

2017

FISHING FORECAST

INFORMATION FOR:

- 2016 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 2017 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. **Minatare, Winters Creek** and **Box Butte** – all in the Panhandle – will be particularly good for numbers of eating-size walleyes in 2017. **Calamus, Harlan** and **Maloney** also will offer anglers good numbers, while **Merritt, McConaughy, Elwood** and **Sherman** will offer an opportunity to catch a big walleye, along with good quantities. Smaller reservoirs in eastern Nebraska are less ideal as walleye habitats, but anglers will have some opportunities to catch walleyes from those waters, including a shot at some big fish. **Stagecoach, Czechland, Wagon Train, Yankee Hill** and **Wanahoo** will be the best waters to catch a walleye in eastern Nebraska. Lots of walleyes, mostly 10-15 inches long, were sampled at **Big Alkali** and **Lawrence Youngman** last fall.

WHITE BASS

White bass also are open-water predator fish that thrive in Nebraska's largest reservoirs. The best white bass fisheries will be found at **Swanson** and **Harlan**, while **Sherman, Maloney, McConaughy** and **Calamus** will also be good. Typically, the largest white bass are found in waters that have lower densities; look to **Minatare, Elwood**, and **Lewis & Clark** for some white bass larger than 15 inches. **Calamus** and **Harlan** will offer a few big white bass, along with good numbers of fish.

WIPER

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. Waters that offer good white bass fishing can be some of the state's best wiper fisheries, too. **Calamus, Elwood, Minatare** and **Swanson** will be the best reservoirs for 20-plus-inch wipers. Sampling catch rates of wipers in the fall of 2016 were

very high at **Maloney** and **Davis Creek**, but most of those fish were less than 20 inches long. An even greater abundance of wipers was collected at **Branched Oak** in the fall, but those fish were less than 15 inches long, and all wipers there must be released. Smaller waters are less ideal wiper habitats, but **Stagecoach** and **Wagon Train** reservoirs in southeast Nebraska support some wipers 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 on just about any small body of water, but if 8-inch-plus bluegills are the target, there will be several candidate waters in 2017. Small- to medium-sized reservoirs will offer some of the best bluegill fishing again this year. **Maple Creek, Iron Horse Trail** and **Czechland** head the list. **Summit, Maskenthine, Walnut Creek** and **Pibel** will also be very good for 8-inch and larger bluegills. Sandhills lakes offer lower densities of bluegills, but can produce some trophies, with the biggest fish 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 will be **West Long** on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge, as well as **Frye** and **Smith Wildlife Management Area** lakes. Sandpits and interstate lakes can also offer some excellent chances for quality bluegills, including several pits on **Fort Kearny State Recreation Area** and **East Odessa** interstate lake.

CRAPPIE

Crappies can be found in abundance throughout Nebraska, but anglers are always on the look for waters that will produce fish larger than 10 inches. There will be numerous places in 2017 that will offer some very good crappie fishing, with **Blue Lake** and **Whitney** and **Sherman** reservoirs heading the list. Small to medium-sized reservoirs tend to be excellent crappie



Calamus Reservoir white bass

habitats and consistently produce some of the state's best crappie fishing. Crappie anglers will want to spend some time on **Walnut Creek, Yankee Hill, Czechland**, and **Wanahoo** for some 10-inch-plus fish. Once again, the Sandhills tend to have lower densities of panfish, but can offer some of the biggest, fattest black crappies in the state. **Cottonwood-Steverson, Home Valley, Island** and **Big Alkali** lakes will be the best in the Sandhills.

