

2016

# FISHING FORECAST

INFORMATION FOR:

- 2015 Fish Sampling Charts
- Guide to Fishing Nebraska
- Best Waters to Catch Larger Fish
- Forecast for 17 Fish Species

**NEBRASKA**  
- GAME  PARKS -



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# A GUIDE TO FISHING NEBRASKA IN 2016

By Daryl Bauer, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission fisheries outreach program manager

## WALLEYE

Nebraska's largest reservoirs are the state's best walleye habitats and consistently provide the best walleye fishing. That will be the case in 2016 as some of the perennially best walleye fisheries will be there again. **Merritt, Sutherland, Calamus, Johnson, and Lewis & Clark** reservoirs will offer anglers good numbers of eating-size walleyes. Merritt also will offer anglers an excellent chance to catch a big walleye, along with **McConaughy, Elwood, Sherman, and Harlan County** reservoirs. Smaller reservoirs scattered throughout Nebraska are less ideal as walleye habitats, but anglers will have opportunities to catch walleyes from the state's small- to medium-sized reservoirs. **Maskenthine** will offer anglers good numbers of 15- to 20-inch walleyes this year while **Whitney, Holmes, Stagecoach, and Yankee Hill** may not have a lot of walleyes but will offer anglers a chance to catch a big walleye. Lots of walleyes were sampled at lakes **Minatare** and **Maloney** last fall, but most of those fish were only 10-15 inches long.

## WHITE BASS

White bass also are open-water predator fish that thrive in Nebraska's largest reservoirs. The best white bass fisheries in 2016 will be found at **Harlan** and **Swanson**, while **Calamus, Enders, and Johnson** will also be good. Typically, the largest white bass are found in waters that have lower densities; look to **Elwood, Jeffrey, Whitney, Plum Creek, and McConaughy** for some white bass larger than 15 inches this year. However, Calamus and Harlan also will offer some big white bass, along with the numbers of fish that can be caught from those waters. In eastern Nebraska, **Lewis & Clark** and **East Twin** reservoirs will have some white bass for anglers to catch.

## WIPERS

Wipers are white bass/striped bass hybrids, and like their parent species, they also are most

successful in open-water habitats — Nebraska's largest reservoirs. Like walleyes and white bass, some of the same Nebraska waters are consistently good for wipers year after year. Waters that offer good white bass fishing can also be some of the state's best wiper fisheries. **Calamus, Swanson, Davis Creek, and McConaughy** will be the best Nebraska reservoirs for 15-inch-and-larger wipers in 2016. Calamus, Swanson, and McConaughy will also be the angler's best bet for some big wipers, along with **Elwood** and **Enders** reservoirs. Sampling catch rates of wipers in the fall of 2015 were very high at **Lake Maloney** and **Sutherland**, but most of those fish were less than 15 inches long and if caught should be released to allow them to reach their growth potential. Smaller waters are less ideal wiper habitats, but **Stagecoach** and **Wagon Train** reservoirs in southeastern Nebraska support some wipers, including fish in excess of 20 inches.

## BLUEGILL

Bluegills can be found in a variety of waters across Nebraska. Anglers can take their kids out to catch some "sunnies" on just about any small body of water. The quest is to locate waters that offer an abundance of fish larger than 8 inches. Small- to medium-sized reservoirs across Nebraska will offer some of the best bluegill fishing again in 2016: **Pibel, Homestead, Walnut Creek, Summit, Burchard, Melham, and Buckskin Hills**. Nebraska's Sandhills lakes offer lower densities of bluegills, but can produce some trophy bluegills, with the biggest specimens in excess of one pound. Anglers should remember that bluegills that big are rare fish and worthy of having a picture taken and then returned to the water. The best Sandhills lakes in 2016 again will be some on the **Valentine National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)** as well as **Blue** and **Frye** lakes. Sandpits and Interstate 80 lakes can also offer some excellent opportunities for quality-size bluegills. **Pit No.**

**20 at Fremont Lakes State Recreation Area (SRA)** as well as I-80 lakes **West Gothenburg** and **Brady** will be good pits to try this year.

