

2020

# FISHING FORECAST

INFORMATION FOR:

- 2019 Fish Sampling Charts
- Guide to Fishing Nebraska
- Best Waters to Catch Larger Fish
- Forecast for 18 Fish Species

NEBRASKA  
— GAME  PARKS —



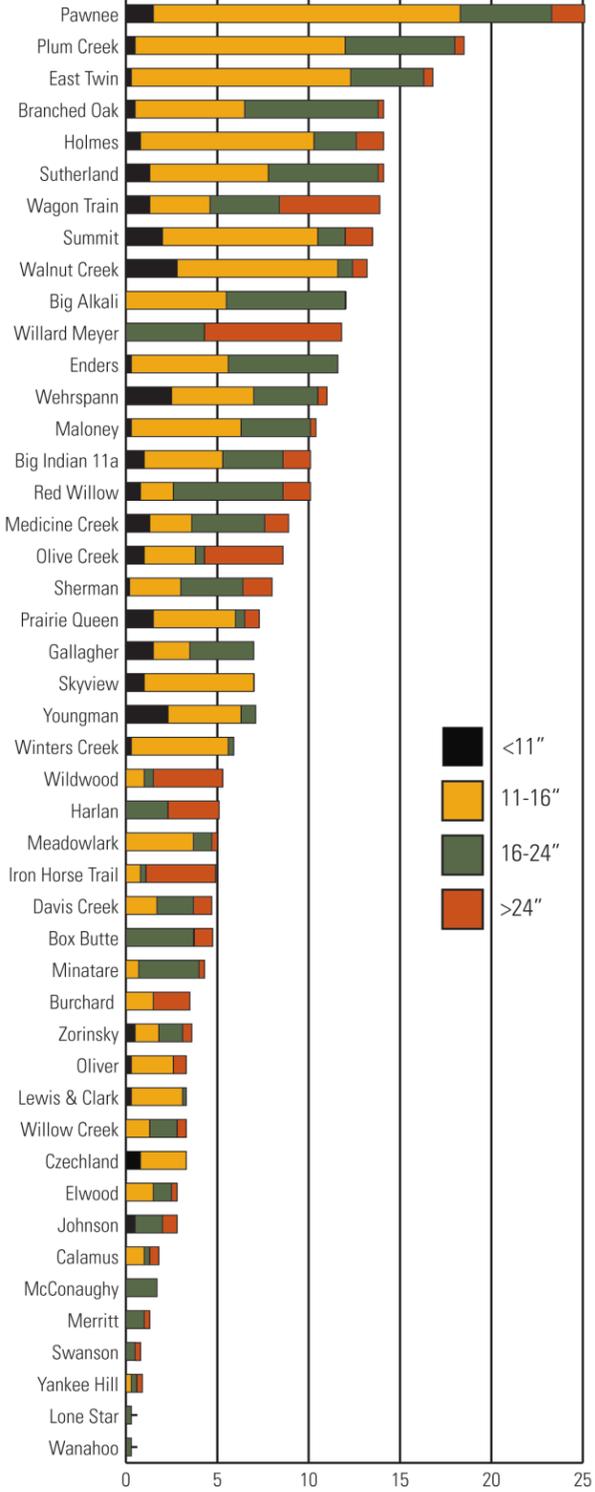
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# 2020 Sampling Charts

