

## Folsom Lake Area

### Lake Natoma

The Nimbus Dam creates a narrow reservoir below Folsom Lake on the American River. It backs up water for nearly six miles, starting just upstream from the Nimbus Hatchery and the Hazel Avenue bridge. Open water attracts many water birds, and the surrounding oak woodlands add to the species diversity.

Every winter, Common Loons are found on the lake and, on rare occasions, a Pacific Loon has been reported. Five species of grebes can often be found, with this site being one of the best places locally to find Horned Grebes. Rarities have included Red-breasted Merganser and Red-necked Grebe. A spotting scope is very helpful. Bike trails encircle the lake. There is a \$5 parking fee. Keep your receipt, since it is valid at all state park accesses.

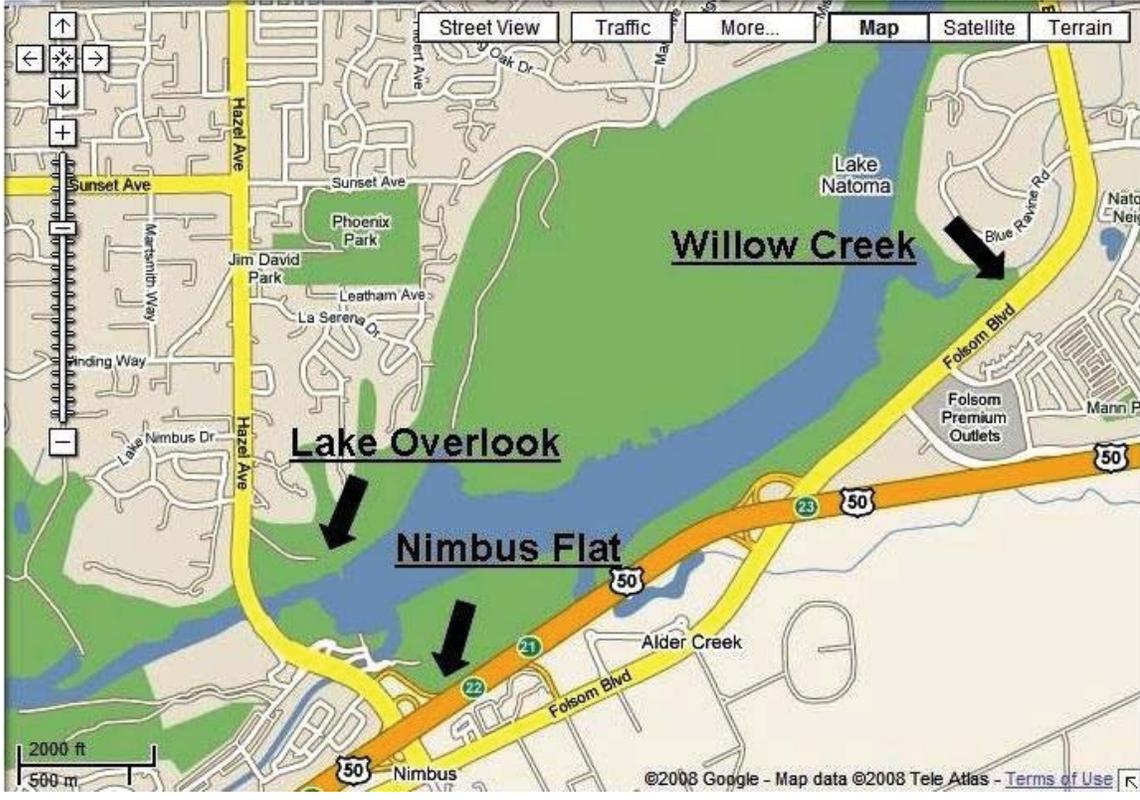
**Birding the site:** There are several access points managed by California State Parks. The place to check first for water birds is Nimbus Flat near the dam. Exit Highway 50 at Hazel Avenue and go north over the freeway. After the first light, make a quick right into Nimbus Flat. Drive to the water's edge and park. From there, you have a good view of much of the lower end of the lake. There are often good numbers of gulls to study along the shore.

You can continue north on Hazel, cross the river, then make a right at the top of the bluff into the Lake Overlook access. An informal dirt path near the north end of the parking area will take you down to the bike trail. The bluffs on the north side of the lake are good for Rufous-crowned Sparrows (listen for their House Wren-like song and "dear, dear, dear" calls). Also listen for the questioning whistle of Phainopepla here and elsewhere around the lake.

For another view of the lake, go to the Willow Creek access. Return to Highway 50 on Hazel Avenue, go east for 0.9 mile, and exit at Folsom Boulevard. Make a left on Folsom Boulevard, and go 1.5 miles to Blue Ravine Road. Make a U-turn and backtrack on Folsom for 0.7 mile and make a right at the sign for Willow Creek. There are good views of the lake, a cove where kayakers launch their crafts, and a nice section of the bike trail crossing the creek if you walk north along the trail from the northeast end of the parking area (watch for cyclists). There are also nice woods along the entrance road. From the far end of the dirt parking area, walk to the main lakeshore and look across to a Great Blue Heron,

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Great Egret, and Double-crested Cormorant rookery in the tall gray pines (March-July).



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Negro Bar provides several viewpoints of the upper portion of the lake, as well as a nice mix of oak woodland, gray pine, and a small patch of chaparral. From Highway 50 and Folsom Boulevard, go north for 3.6 miles (from Willow Creek, make a U-turn at Natoma Station Drive, and take Folsom Boulevard north for 3.0 miles to Greenback Avenue). Turn left at Greenback Avenue, then make a left to the Negro Bar access in 0.3 mile. The far parking lot and picnic area are reached by heading right once you reach the first large parking area. From here, you can walk down to the lake with your scope, walk the lakeshore along the bike path (the bluffs here are also good for Rufous-crowned Sparrows), or visit the small patch of chaparral between the parking area and Greenback Avenue. If you have the time, there are other roads and trails to explore.

The Folsom Rodeo Grounds area provides access to the upper portion of Lake Natoma and the remaining scenic portions of the American River Canyon below the Folsom Dam. From Highway 50, take Folsom Boulevard north for 2.7 miles and turn right on Natoma Street. After one mile, turn left at Stafford Street. Continue 0.2 mile to a large parking area near the Rodeo Grounds. From the far right (northeast) edge of the parking area, walk between the Rodeo Grounds and the trees, take the trail down the slope to the left, and then head right, descending toward the river canyon. You'll reach a set of stairs that takes you up on the old Folsom Powerhouse Canal Road. Head to the right along a marshy section of canal with nice views of the river canyon. A great area for Rufous-crowned Sparrow, sometimes Band-tailed Pigeon (very rare), Phainopepla, Varied Thrush, Purple Finch, Pine Siskin. The path ends at a fence for Folsom Prison. Back at the stairway, if you go downstream, you will come to a bridge crossing a small creek, then a bike trail. Turn left up the hill on the trail and left on Leidesdorff Street. Continue on Leidesdorff, and then follow a bike trail up the hill to the right as it winds back to the parking area.

**Directions:** From Sacramento, at Interstate 5, travel east on Highway 50 for 17.5 miles to the Hazel Avenue exit (exit 21), or continue on Highway 50 for another mile to the Folsom Boulevard exit (exit 23). See above for directions to each access point.

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