

Smith Falls State Park



NEBRASKA GAME AND
PARKS COMMISSION

www.OutdoorNebraska.org

Even our own citizens are poorly informed about the beauty and diversity of Nebraska scenery, and many are unaware that rapids and waterfalls exist. People are praising the attractions of neighboring states, leaving ours unmentioned, unknown, and unvisited. These are some peculiarly attractive spots around Valentine, in the region of the best waterfalls in the state. The scenery is bold and well forested with evergreens and deciduous trees, and well watered, and the surroundings are altogether attractive. the trouble now is that the lakes and waterfalls are so inaccessible.

Erwin H. Barbour
Nebraska Geological survey, 1903.

Although, many Nebraskans continue to look to other states for scenic wonders, increasingly they are finding them close to home. Many of the state's most picturesque spots are on private land, and remain as inaccessible as they were in Barbour's day. Smith Falls, a scenic natural wonder, is located 15 miles east of Valentine via Nebraska Highway 12. Created where a small, spring-fed creek tumbles about 70 feet over a rock ledge to the Niobrara River Valley below, it is Nebraska's highest waterfall.

During the last two decades, canoeists have discovered the Niobrara River and Smith Falls, but Nebraska's highest waterfall has remained largely unseen by the general public. Surprisingly, only one other of the state's waterfalls is found on public land, the nearby Fort Falls on the Fort Niobrara Wildlife Refuge.

A REMNANT OF ICE AGE NEBRASKA

Smith Falls is more than just a tourist attraction, it is a naturally occurring biological museum. As the last glacier retreated north some 12,000 years ago, Nebraska's climate turned warmer and drier. Spruce and birch forest, which once covered the state, could not survive in this new climate and was replaced by prairie, except in the cool, wet canyons which feed into the Niobrara River east of Valentine. In these spring-branch canyons, remnants of the Ice Age fauna and flora persist. Protected from dry summer winds in the north-facing canyons, paper birch communities with an understory of northern grasses, sedges and forbs still thrive, 200 to 400 miles south of their modern-day range. At the foot of Smith Falls is a colony of unique trees, a hybrid of quaking aspen, a northern species, and big-toothed aspen, an eastern species.

Often referred to as the "biological cross-roads of the Great Plains," the 30-mile stretch of Niobrara River, in which Smith Falls is located, is of great biological importance. Along the Niobrara, the ranges of closely related species of eastern and western woodland birds overlap, and some, like flickers, buntings, orioles and grosbeaks, hybridize much as big-toothed and quaking aspens once did. In the deciduous forests, an isolated subspecies of eastern woodrats is found 400 miles from its nearest relatives in eastern Kansas.

In addition to the northern birch community found in the spring-branch canyons, four other distinct plant communities and their respective compliments of animal life merge there. Along the dry, sun-washed north valley wall, the Rocky Mountain ponderosa pine forest reaches

its easternmost limit. Along the shaded, moist south valley wall, eastern deciduous forests of basswood, ironwood, black walnut and elm reach their westernmost limit. Mixed grass prairie is found on tablelands north of the river and on the north valley slope. And, to the south of the valley, is Sandhills prairie. In this relatively short stretch of Niobrara River Valley, 160 species of plants and animals are at the very edge of their distribution.

A SCENIC RIVER

Because of the Niobrara's striking scenery, recreational use and biological significance, a 76-mile segment of the river east of Valentine was designated a National Scenic River in May 1991. At the same time, a 25-mile stretch of the Niobrara, from the western border of Knox County to the Missouri River, was designated a Federal Recreational River. In a statement shortly after signing the scenic river bill, President George Bush called the Niobrara "an outstanding river resource."

PROTECTED BY ITS REMOTENESS

Apparently, Smith Falls was named for Frederic Smith, an early settler who filed the first homestead patent on the land in 1896. Until recently, Smith Falls and the unique plant community near it, were protected by its remoteness.

During the last 20 years, as canoeing became ever more popular on the Niobrara River, and Smith Falls became more widely known, an increasing number of people have come to see the falls or camp nearby. This increased foot traffic, and years of cattle grazing on the area, has caused serious erosion, threatening the future of this biologically unique area.