LARGEMOUTH BASS

Largemouth bass thrive in fisheries that offer stable water levels, clean water and an abundance of shallow-water cover. In Nebraska, small reservoirs, Sandhills lakes, pits and ponds tend to be the best largemouth habitats. Some of those waters have high densities of bass, which tend to produce excellent panfish fishing as bass keep panfish numbers in check. However, waters with lots of bass may not necessarily be the best for producing big bass. Waters with relatively lower densities of largemouth bass can offer anglers opportunities to catch bass larger than 15 inches. **Wanahoo** and **Pibel** will offer anglers tremendous numbers of 15-inch and larger bass in 2017. Other small- to medium-sized reservoirs such as **Iron Horse Trail, Skyview, Buckskin Hills, Grove** and **Hedgefield** will also be excellent for bass. Interstate lakes and other public pits such as **Fremont Lakes State Recreation Area No. 2, Windmill No. 3** and **East Sutherland** will also offer some excellent

bass fishing. Sandhills lakes can also be good largemouth bass habitats; **Duck** and **Pelican** lakes on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge will be the good bets for bass fishing this year. Private pits and ponds always produce some of the best bass fishing, and many Nebraska anglers have permission to fish at least one of those privately-owned waters. In addition, some private pits and ponds are in the Open Fields and Waters program and have public walk-in access. Refer to the Public Access Atlas for those waters. Public ponds such as **Redtail** and **Mayberry** will be good largemouth fisheries, but catch-and-release will be needed to maintain quality bass fisheries in those small waters.

CHANNEL CATFISH

The popular channel catfish is found widely across the state. **Pawnee, Branched Oak, Sutherland, Davis Creek** and **Prairie Queen** reservoirs will all offer good numbers of 16-inch-plus channel cats. In addition, **Wildwood, Burchard, Medicine Creek, Wagon Train** and **Johnson** reservoirs will be good for 24-inch-plus cats. All catfish must be released at **Wildwood** — the reason there is an abundance of big channel cats there. Voluntary catch-and-release of large trophy catfish should be considered, as it takes years to grow channel cats to that size. For example, **Box Butte, Merritt** and **Calamus** reservoirs have lower densities of trophy catfish. These fisheries took years to develop but can be maintained by voluntary catch-and-release. Do not overlook Nebraska's warm-water rivers such as the **Missouri, Platte, Elkhorn** or **Niobrara**, as they also are excellent catfish fisheries. Some areas on rivers have public access. Check out the Public Access Atlas for walk-in sites in the Open Fields and Waters program.

REDEAR SUNFISH

Louisville State Recreation Area No. 2, Wilson Creek 2x and **Crystal** interstate lake are top destinations to target redear sunfish this year.

SMALLMOUTH BASS

Look to **War Axe, Johnson, McConaughy** and **Blue**, as well as the **Missouri River** in northeast Nebraska, for smallmouth bass.

BLUE CATFISH

Pawnee, Medicine Creek, Elwood, Swanson and **Branched Oak** are places to find blue catfish, but look to the **Missouri River** in southeast Nebraska for the biggest blue cats, potentially some weighing triple digits.

FLATHEAD CATFISH

Flatheads can be found in the **Missouri River**, as well as in reservoirs such as **Harlan, Sherman** or **Branched Oak**, and in the **Tri-County** and **Loup** canal systems. All flatheads at **Branched Oak** must be released immediately after capture and anglers should consider releasing big cats on other waters, too.

SAUGER

The best sauger fishing will be on **Lewis & Clark** and the **Missouri River** in northeast Nebraska, but **Johnson Reservoir** and the **Tri-County** canal system also have good numbers.

YELLOW PERCH

Some of the best fishing for this tasty and popular panfish will be found at **Home Valley, DeFair, Clear (Brown County)** and **Frye** lakes in the Sandhills. **West Long** on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge and **Rock Bass** and **Boardgate** ponds on the Oglala National Grasslands will also offer great perch fishing.

NORTHERN PIKE

Sandhills lakes are some of the best pike habitats and, once again, lakes on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge – **Dewey, Pelican** and **Hackberry** – will be some of Nebraska's most popular pike fisheries. **Smith Lake Wildlife Management Area** will be good this year, but do not overlook reservoirs such as **Box Butte, Merritt** and **Wanahoo** (catch-and-release only). Reservoirs in southern and



Box Butte Reservoir northern pike

eastern Nebraska such as **Wanahoo** typically are too warm for the cool-water northern pike, but Wanahoo is relatively new and has some pike habitat.

