

General Watersmeet Area Information



Welcome to Watersmeet located in the beautiful Upper Peninsula of Michigan, also known as "God's Country".

The name "Watersmeet" comes from the area's Ojibwa name. It refers to the fact that the waters of this rolling highland drain in three directions: north into Lake Superior via the Ontonagon River, south into Lake Michigan via the Brule and Menominee Rivers, and southwest into the Mississippi system and Gulf of Mexico via the Wisconsin River. The Ontonagon River's Middle Branch, where Simper Times Cabin is located, offers spectacular canoeing and kayaking with a even a bit of exciting whitewater, as well as world-class trout fishing. Also on the Middle Branch are two dramatic, complex waterfalls, Bond Falls and Agate Falls, both of which you should visit if time allows.

The Watersmeet area is wonderfully undiscovered and undeveloped compared with the busy concentration of touristy shops and chain-type lodgings located just 30 miles south in Eagle River, Wisconsin. Entering Michigan from Land O'Lakes, you will immediately notice far less visible development and bigger trees. Even along U.S. 2, the main east-west route across the Upper Peninsula, there's a feeling of remoteness and wild beauty from Iron River to Watersmeet and on to Wakefield. Motorists see nothing but trees for miles and miles. Maples and other hardwoods make for beautiful fall color. Wolves prefer this kind of inland area - Gogebic County now has around 90 wolves situated into 11 packs. Sometimes the wolves can be seen on the shoulders of U.S. 2 east of Watersmeet, scavenging for an easy meal.

Many are of the opinion that the jewel of these lake-filled highlands is the Sylvania Wilderness Area in the Ottawa National Forest, consisting of 30 square miles encompassing dark old-growth forests and 34 exceptionally clear lakes famous for top-notch fishing. Most U.P. forests have rejuvenated since the clear-cut logging of a century ago, and motorists see impressive hardwoods and hemlocks throughout the Watersmeet area, most of which lies within National Forest boundaries.

Sylvania is one of the few sizable northwoods forests that escaped the axe. The woods here have had hundreds of years to mature, creating a "climax forest" of yellow birch, eastern hemlock, and sugar maple. One sees an area much the way it looked before Europeans arrived. Abundant rotting logs and leaf debris are ideal environments for mushrooms and woodpeckers. Rare wildflowers such as lady's slippers have survived the years it takes to blossom. Orchids and insect-eating pitcher plants are not uncommon. Paddlers and hikers can explore Sylvania as a wilderness area, without signs to guide them.



In the 1890s timber and iron-mining magnates who wanted a superb fishing camp saved the Sylvania Tract's old-growth forests and clear lakes from the logging taking place all around it, as well as from the damage to fisheries that resulted from logging's sediments and clearcuts. Today all but Sylvania's northern edge is managed by the vast Ottawa National Forest as the Sylvania Wilderness Area, a machine-free wilderness. The national forest includes most of the Watersmeet area and western Gogebic County, and most of neighboring west Iron County as well.

Sylvania and the modest Upper Peninsula village of Watersmeet lie at the northern edge of the vast Wisconsin lake country, just across the state line from the larger town of Land O'Lakes, Wisconsin. The area economy has long been dominated by fishing resorts, outdoor recreation, and summer people and retirees (largely from Chicago), as well as by logging and sawmills. During Prohibition, Sylvania and many other retreats in and near these north woods focused less on fishing and more on drinking, gambling, and partying outside the law's reach.

Sylvania and the Watersmeet area's three national forest campgrounds appeal to families, anglers, canoeists, and kayakers. The Watersmeet/Land O'Lakes area is also popular with snowmobilers because it's relatively close to large downstate cities in Wisconsin and Illinois and there is a vast network of well-maintained snowmobile trails crossing the entire area. Adjacent to Sylvania, the Cisco chain of 15 lakes and many bays, largely under private ownership, is geared to fishing in motorboats. Its size makes it relatively quiet too. Cottages, year-round second homes, and a dwindling number of small resorts are on its 270 miles of shoreline.



Recently there has been an intense wave of vacation homebuilding. Watersmeet is known for the Lac Vieux Desert tribe's attractive casino-resort north of town, and for its Watersmeet Nimrods high school basketball team made famous by ESPN commercials.

The \$17.5 million casino complex, Lac Vieux Desert Casino and Resort, north of Watersmeet opened in 1996. (It's pronounced "LAHK view duh SERR.") It includes lodging, a bingo hall, restaurant, beautiful 9-hole golf course, and now an oval for motocross and snowmobile races. The Lac Vieux Desert Band of Ojibwa takes its name from the productive lake where they had lived and fished since at least 1796.



The Watersmeet Chamber of Commerce has a part-time secretary but no drop-in office. If you call (800) 522-5657, the Western U.P. Convention & Visitors Bureau will mail visitor info for Watersmeet. www.watersmeet.org

The national forest's Ottawa Visitor Center, located on the southeast corner of U.S. 2 and U.S. 45 just east of Watersmeet, offers a wealth of visitor information. Entrance roads are from both highways. Please refer to their information sheet in this binder for additional information.

The Land O' Lakes Welcome Center is in the conspicuous log building on U. S. 45 at County Road B. It's run by the Land O' Lakes Chamber of Commerce. It also gives out information about Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Open year-round - May thru Sept : Mon-Sat 9-4 CST, Sun 10-2. Rest of year: Mon, Wed, Fri 10-3. Call (800) 236-3432

PICNIC PROVISIONS and PLACES

In Watersmeet, the Clark Lake picnic area at the edge of the Sylvania Wilderness Area provides drive-up access to a motor-free lake with swimming and hiking trails. Nordine's in Watersmeet is more of a large convenience and party store with some groceries. Handy to U.S. 2 is the Imp Lake picnic area 6 miles southeast of Watersmeet with an interesting interpretive trail in an old-growth forest. Pleasant picnic areas are also at Mex-I-Mine Falls and Clark Lake.