Fred Krzyzanowski, who purchased the land including Smith Falls in 1941, tried to accom-

modate swelling public interest by establishing a primitive campground and picnic area. Until his death in 1988, Mr. Krzyzanowski would often walk from his house to the campground nearby to visit with campers.

PRESERVING A NEBRASKA LANDMARK

Recognizing the biological and scenic significance of Smith Falls and the need for its preservation, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission established the park in May 1992.

The 250-acre park will protect this biologically unique and scenic site, while at the same time allowing the public to view and enjoy the picturesque falls. Since protection of this distinctive site is vital, Smith Falls State Park will be unlike any other in the state. While public access to the area will be much improved, human impact on the site's natural features will be minimized.

The south side of the river, where Smith Falls is located, will be maintained in its natural condition. A boardwalk along the path to the falls will help nature heal eroded areas. Hiking will be limited to the established trails to prevent erosion and protect rare plants found there.

There is no vehicle access or camping on the south side of the river. Picnic sites, primitive camping areas and restroom facilities are located on the north side of the river. Shelter facilities may be rented for a nominal fee. There are no RV facilities at the park. An overnight camping fee is charged for each person.

A Sept. 14, 1991, Omaha World-Herald editorial supported the proposed park project with these words:

[Fred] Krzyzanowski . . . and his family have been good stewards and gracious hosts to river travelers. The family has performed a great public service by keeping Smith Falls open to canoeists and others. However, there

are no assurances that future owners would keep Smith Falls open to the public.

Smith Falls, much like Chimney Rock or Scotts Bluff, is a Nebraska landmark. Like those well-known rock monuments, it should be accessible for all to see, and protected in a public trust for future generations. This dream is well on its way to reality — through the cooperation of the Krzyzanowski family and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and with the financial support of those who share this vision.

MORE INFORMATION

For information on any Nebraska state park areas, ask at the office or write to:

PARKS DIVISION

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

PO Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503-0370,
phone 402-471-0641. Or call toll-free

1-800-826-PARK (7275) to leave
your name, complete address and
information request.

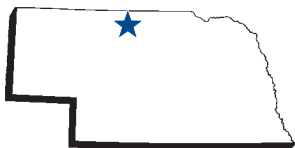
CHECK OUR WEB SITE

Visit us on the World Wide Web at
www.OutdoorNebraska.org and preview
the sights at Nebraska's great state parks.

RESERVATIONS

For reservations call the
park office at 402-376-1306.