BULLHEAD

Bullheads are a great fish for beginning anglers, as they are almost always willing to bite. Bullhead fishing will be particularly good at **Czechland, Wanahoo** and **Burchard** reservoirs.

MUSKELLUNGE

To catch this large, toothy “king of freshwater sport fish,” anglers should target **Merritt, Calamus** and **Wagon Train** reservoirs, as well as **Fremont Lakes State Recreation Area No. 20**, and Grand Island's **L.E. Ray Lake**.

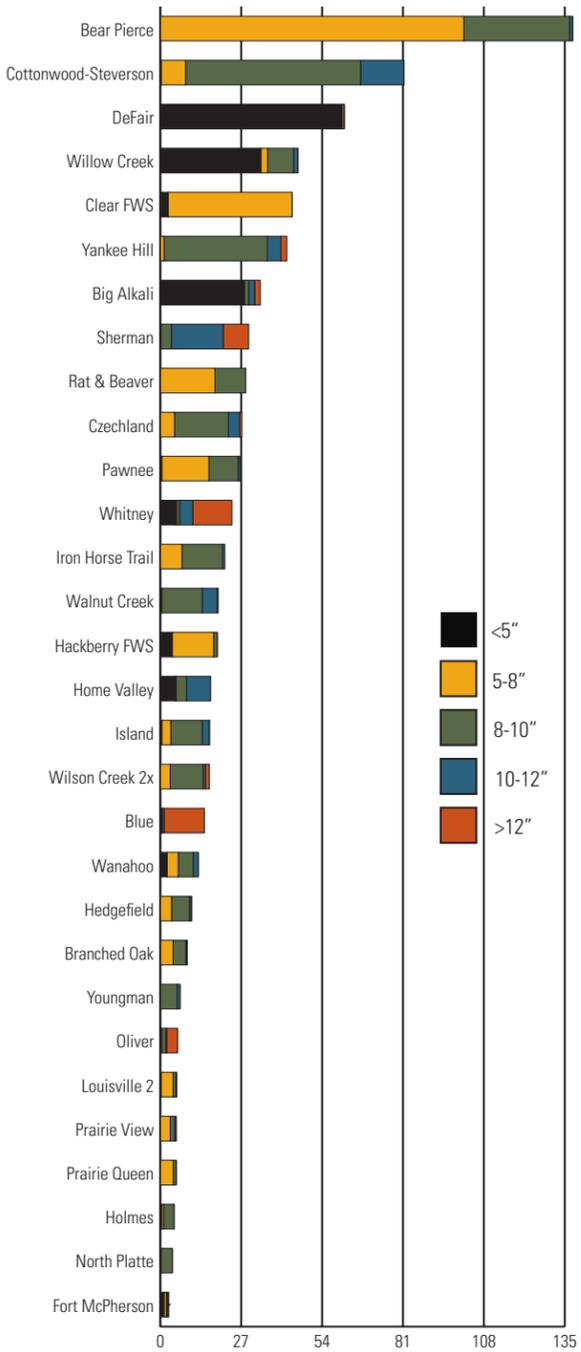
TROUT

Nebraska has waters capable of supporting cold-water fish year-round. This is 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; **East Branch of Verdigre, Long Pine, Soldier** and **Ninemile** creeks are perennial favorites. In 2017, rainbow trout fishing at **Lake Ogallala** will continue to be good, and anglers might even catch some cutthroat trout from the **White River** in the Pine Ridge.

