

## The Medicine Creek Wildlife Viewing Adventure

**Viewing Highlights:** Prairie chicken, prairie dogs, turkeys, pelicans, heron rookery and herons, white pelicans, quail, lark buntings, pheasants, maybe cock pheasants fighting!

Medicine Creek is a spring fed river that originates in the wet meadows north of Wellfleet, Nebraska. The Medicine Creek flows above ground in Frontier, Lincoln and Furnas counties and merges with the Republican River at Cambridge in Furnas County.

The river rushes, boils, meanders, churns, pools, floods and brings about a rich diversity of wildlife in its wake, and over the course of history the Medicine Creek habitat attracted the first farmers who established villages along the Medicine and its tributaries.

Meet the outdoors and so much more on the Medicine Creek Adventure. Experience wildlife, a dramatic view of Plains history, diverse plant life, architecture, art, healthy, fresh food, and a hearty welcome from the citizens.

**Where:** The Medicine Creek watershed - Curtis, Eustis, Cambridge, Arapahoe, Oxford

**When:** Early April, May and June

The Medicine Creek Tour combines both guided wildlife viewing tours and self guided tours.

See lodging suggestions at [www.chickendancetrail.com](http://www.chickendancetrail.com) Arrange lodging near Cambridge or Arapahoe on Day 1. On days 2 and 3 you may travel north along the Medicine Creek and toward the Dancing Leaf Lodge, and the Curtis, Elwood, Eustis communities.

## Itinerary

### Day 1

#### Windmill Farm Wildlife Viewing Tour

Day 1 of the Medicine Creek tour is guided by Doyle and Mary Lou Wineland at Windmill Farm Lodge located south and east of Cambridge. Visitors will be escorted to viewing blinds before sun-up to see prairie chickens dancing on a lek. Breakfast at the farm by 9 a.m., and then a van ride through the prairie to see a prairie dog town and other

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sights of interest in the river valley. Contact Windmill Farms to arrange for lodging, guide service, breakfast and lunch.

In the afternoon visit Arapahoe, Cambridge, Oxford, Holbrook to shop, sip hand crafted coffee, visit a museum rich with artifacts and stories of the Native Americans and the well-documented adventures and escapades of early European settlers, take a tour of the historic homes in Cambridge, walk in the parks and view sculptures from regional artists, and visit nearby historical sights. See “Things To Do” at [www.chickendancetrail.com](http://www.chickendancetrail.com) .

Tour members will be settled again in the Windmill Farm viewing blinds between 5:30 and 8:00 p.m. to see evening displays of turkeys, deer, barn owls, screech owls, and the great horned owl as well as coon, fox, coyote and other wildlife passing by.

You will be escorted back to your transportation, and dinner is on your own. Find restaurants on [www.chickendancetrail.com](http://www.chickendancetrail.com) website. Search in Arapahoe, Cambridge, Oxford, Beaver City.

**See photos of Wind Mill Farm facilities and the habitat at <http://www.windmillfarmsinc.com/> Find contact numbers for Wind Mill Farms on the website too.**

## **Day 2**

### **Medicine Creek Reservoir**

#### Viewing Highlights

Blue herons and a blue heron rookery, avocets, grebes, phalarope, white pelicans, blue wing and green wing teal, pintails, terns, potential hawk migration, migrating passerines, warblers

The Medicine Creek Reservoir or sometimes called Harry Strunk Lake provides a stunning backdrop for wildlife photographs. The lake seems to meet the sky, and both are wide and high and blue. See a map of the Medicine Creek Reservoir at [http://www.cambridgene.org/Lake\\_map.pdf](http://www.cambridgene.org/Lake_map.pdf)

### **Medicine Creek Reservoir**

by Rocky Hoffman for *NebraskaLand Magazine* May 2007

Located in southwestern Nebraska's Frontier County, the Medicine Creek Reservoir area provides an interesting mix of hunting, camping, fishing and birding opportunities, with a bit of history tossed in for good measure.

