Know before You Go

The Alvord Desert is accessible year-round; however, ideal conditions exist June through November, when the playa is usually dry enough for vehicular travel. With no potable water, restroom facilities, cell phone service, or designated camping areas, travelers should bring their own conveniences and plan on a barren, open air adventure. At Mann Lake, anglers converge as early as March and into October. Shallow throughout its 200 acres, Mann Lake features extensive weed beds and easily wadeable shoreline margins. Aside from two portable restrooms and boat ramps, Mann Lake offers no other amenities. Bring your own shade, shelter and water, and tie everything down. Strong winds are common, and weather conditions are often unpredictable. The nearest town is Fields, Oregon, approximately one hour south.

Recreation

The Alvord playa is a popular venue for land sailing, driving, and camping. Sore travelers will find sweet solace at Alvord Hot Springs – a privately owned, no-fee hot spring that bubbles up at 174 degrees, but cools considerably by the time it reaches man-made sitting pools. Other pools in the area, including Mickey Hot Springs, are too dangerously hot for use by anyone. Please keep your dogs and children a safe distance away. Mann Lake is a favorite fishing spot for cutthroat trout. Visitors also enjoy camping, hiking, viewing wildlife such as pronghorn antelope, quail and chukar, and rockhounding for thunder eggs, agates, and other rocks and minerals in the area.

Directions to the Site

From Burns, Oregon, take State Highway 78 southeast for approximately 65 miles. Turn right onto the East Steens Road and travel southwest for approximately 24 miles until you reach the Mann Lake Recreation Site turn-off on your right. The Alvord Desert is located approximately 12 miles south of Mann Lake by way of the East Steens Road.

District Contact Information

Burns District

Bureau of Land Management
28910 Hwy 20 West
Hines, Oregon 97738

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BLM/OR/WA/GI-05/030+1122.32

Alvord Desert and Mann Lake

BLM

Burns District

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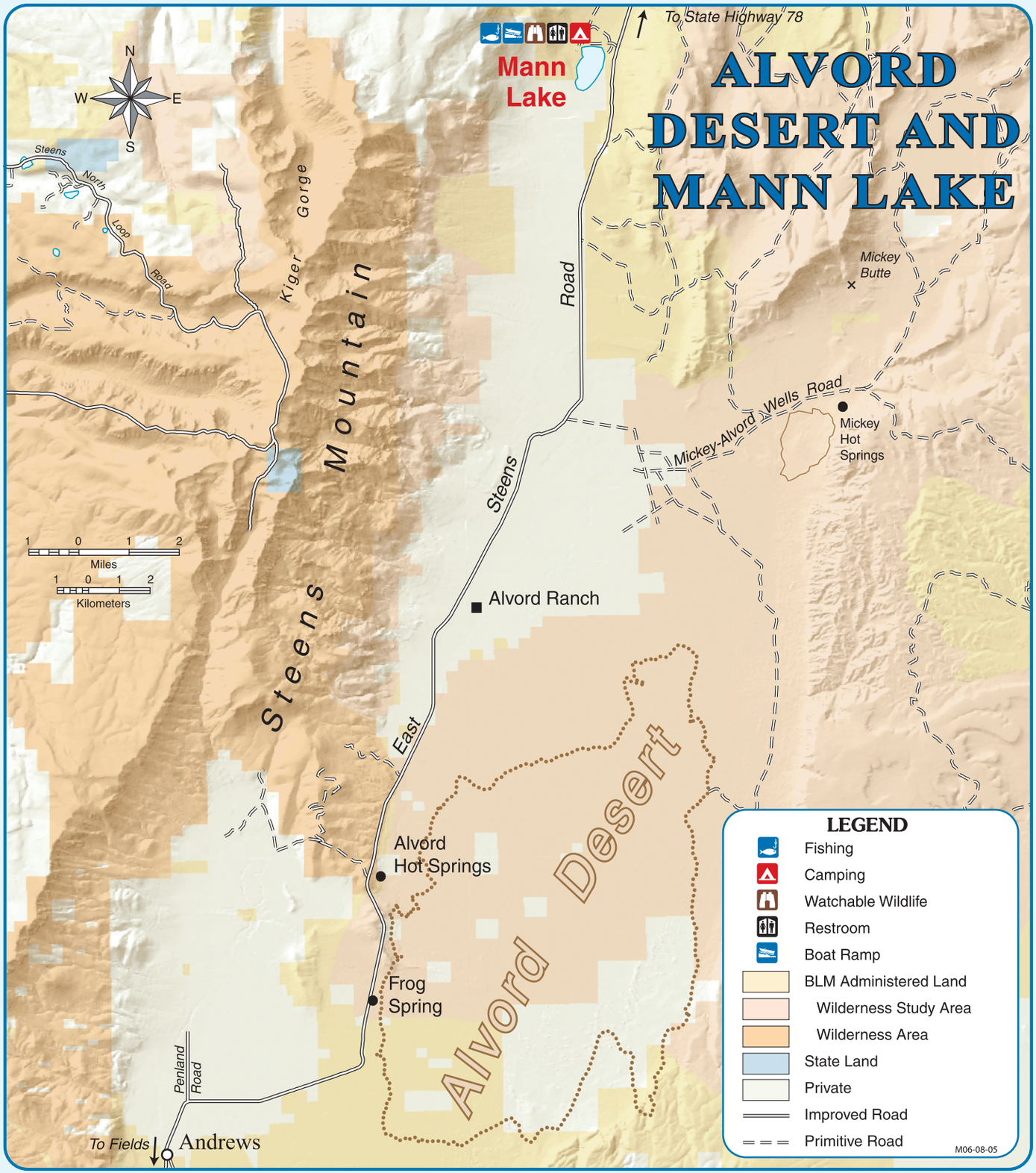
Welcome to Alvord Desert and Mann Lake

While Steens Mountain looms to the west, the shimmering alkali flats of the Alvord Desert unfold to the east. The Alvord Desert Playa which can be either wet or dry, depending on the time of year, is one of the largest playas in Oregon – 6 miles wide and 11 miles long. Tens of thousands of years ago, a lake almost 200 feet deep covered the Alvord Desert and extended southward into Nevada. The old shoreline formed terraces along the edge of the valley, and deep under the desert floor are the same lava flows that make up the top of Steens Mountain. Located below the east face of Steens Mountain, Mann Lake attracts anglers as much for its remote and rugged splendor, as for its abundant Lahontan cutthroat trout. The trout are supremely adapted to survive alkaline desert waters and without them fisheries like Mann Lake could not exist. Mann Lake was named for an early rancher and has satisfied fishermen for over 40 years.