## CRAPPIES

Crappies are another panfish species that can be found throughout Nebraska, and likewise the challenge for anglers is to find waters with not just lots of crappies, but fish larger than 10 inches. Small- to medium-sized reservoirs tend to be excellent crappie habitats and consistently produce some of the state's best crappie fishing. In 2016, crappie anglers will want to spend some time on **Branched Oak, Czechland, Wildwood, Olive Creek, and Burchard** reservoirs. Larger, irrigation reservoirs with fluctuating water levels tend to be less favorable for crappies, but **Sherman Reservoir** fills with water every spring and its bay and cove habitats are ideal for crappies. Reservoirs like **Plum Creek** and **Midway** on the canal system in central Nebraska are also good crappie fisheries. Nebraska's Sandhills lakes tend to have lower densities of crappies, but can offer some of the biggest, fattest black crappies in the state; **Blue** and **Hackberry** lakes will be two of the best of those lakes this year.

## LARGEMOUTH BASS

Small reservoirs, Sandhills lakes, pits, and ponds tend to be the best largemouth bass habitats in Nebraska. Those waters offer the stable water levels, clean water and an abundance of shallow water cover, especially aquatic vegetation, in which largemouth bass thrive. Some of those waters can have very high densities of bass, which may produce excellent panfish fishing (largemouth bass keep panfish numbers in check), but those waters with lots of bass may not necessarily be the best for producing big bass. On the other hand, relatively lower densities of largemouth bass can offer anglers with lots of opportunities to catch fish larger than 15 inches. **Lake Wanahoo** and **Ravenna** will offer anglers tremendous numbers of 15-inch-and-larger bass

in 2016. Small reservoirs like **Timber Point, Olive Creek, and Walnut Creek** will also be excellent for largemouth bass this year. Sandhills lakes can also be good largemouth bass habitats and produce some beautiful, fat bass. **Duck** and **Pelican** lakes on the Valentine NWR will be good bets for Sandhills bass fishing this year or plan an adventure to **Lord Lake** on the McKelvie National Forest. Private pits and ponds always produce some of the best bass fishing in the state, and many Nebraska anglers have permission to fish at least one of those privately-owned waters. In addition, some private pits and ponds have been enrolled in the Open Fields and Waters program and are open to the public; refer to the Public Access Atlas for those waters (OutdoorNebraska.org). Interstate lakes and other public pits such as **Fremont SRA Pit No. 2, Louisville SRA Pit No. 2A, Brady, and West Gothenburg** will also offer some excellent bass fishing in 2016.