In the late-1940s, the Bureau of Reclamation began working on an irrigation and flood control project on Medicine Creek north of Cambridge. The excavation required to construct the earth-filled, mile-long dam uncovered the largest lower jaw of any known land animal ever recorded. In fact, the “four tusk” Amebelodon’s six-foot-long lower jaw is larger than any dinosaur’s jaw, even that of T. rex. Excavations at the Cambridge quarry also uncovered thousands of other fossils, including the amazingly intact and perfectly preserved skull of a previously unknown saber-toothed carnivore tagged the Barbour’s cat. Remnants of the Hemphillian Age that began 8.5 million years ago, the fossils at Cambridge included the remains of two kinds of rhinos and a variety of other hoofed animals, including predecessors of modern horses.

It is likely that the soils surrounding Medicine Creek hide other yet to be discovered riches in paleontology and archaeology. Buried beneath the yards of loess soils deposited during the ice ages are the missing pieces to many puzzles, possibly even the defining answer to the controversial arrival date of the region’s first human being. The gross quantity of artifacts already discovered is evidence of the region’s attractiveness to prehistoric man and beast alike, and although millions of years of modifications have occurred, the area still beckons today.

Medicine Creek Reservoir, the 1,850-acre lake formed by the dam when it was closed, is a long, narrow impoundment with nearly 30 miles of irregular shoreline. One of the state’s older reservoirs, it is draped by large and mature trees that are underscored by rich, dense shrubbery. Many visitors to Medicine Creek Reservoir have rated the area as one of Nebraska’s loveliest recreation spots.

Medicine Creek State Recreation Area (SRA) and Wildlife Management Area (WMA) encompass 8,500 acres of public land and water in southeastern Frontier County. Fed by Medicine Creek, whose headwaters begin in Lincoln County, Medicine Creek Reservoir is the second of two impoundments along the creek, the first being Wellfleet Community Lake, located near the stream’s origin. Because of its placement in the region’s agricultural mosaic, Medicine Creek’s flows appear to be less affected by groundwater development than those of other southwestern Nebraska streams, so this annually irrigation-depleted reservoir recovers to full pool by fall in most years. Medicine Creek Reservoir’s fishery has traditionally been productive for everything from big channel catfish in the spring to wipers and white bass in the summer and fall. From early spring through Memorial Day and a bit later, channel catfish lurk in shallow places along the reservoir’s rugged shoreline and far up the headwaters of the creek. Both channel and flathead catfish are present in the reservoir, but the mainstays are the abundant channel catfish that go on the bite early. Crappie, other panfish and walleye are also a part of the early bite in the spring when most game fish come shallow seeking a spot to feed and spawn.....

**The area is not only a great place to camp and fish: Bird watchers from across the country rate the Medicine Creek Reservoir complex high on the list of places to go birding. According to Commission wildlife biologist T. J. Walker, “The potential for recording 100 species in a day of birding certainly exists at Medicine Creek Reservoir.” Walker attributes the large bird variety to the diversity of habitat found here, including grasslands, deciduous forests, a large body of water, marshy wetlands, cut banks and heavy understory. “There are neotropical migrants such as orioles, grosbeaks and warblers, and there are waterfowl and shorebirds,**

raptors and vultures. In fact, an impressive concentration of turkey vultures stage in the area every fall,”

said Walker, who added that Medicine Creek SRA and its accompanying WMA also provide great opportunities to see both eastern and western bird species such as rose-breasted and black-headed grosbeaks, and Baltimore and Bullock’s orioles.

Also present on the wildlife lands are four species of upland game birds: Medicine Creek has the brushy and woody habitat that quail like, its timber and creekbottoms provide suitable haunts for wild turkeys, and its upland grass areas satisfy the needs of ringnecked pheasants and a small prairie chicken population. In all, nearly 6,000 acres of habitat are extensively managed for wildlife, and hunters find that Medicine Creek WMA is one of the finest public hunting areas in the state. Undoubtedly more pheasants, turkey and deer are harvested on Medicine Creek Reservoir WMA than at any other public wildlife lands in the southwest.