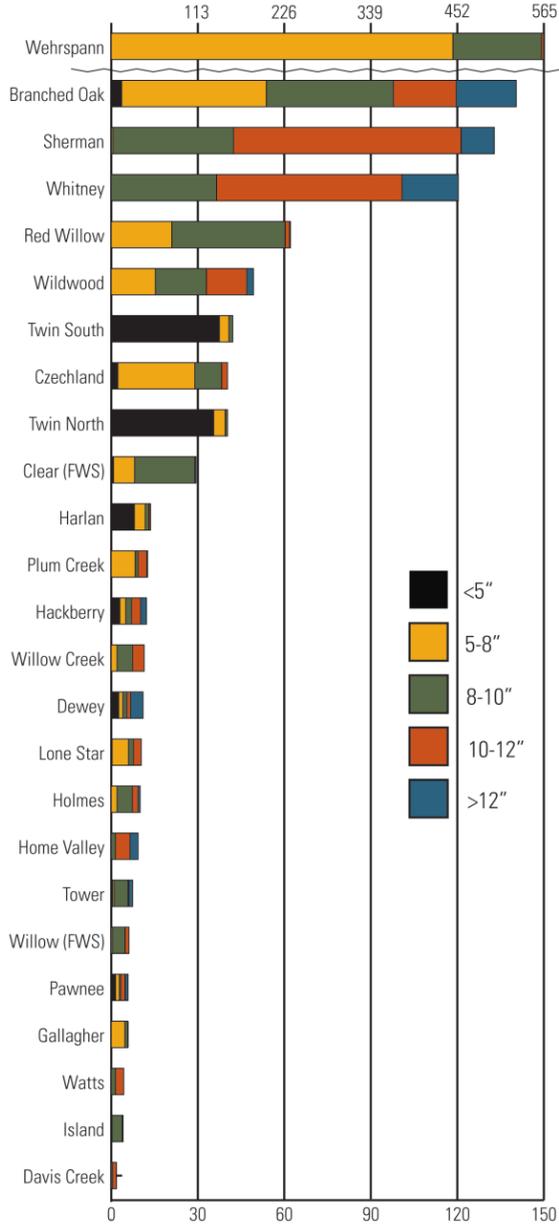
## CHANNEL CATFISH

Per Gill Net



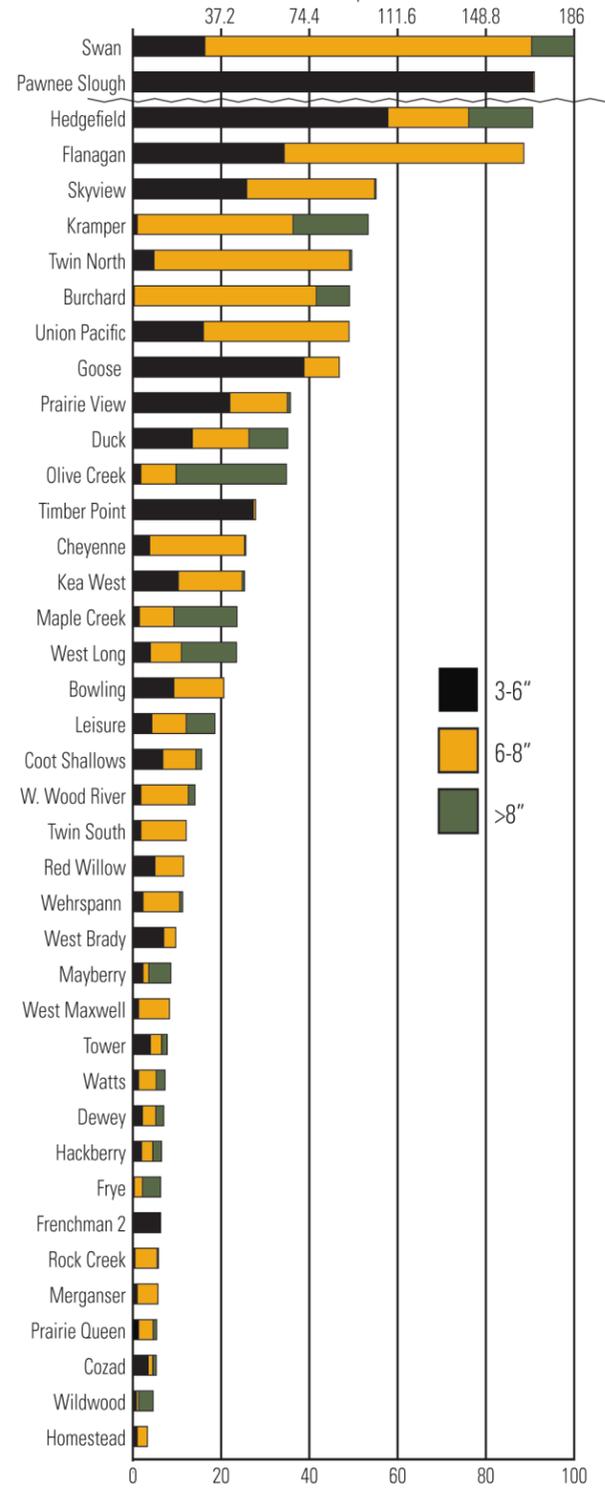
## CRAPPIE

Per Trap Net



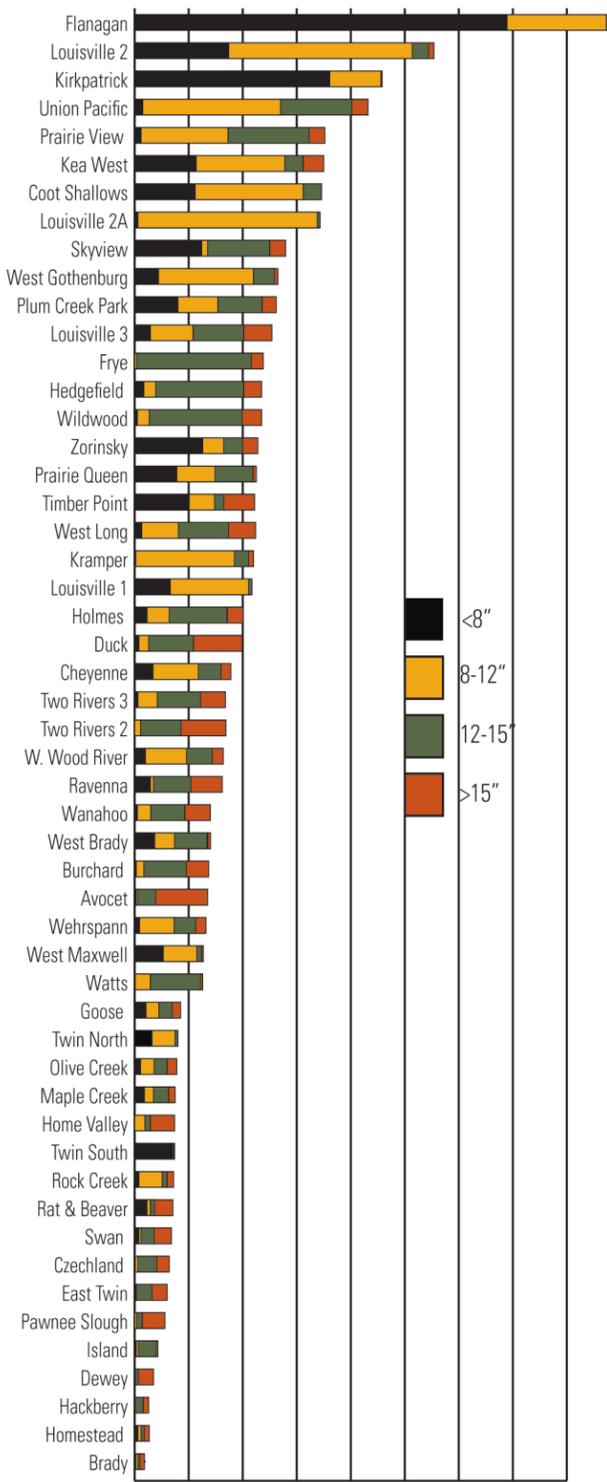
## BLUEGILL

Per Trap Net



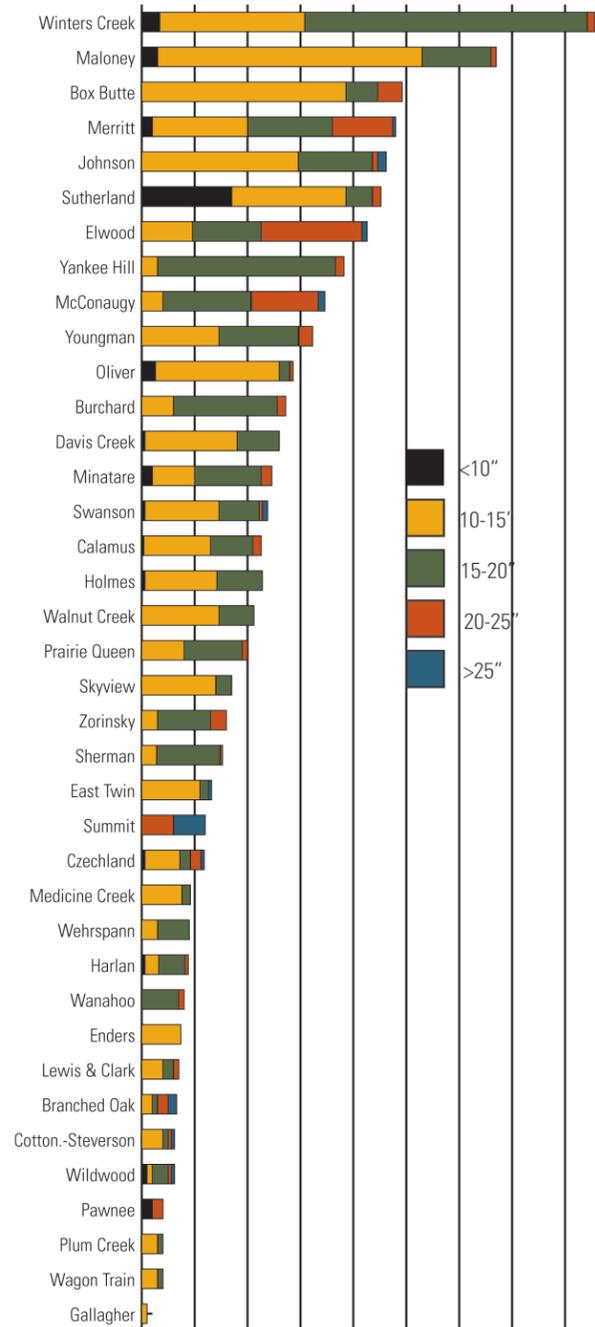
## LARGEMOUTH BASS

Per Hour Electrofishing



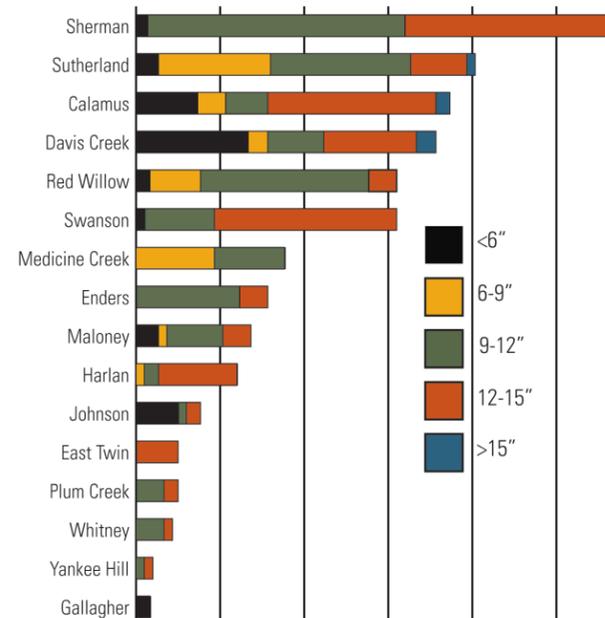
## WALLEYE

Per Gill Net



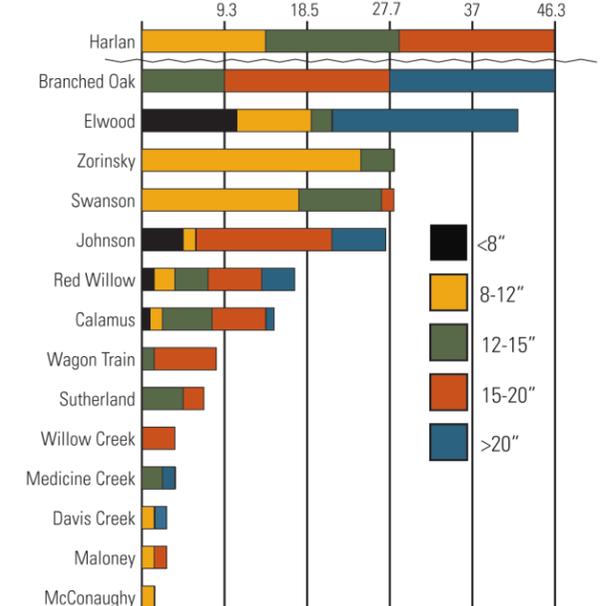
## WHITE BASS

Per Gill Net



## WIPER

Per Gill Net



# A GUIDE TO FISHING NEBRASKA IN 2020

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 fishing. High water levels in 2019 meant more habitat in which walleyes could disperse, and more water will mean more fish in coming years. The highest total sampling rate of walleyes in the fall of 2019 was at **Winters Creek, Maloney, Box Butte, Merritt** and **Johnson reservoirs**. **Winters Creek, Johnson, Maloney** and **Minatare** will be best in the state for eating-size, 15- to 20-inch walleyes in 2020. Anglers targeting bigger walleyes should plan trips to **Merritt, Elwood, McConaughy** and **Swanson**. Smaller reservoirs in eastern Nebraska are less ideal as walleye habitats, but several of those will offer some good walleye opportunities this year; **Yankee Hill, Burchard, Youngman** and **Summit** will offer both numbers of walleyes as well as some big fish.