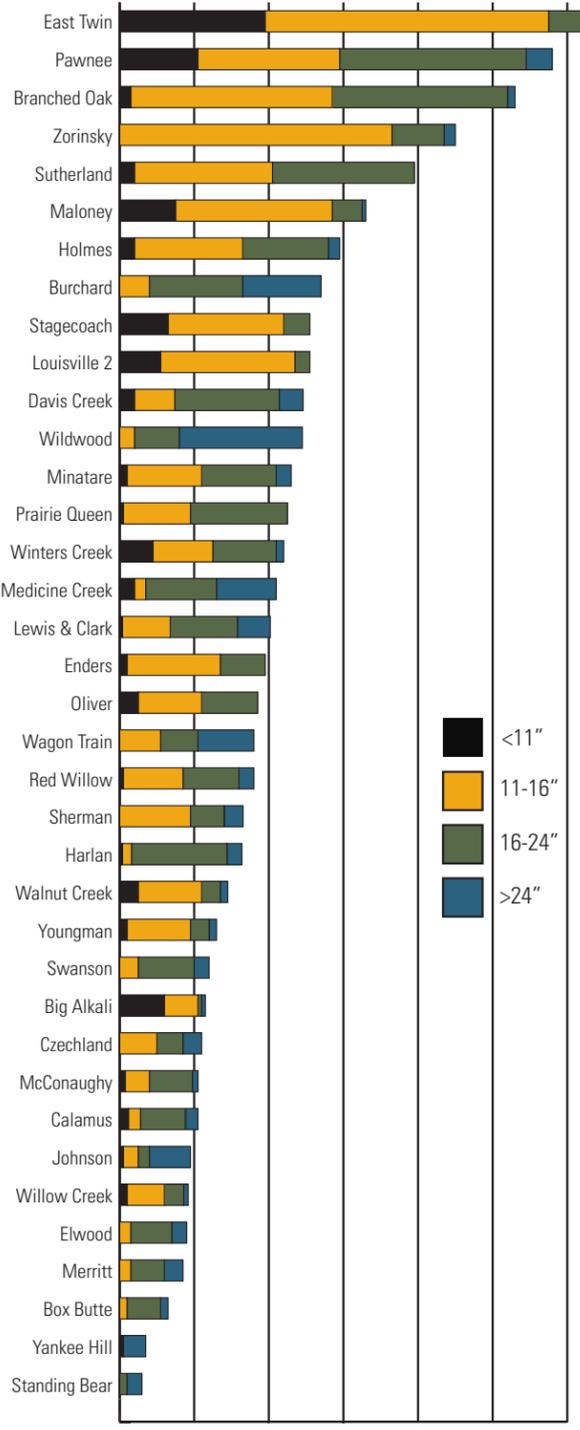
Photos: NGPC/NEBRASKAland Magazine

2016 Sampling Charts

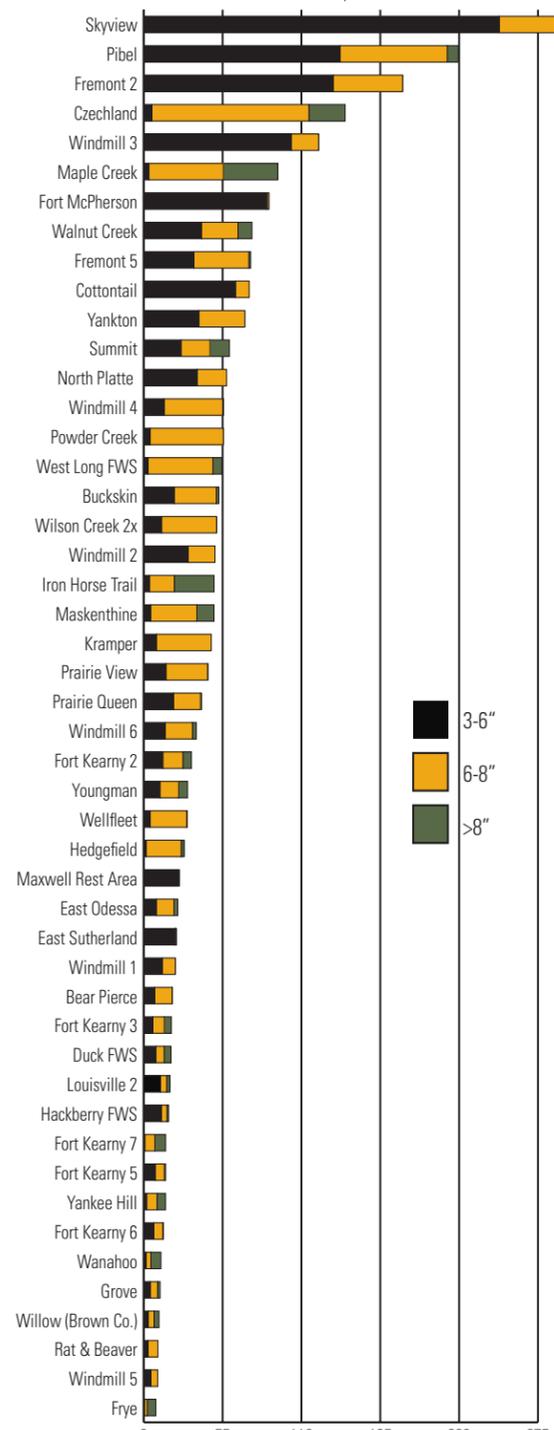
CRAPPIE
