



Smith Mountain Dam and Lake (Images of America)

James A. Nagy

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The construction of a dam in the gap of Smith Mountain in Pittsylvania County, Virginia, had been considered as early as the 1920s. However, the dam's construction did not begin until 1960. Smith Mountain Dam closed the gap completely in 1963, and Smith Mountain Lake began to fill and form behind it. The hydroelectric dam consists of 175,000 cubic yards of concrete and has the capacity to generate 605 megawatts of electricity for up to 11 hours. Smith Mountain Dam is part of a two-dam system on the Roanoke River, and its companion dam, the Leesville Dam, is a smaller structure designed to pump water back to Smith Mountain Lake and to also generate hydroelectric power for American Electric Power (AEP) customers. Smith Mountain Lake covers 20,000 acres and has a 500-mile shoreline, which borders Franklin, Pittsylvania, and Bedford Counties. Over the years, development near and around Smith Mountain Lake has exploded, and this has presented both opportunities and challenges in regard to stewardship of the area's natural resources.

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