## WHITE BASS

White bass also are open-water predator fish that thrive in Nebraska's largest reservoirs. The best white bass fisheries in 2020 will be found at **Sherman, Sutherland, Calamus, Davis Creek, Red Willow** and **Swanson**. Of those, **Davis Creek, Calamus, Sutherland** and **Sherman** will be best for some white bass larger than 15 inches.

## WIPERS

Wipers are white bass X striped bass hybrids, and like their parent species, they also are most successful in open-water habitats – Nebraska's largest reservoirs. **Harlan, Elwood, Swanson, Johnson** and **Red Willow** reservoirs will offer the most wipers for anglers in 2020. However, most of the wipers sampled at **Harlan** were small. Anglers looking for trophy wipers in 2020

will find **Elwood** and **Johnson** hard to beat. Smaller reservoirs in eastern Nebraska are less ideal wiper habitats, but anglers will have some good opportunities to catch wipers from **Branched Oak** and **Zorinsky** reservoirs, including some big fish at **Branched Oak**, where all wipers must be released.

## BLUEGILL

Anglers can take their kids to catch some "sunnies" on just about any small body of water in Nebraska. Our state can produce numbers of 8-inch-and-larger bluegills as well, and there will be a bunch of waters that will do that this year. Small- to medium-size reservoirs across Nebraska offer some of the best bluegill fishing every year, with **Olive Creek, Kramper, Hedgefield, Maple