Per Trap Net



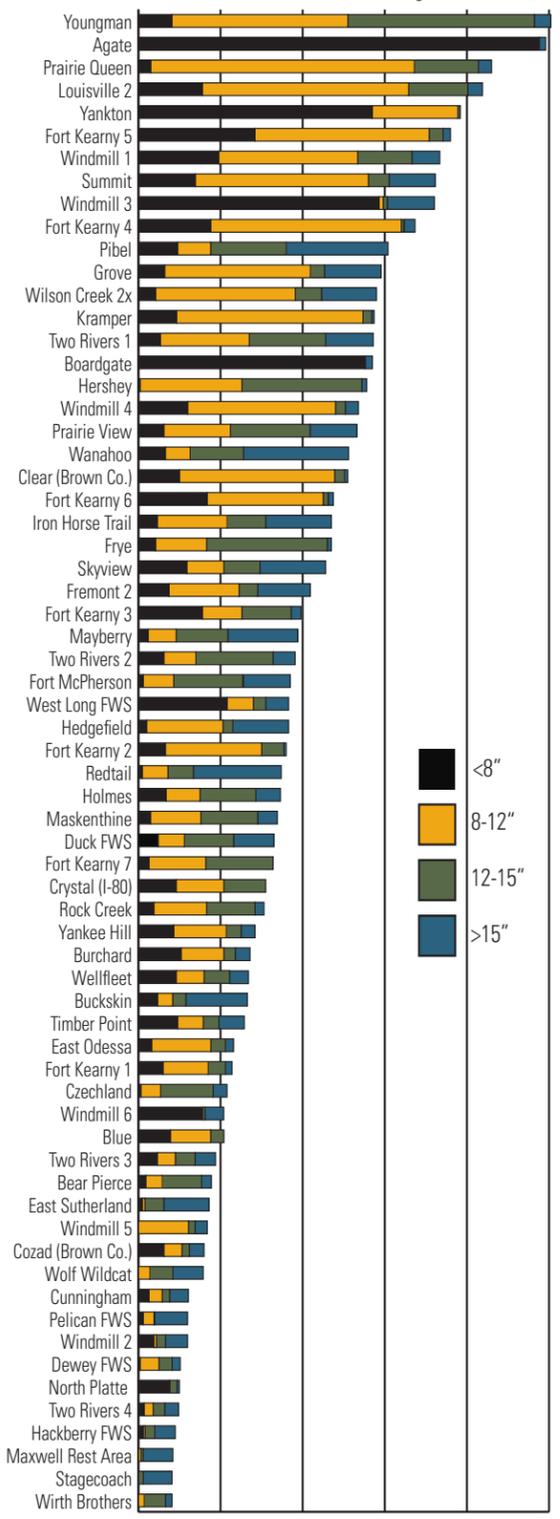
CHANNEL CATFISH
Per Gill Net



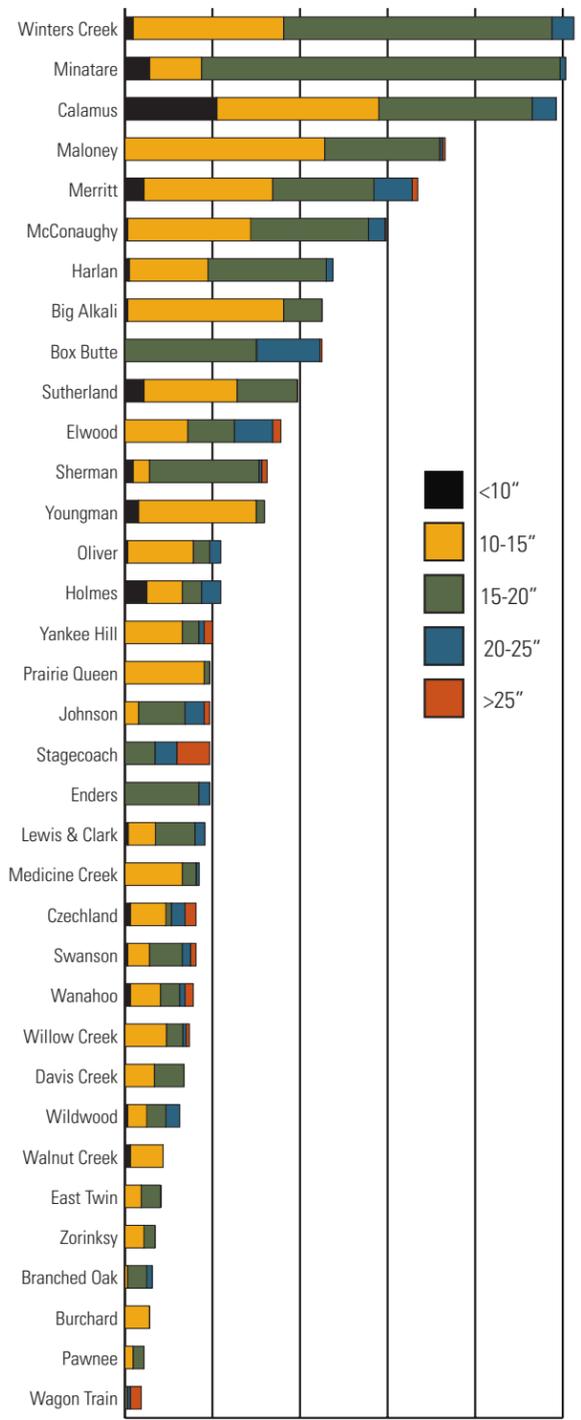
BLUEGILL
Per Trap Net