White-tailed and mule deer are also found on Medicine Creek WMA, as well as waterfowl, cottontail rabbit and fox squirrel. Over the years wildlife management styles and philosophies have switched from strictly game species management to more of an ecosystem management approach. Three decades ago, trees and shrub plantings were the benchmark for wildlife land value and more than 50,000 trees and shrubs were planted on Medicine Creek WMA by state and federal agencies to providing edge habitat and protection from the area’s harsh prairie environment. Food plots were tended as well, and grasslands were left unmanaged....

The land around present-day Medicine Creek has been satisfying the needs of hunters since prehistory. It has been well documented that people of the Clovis culture were hunting mammoth in southwestern Nebraska about 11,000 years ago, and it is widely believed by archaeologists that probably the first humans occupied this area relative to that period. In the 1980s, a potential archaeological site was discovered along an eroding high bank of the reservoir. The site contained a mammoth skeleton that offered a wealth of forensic evidence that humans had processed the animal for nutritional purposes. Carbon dating of the skeleton and soil at the site level places the animal's remains at between 18,000 and 19,000 years old. If that is correct, then hunters visited present day Medicine Creek more than 7,000 years earlier than popular academic belief.

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### **Day 3**

Dancing Leaf Lodge and Cultural Learning Center

Dancing Leaf Lodge is located 42 miles north of McCook, Highway 83, and 3 miles east of Wellfleet.

Dancing Leaf Cultural Learning Center offers a unique blend of educational and recreational opportunities. An earthen lodge from the time period of 800-1300 years ago has been reconstructed. A tour of this and other archeological information and artifacts is covered in a 90 minute [daily tour](#).

Dancing Leaf is located on 115 acres of cedar covered canyons along the Medicine Creek and includes a spring fed lake, many scenic trails and natural springs.

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Reserve a tour of the Dancing Leaf Earth Lodge and archeological finds. Arrange for an overnight stay at the Lodge. Find restaurants on [www.chickendancetrail.com](http://www.chickendancetrail.com) website.

One thousand years ago in Southwest Nebraska, there lived small groups of Native Americans known to archeologists as the Upper Republican Culture. These people lived in earthen lodges and farmed along Medicine Creek and are thought to be ancestors to the Pawnee. Some may feel that their way of life was harsh, but their ability to live as one with nature gave them a spiritual outlook on life that few have ever experienced. Dancing Leaf is in a setting of prairie hills along the banks of the Medicine Creek that we have tried to recapture a feeling of closeness to nature and inner strength that can best be experienced through this simple way of life.

Les and Jan Hosick  
6100 East Opal Springs Road  
Tele. 308 963 4233  
[www.dancingleaf.com](http://www.dancingleaf.com)

**Recommended reading:**

*Medicine Creek Journals*, D. Jean Smith, The Old Hundred and One Press, North Platte, NE, 2003.

*The End of Pawnee Starlight* by Shawn Farritor, 2009

# Tour Information\*

**90 min. tours** - start each day every half hour 9:00 a.m. through 3:00 p.m.  
Memorial Weekend through Labor Day

**90 min. Tour Rates:**      Adult \$7.00      Child (5-17) \$5.00

**Day Pass** - includes Earth Lodge Tour, Canoeing, Hiking Trails,  
Medicine Wheel Tour, and Guided Plant Hikes. \

**Day Pass Tour Rates:**      Adult \$12.00      Child (5-17) &10.00

Other tour times and/or Buffalo Stew or other meals available by reservation year round.

## Overnight Accommodations

### **Reservations required**

Price per 24 hour period

#### **Earthen Lodge**

Primitive camping

- you supply your own camping gear -

Adult \$30.00 Child (5-17) \$25.00

Minimum rental fee \$100.00

Prices include day pass privileges

#### **Tent Areas\***

\$12.00 per tent

#### **RV Parking\***

\$12.00 per space

#### **Cabin Rental\*\***

From \$50.00 to \$75.00

(Overnight guests in tent, RV's, and cabins will also need a day pass for each person)

\*Bathhouse and showers available for those staying in tents or RV's.

\*\*All cabins heated and air conditioned.

\*Available year round by reservation

Special group programs and school tours.

Meeting room and picnic shelter.

Buffalo Stew and other meals available for tour and overnight guests.

Call for pricing and availability

308-963-4233