Creek** and **Burchard** topping that list in 2020. Nebraska's Sandhills lakes offer lower densities of bluegills, but can produce some trophy 'gills with the biggest fish in excess of one pound. The best Sandhills lakes will be **Swan** and **West Long**. Anglers should remember that bluegills that big are rare fish and worthy of having a picture taken and then returned to the water. Pits like **West Wood River** and **Coot Shallows** interstate lakes will also produce some quality bluegills this year.

## CRAPPIES

Crappies are another panfish that can be found throughout Nebraska, with anglers always on the look for waters that will produce fish larger than 10 inches. This year's best crappie fishing in Nebraska will be at **Sherman, Whitney, Branched Oak, Wildwood** and **Wehrspann** reservoirs. **Red Willow Reservoir** will be one to watch in coming years as it continues to fill with water and the crappie population continues to expand. Again Nebraska's sandhill lakes

tend to have lower densities of panfish like crappies, but can offer some of the biggest, fattest, black crappies in the state; **Dewey, Home Valley** and **Hackberry** lakes will be the best of the sandhills this year.

## LARGEMOUTH BASS

Water bodies that offer stable water levels, clean water and an abundance of shallow water cover, especially aquatic vegetation, are those in which largemouth bass thrive. In Nebraska, small reservoirs, Sandhills lakes, pits and ponds tend to provide the best of that habitat. Some of those waters can have high densities of bass, which tend to produce excellent panfish fishing as largemouth bass keep panfish numbers in check. However, waters with lots of bass may not necessarily be the best for producing big bass. When looking at the sampling data for the best bass waters, those with the highest numbers of bass may not offer the best opportunities to catch fish larger than 15 inches. On the other hand, lower densities of largemouth bass can offer anglers the best opportunities to catch bass larger than 15 inches. Some small- to medium-size reservoirs that will be particularly good this year include **Timber Point, Wanahoo, Burchard, Wildwood** and **Hedgefield**. Pits and ponds are some of the best bass fisheries in the state; **Two Rivers lakes 2 and 3, Ravenna, Louisville No. 3** and **Pawnee Slough** will offer some excellent bass fishing in 2020. Sandhill lakes can also be good largemouth habitats and produce some pretty, chunky bass; **Avocet, Duck, West Long, Home Valley, Rat and Beaver**, and **Swan** lakes will be good bets for some 15-inch-and-larger bass. Private waters 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. Check out the Public Access Atlas at [OutdoorNebraska.gov/PublicAccessAtlas](http://OutdoorNebraska.gov/PublicAccessAtlas).