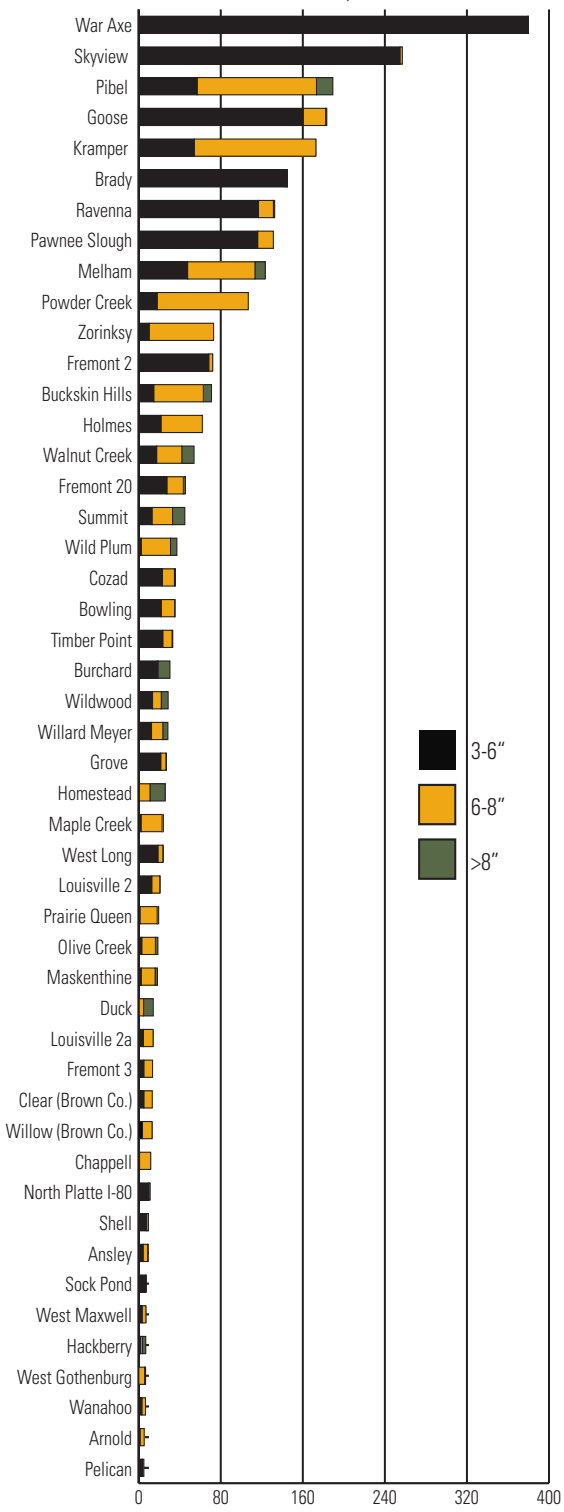
## CHANNEL CATFISH

**Sutherland, Midway, Buckskin Hills, East Twin, and Pawnee** reservoirs will all offer good numbers of 16-inch-and-larger channel cats in 2016. In addition, **Czechland, Wildwood, Branched Oak, Calamus, and Johnson** reservoirs will be good for 24-inch-and-larger cats. Remember that all catfish have to be released at **Wildwood Reservoir**, and that is why there is an abundance of big channel cats there. Voluntary catch and release of large, trophy catfish is a practice that should be considered by anglers on any Nebraska water as it takes years to grow channel cats to that size and it will maintain the quality of fishing. For a different experience, do not overlook Nebraska's warm-water rivers like the **Missouri, Platte, Elkhorn, or Niobrara**, as they also are excellent catfish fisheries. There are some areas where public access is available on Nebraska rivers. For access to warm-water streams and rivers on private lands, check out the Open Fields and Waters program.

