WE WOULD JUST LIKE TO SAY THANK YOU

It was the year 1950. The small town of Kirksville had doubled in population since 1900. Kirksville was growing and a new water supply was needed. Since the amount of water supplied by the Chariton River was inadequate for the prospering community, the idea of a reservoir came into being. After a survey of the Adair County region, it was decided that Big Creek, a tributary of the Chariton River located two and one-half miles southwest of Kirksville, offered the best possibility for a reservoir site.

The project of Forrest Lake, named after Missouri Governor Forrest Smith, was complicated. One problem during this period of surveying and planning was that Kirksville needed and was building a new disposal plant. With all of the city’s available funds tied up in this endeavor, Kirksville had no funds to start the reservoir operation. In Jefferson City, Missouri, about this time legislators passed an act enabling

An overview of Thousand Hills State Park which was dedicated in 1952. This land offers wildlife areas, camping and picnic grounds, cabins, boat docks, and a beach. (Photo courtesy of Gary Fisher)
cities to issue revenue bonds to raise additional money. This enabling act looked like a good way to obtain funds for the new reservoir.

During this time Mayor Pete Anesi and the councilmen of Kirksville embarked on a campaign to interest the people of the community in their plan for a reservoir and began to push for a bond issue. The entire plan might have died, except that local civic clubs such as the Jaycees, Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, and the Chamber of Commerce worked very hard to convince the community. Their hard work paid off when the bond issue passed on the first ballot with an overwhelming 90 percent of the voters backing the new reservoir.

What the voters did not know was that they were not only backing a new water supply but a place of historical significance, a scenic wonder, a flowing spring, a geological formation, and a recreational area. Forrest Lake can even boast of Indian petroglyphs dating from the year 900 A.D.

The fall of 1950 saw the initial work begin, though it wasn’t until the spring of 1951 that construction really got underway. Based upon the average rainfall per year in Kirksville, it was estimated that one full year of rainfall would be needed to fill the lake with water. One rainy August night in 1952, an
eight-inch downpour fell and Forrest Lake was born. "Shocking" was the description of Mrs. J. S. Denslow as she stepped outside to view the large body of water in the morning sun. The 700-acre project was complete!

There was a definite need for a recreational area in our part of the state. Long-range plans had, in fact, called for such a project in the northeast region as soon as funds permitted. A Kirkville citizen, W. O. Mackie, aided in fulfilling this idea. The State Park Board listened to Mr. Mackie and began a study of the matter. The State Park Board accepted the lands already acquired by the city of Kirkville and developed them into a state park. The city of Kirkville turned over the 2,667 acres of land, including the 700-acre impoundment of water, for administration by the State Board. It had cost the city $631,000; it cost the state of Missouri not even one cent. Since the lake was funded by a bond issue, the city of Kirkville could not turn it over to the state. Today Kirkville technically still owns the water.

Top: In the late 1950’s, the swimming beach at Thousand Hills Lake was a popular summer hang-out. Bottom: Thousand Hills boat docks were constructed in the early 1950’s. The docks serve as an outlet to the water and a prime fishing spot. (Photos courtesy of Pickler Library at NMSU)