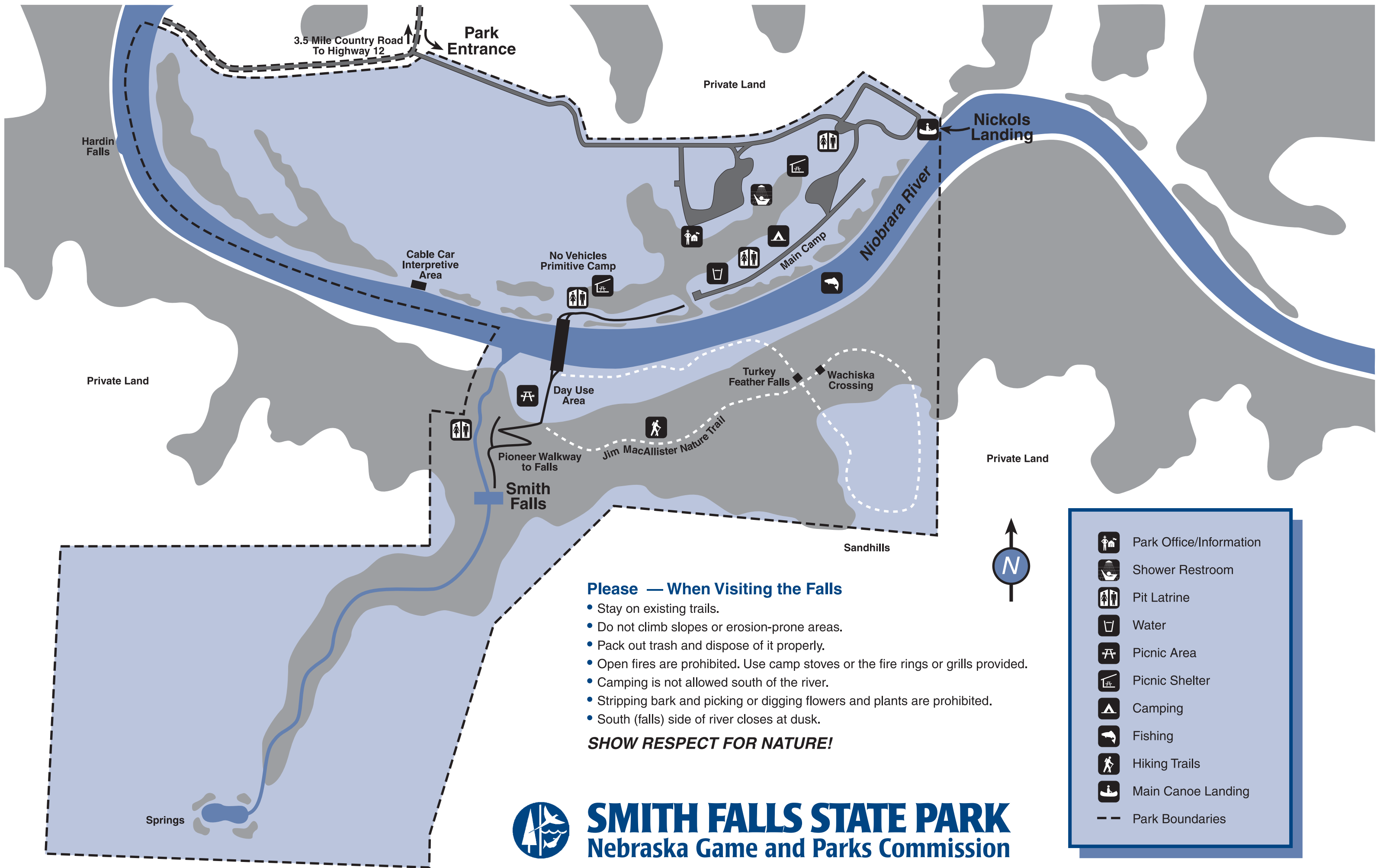
Pay showers are available.



SMITH FALLS STATE PARK

HC 13 Box 25
Valentine, NE 69201-9103

Under federal and/or state law, discrimination is prohibited on the basis of race, color, religion, age, gender, marital status, national origin, disability or political affiliation. If you think you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility or want more information, contact the Affirmative Action Officer, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Lincoln, NE, 402-471-0641; the Equal Opportunity Commission, Lincoln, NE, 402-471-2024, TTY / TDD 402-471-4693. USFWS, Division of Bird Habitat and Conservation, Civil Rights Coordinator, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, MBSP 4020, Arlington, Virginia 22203.



Please — When Visiting the Falls

- Stay on existing trails.
- Do not climb slopes or erosion-prone areas.
- Pack out trash and dispose of it properly.
- Open fires are prohibited. Use camp stoves or the fire rings or grills provided.
- Camping is not allowed south of the river.
- Stripping bark and picking or digging flowers and plants are prohibited.
- South (falls) side of river closes at dusk.


SHOW RESPECT FOR NATURE!