2015 Sampling Charts

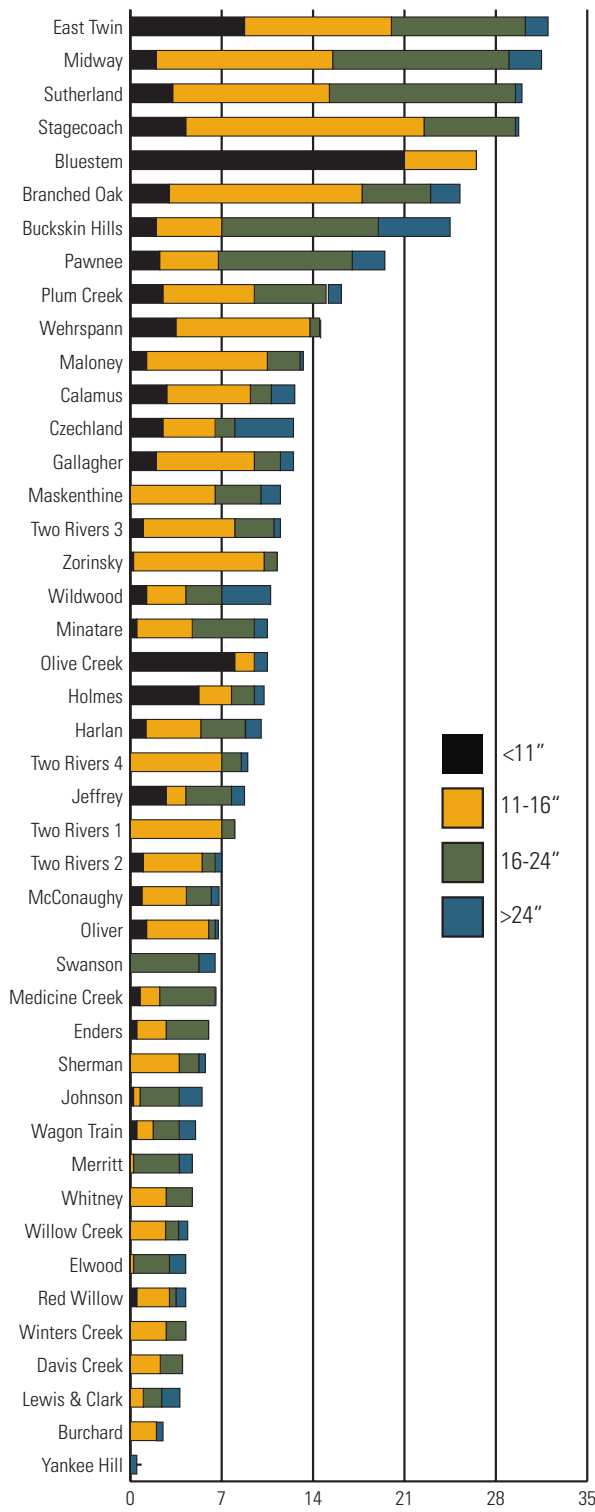
**BLUEGILL**

Per Trap Net



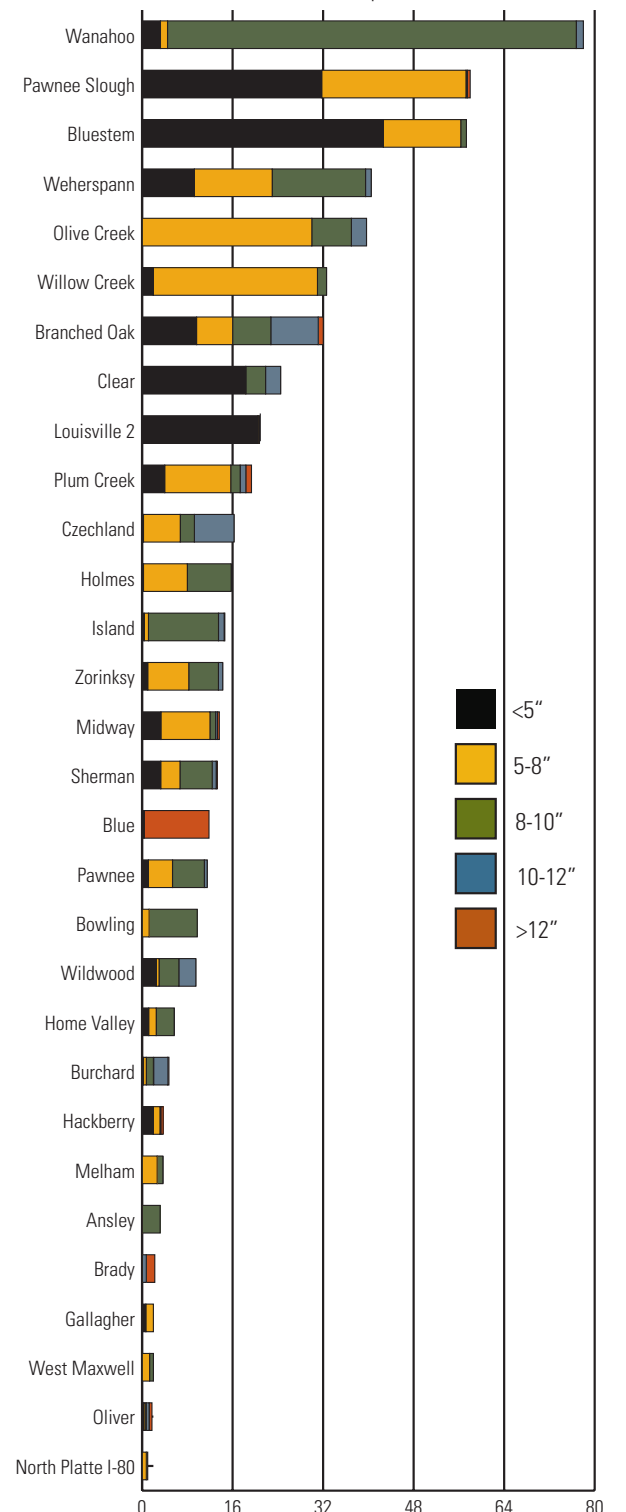
**CHANNEL CATFISH**

Per Gill Net



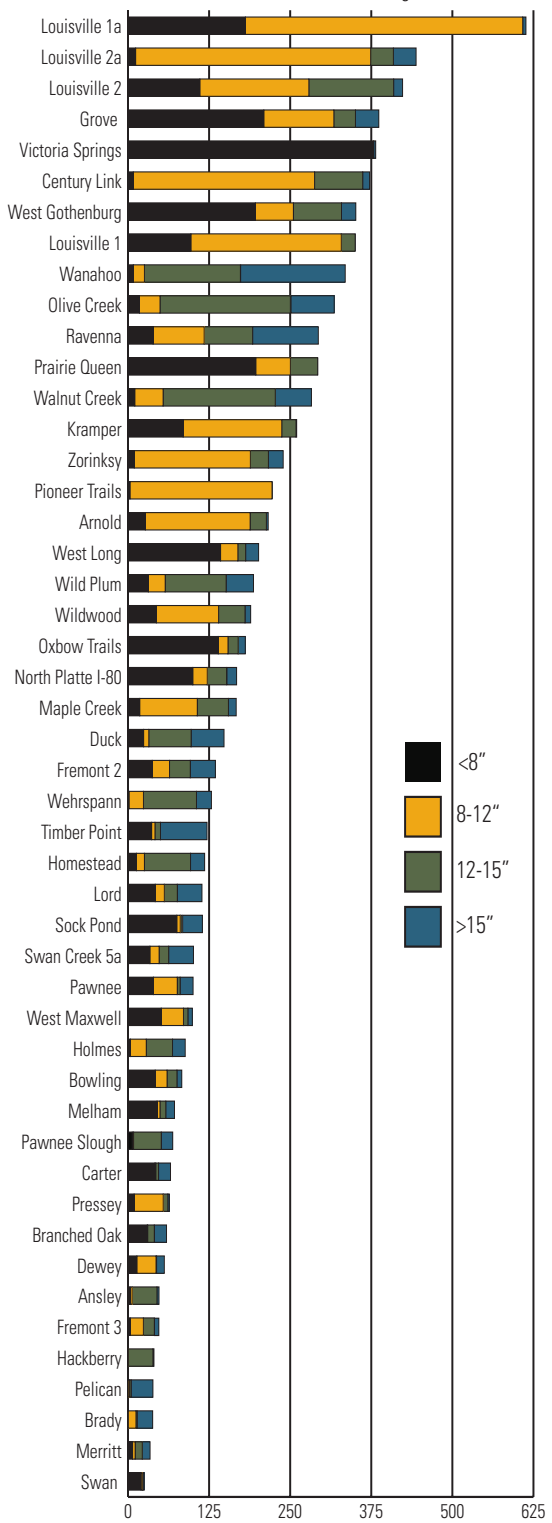
**CRAPPIE**

Per Trap Net



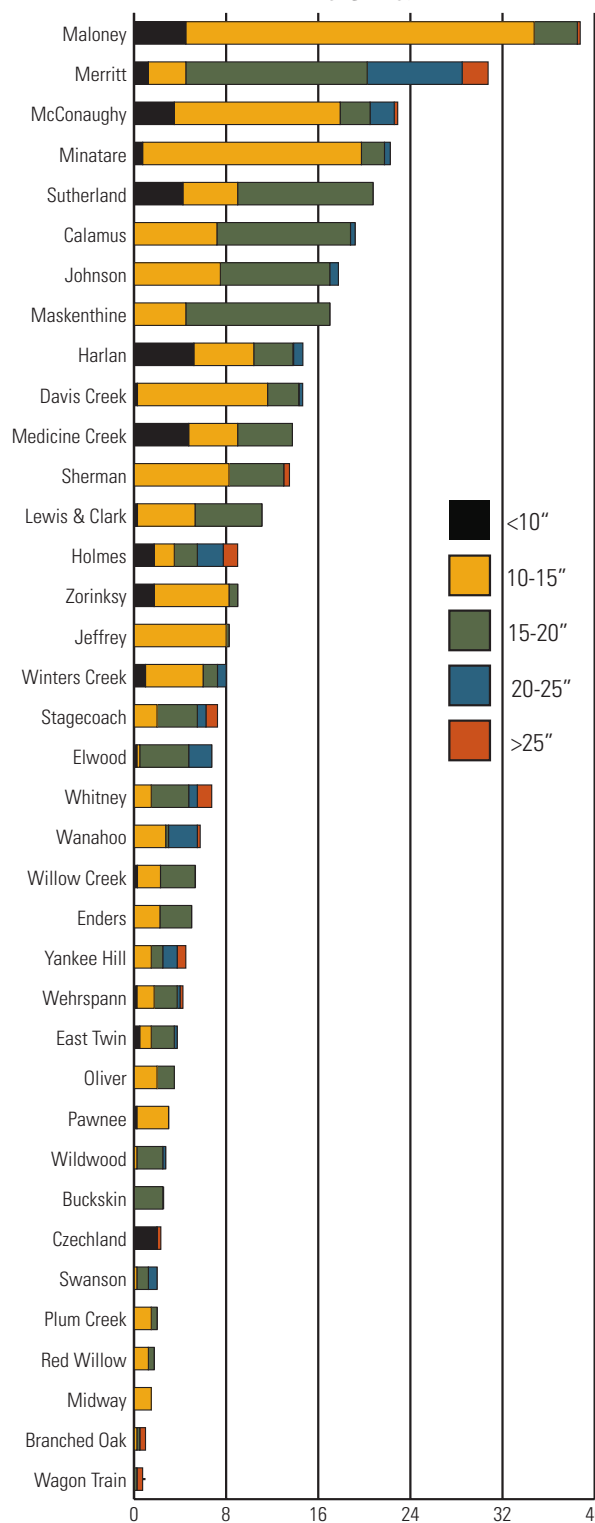
**LARGEMOUTH BASS**

Per Hour Electrofishing



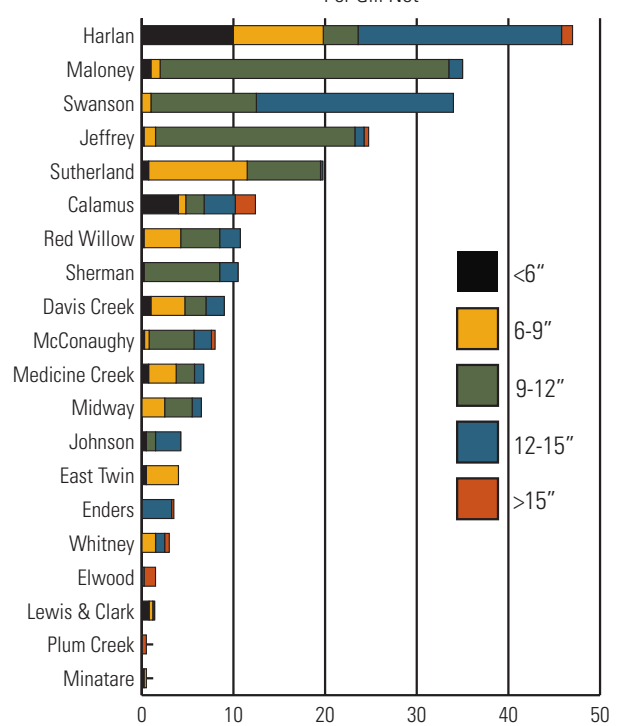
**WALLEYE**

Per Gill Net



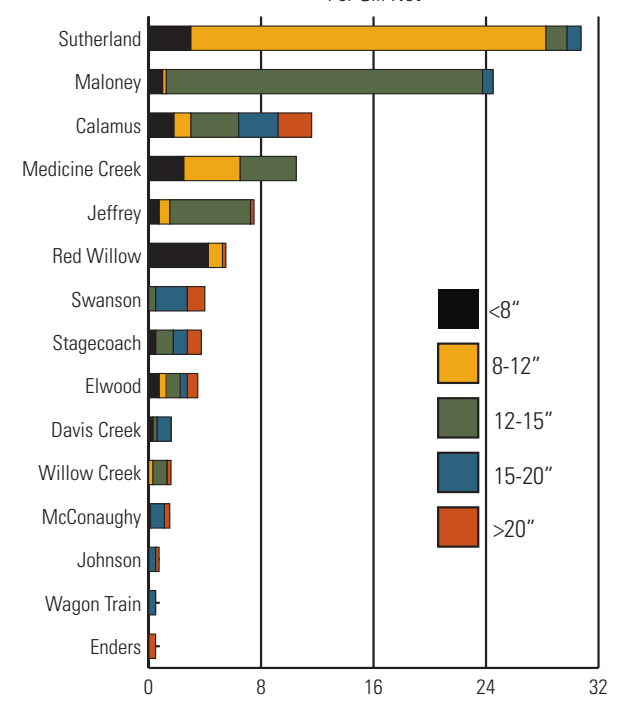
**WHITE BASS**

Per Gill Net



**WIPER**

Per Gill Net



## REDEAR SUNFISH

In addition to bluegills, Nebraska has opportunities to catch other species of sunfish such as redear sunfish at **Louisville SRA Pit No. 2, West Maxwell** or **West Gothenburg** Interstate 80 lakes.

## SMALLMOUTH BASS

Anglers can catch this popular fish at **War Axe SRA, Johnson Lake, Lake McConaughy**, as well as the **Missouri River** in northeastern Nebraska.