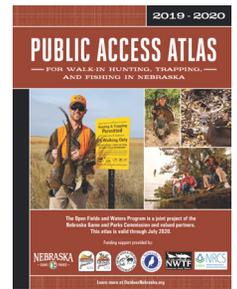
## CHANNEL CATFISH

Channel catfish are a popular fish in Nebraska, and are found widely across the state. **Branched Oak, Big Alkali, Plum Creek Canyon, Sutherland** and **Enders** will all offer good numbers of 16-inch-and-larger channel cats in 2020. For larger cats, anglers should plan to fish **Willard Meyer, Wagon Train, Olive Creek, Wildwood** and **Iron Horse Trail** this year. 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. Catch and release of catfish is required at **Wildwood**. 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 also are some areas where public access is available on Nebraska rivers through the Open Fields and Waters Program.

## OTHER SPECIES

Besides the species highlighted in the fish-sampling graphs, there are a variety of other fish that can be pursued.

**REDEAR SUNFISH** – Nebraska offers opportunities to catch other sunfish species like redear sunfish at **West Gothenburg** interstate lake and **Rock Creek Lake**.



**SMALLMOUTH BASS** – Try **War Axe, Johnson** and **McConaughy**, as well as the **Missouri River** in northeast Nebraska.

**BLUE CATFISH** – These can be found in reservoirs like **Swanson, Medicine Creek, Pawnee** and **Branched Oak**. Look to the **Missouri River** in southeast Nebraska for the biggest blue cats in the state – some fish weighing triple digits.

**FLATHEAD CATFISH** – This large catfish species can be found in the **Missouri River**, as well as in reservoirs like **Harlan, Sherman, Branched Oak** and the **Tri-County** canal system. All flatheads at Branched Oak must be released immediately after capture and anglers should consider releasing big flatties on other fisheries as well.

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

**SAUGEYE** – Stocking of this walleye X sauger hybrid is producing some excellent opportunities for anglers in **Big Alkali, Meadowlark, Pawnee, Medicine Creek, Big Indian 11a** and **Whitney**.

**YELLOW PERCH** – In 2020, some of the best yellow perch fishing will be found at **Dewey, Crane, Duck, Clear (Brown County)** and **West Long** lakes in the Nebraska sandhills.

**NORTHERN PIKE** – Sandhill lakes are some of the best northern pike habitats as well. Lakes on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge, **Dewey** and **Hackberry**, will be some of Nebraska's most popular pike fisheries. **Box Butte Reservoir** in the Panhandle also has an excellent pike fishery. Reservoirs in southern and eastern Nebraska are typically are too warm for cool-water northern pike, but **Wanahoo** is relatively new



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and has some pike habitat now. Remember that all pike are required to be released at Wanahoo.

**MUSKELLUNGE** – This “king of freshwater sport fish” also can be found in Nebraska waters. To catch this trophy, toothy predator, anglers should target **Merritt, Calamus** and **Wagon Train** reservoirs, as well as **Mormon Island West, Grand Island's L.E. Ray Lake, Timber Point** and **Zorinsky**.

**TROUT** – Nebraska also has waters that support cold-water fish year-round where anglers can pursue a Trout Slam catching rainbows, browns, brooks, and possibly even cutthroats and tigers (brown trout X brook trout hybrids). 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** and **Ninemile** creeks are favorites among trout anglers. In 2020, the rainbow trout fishing at **Lake Ogallala** will continue to be good, and anglers might even catch some cutties from the **White River** and **Soldier Creek** in Nebraska's Pine Ridge.

Photo: NGPC/Nebraskaland