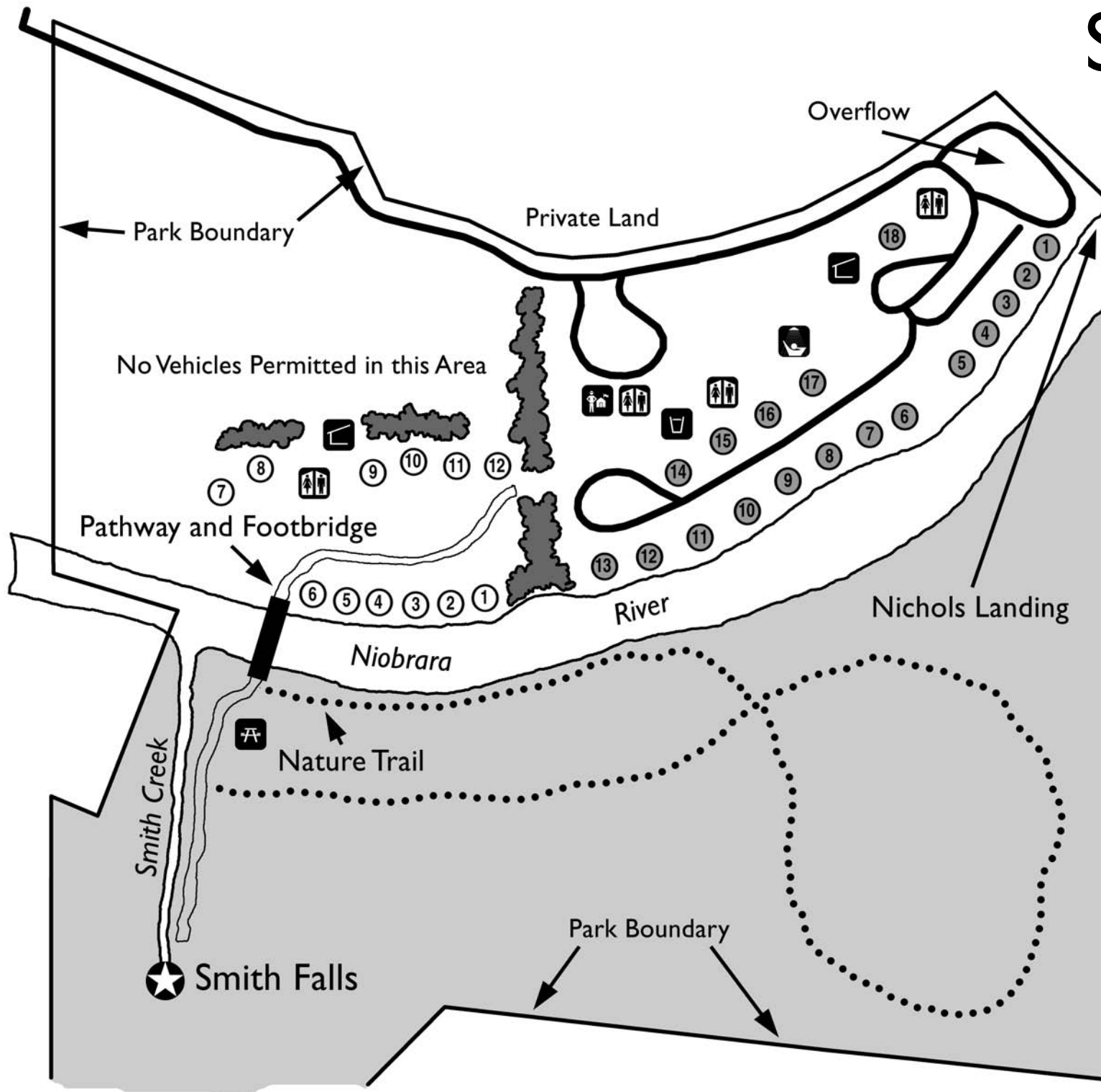


SMITH FALLS STATE PARK
 Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

	Park Office/Information
	Shower Restroom
	Pit Latrine
	Water
	Picnic Area
	Picnic Shelter
	Camping
	Fishing
	Hiking Trails
	Main Canoe Landing
	Park Boundaries