## BLUE CATFISH

Blue catfish can be found in reservoirs such as **Swanson, Wehrspann, and Branched Oak**, but look to the **Missouri River** in southeastern Nebraska for the biggest blue cats in the state, potentially some fish weighing triple digits.

## FLATHEAD CATFISH

Flathead catfish are another species of large catfish that can be found in the **Missouri River**, as well as in reservoirs such as **Harlan, Sherman, or Branched Oak** and the **Tri-County** and **Loup** canal systems. All flatheads at **Branched Oak** must be released immediately after capture and anglers should consider releasing those big cats on other fisheries as well.

## SAUGER

Sauger fishing will be best on **Lewis & Clark Reservoir** and the **Missouri River** in northeastern Nebraska, but **Johnson Reservoir** and the canal system and associated reservoirs above Johnson – **Gallagher Canyon, Plum Creek, and Midway** – also have good numbers of sauger.

## YELLOW PERCH

Yellow perch are a tasty and popular panfish; in 2016 some of the best yellow perch fishing will be found at **Frye, Defair, Blue, and Home Valley** lakes, as well as on lakes in the **Valentine NWR** – all in the Sandhills.

## NORTHERN PIKE

Sandhills lakes are some of the best northern pike habitats in the state and once again lakes on the **Valentine NWR – Clear, Hackberry, and Dewey** – will be some of Nebraska's most popular pike fisheries. **Goose** and **Twinn** lakes are other Sandhills lakes that will be good for northern pike this year, but do not overlook reservoirs such as **Box Butte, Merritt, Minatare, and McConaughy**, especially for some trophy pike. Southern and eastern Nebraska waters can be too warm for the cool-water northern pike, but in southeastern Nebraska, **Lake Wanahoo** will continue to offer anglers a chance to catch-and-release some pike (all Wanahoo pike must be released).

## BULLHEADS

Some anglers scoff at the thought of fishing for bullheads, but “yellow bellies” are a great fish for beginning anglers, as they are almost always willing to bite. Bullhead fishing will be particularly good in 2016 at **Wild Plum, Wanahoo, and Czechland** reservoirs.

## MUSKELLUNGE

Muskellunge are the “king of freshwater sport fish.” To catch this large, toothy predator, anglers should target **Merritt, Calamus, and Wagon Train** reservoirs, as well as **Fremont SRA Pit No. 20**, and Grand Island's **L.E. Ray Lake**.

## TROUT

Nebraska also has waters capable of supporting cold-water fish year-round where anglers can find rainbow, brown, brook, and even cutthroat trout. Most of the cold-water trout streams are found in western and northern parts of the state; the **East Branch of Verdigre Creek, Long Pine, Soldier, Plum, and Ninemile** creeks are perennial favorites among trout anglers. In 2016, the rainbow trout fishing at **Lake Ogallala** will continue to be good, and anglers might even catch some cutthroat from the **White River**.

*Cover Photo: NGPC/NEBRASKAland Magazine*