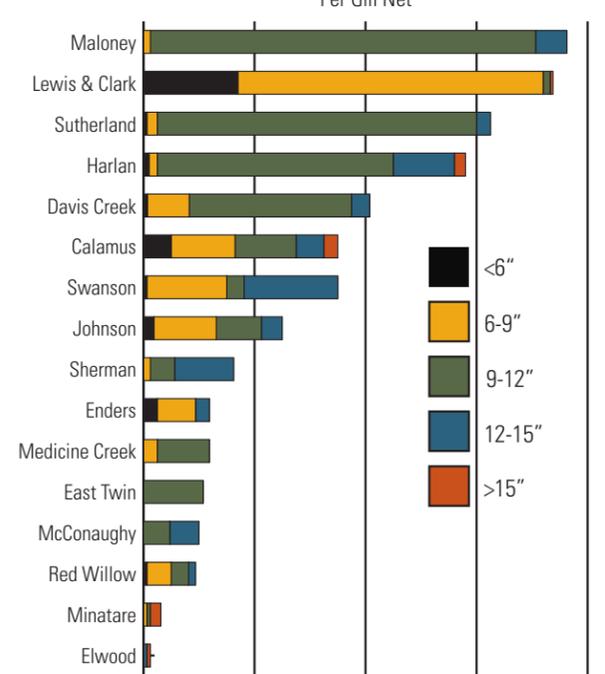
LARGEMOUTH BASS
Per Hour Electrofishing



WALLEYE
Per Gill Net



WHITE BASS
Per Gill Net



WIPER
Per Gill Net