Smith Falls State Park










 Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

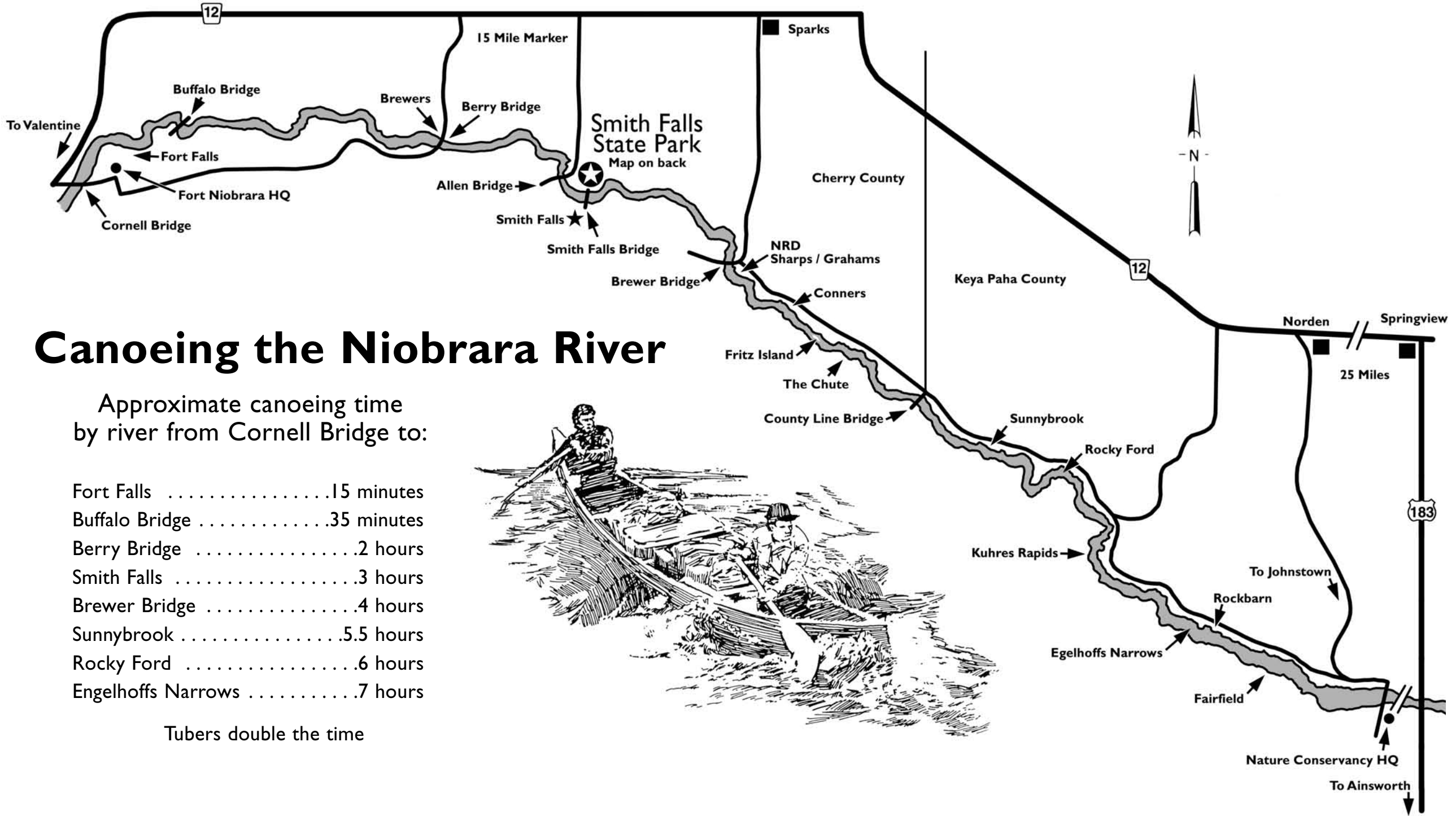


Camping Regulations

- Check in at park office.
- Camping on north side of river only.
- Do not move picnic tables or fire rings.
- Keep fires in fire rings.
- Cutting wood, including roasting sticks, is prohibited on park property.
- Camp only in designated areas.
- Bag all trash and litter - including cigarette butts and pop tops - and take to a dumpster in parking lot behind office.
- Quiet time begins at 10 p.m.
- Check-out time is 12 noon.
- All vehicles must have a valid Nebraska Park Entry permit.
- Park on south side of river closes at dusk.
- Alcohol is prohibited on park grounds.
- If you have any questions, please ask at office.

Key

- | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  Park Office |  Day use Only |
|  Restrooms |  Water |
|  Showers |  Shelters |
|  Camping |  Picnic Area |
|  Primitive Camping | |



Canoeing the Niobrara River

Approximate canoeing time by river from Cornell Bridge to:

Fort Falls	.....	15 minutes
Buffalo Bridge	.....	35 minutes
Berry Bridge	.....	2 hours
Smith Falls	.....	3 hours
Brewer Bridge	.....	4 hours
Sunnybrook	.....	5.5 hours
Rocky Ford	.....	6 hours
Engelhoffs Narrows	.....	7 hours

Tubers double the time

