Jennings Randolph Lake. For more information phone 304-355-2346, or visit <http://www.nab.usace.army.mil>



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