FISHING FORECAST

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A GUIDE TO FISHING NEBRASKA IN 2022
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WALLEYE
Nebraska’s largest waters are the state’s best walleye habitats and consistently provide the best fishing. The highest total sampling rates of walleyes in the fall of 2021 were at Winters Creek, Merritt, Big Alkali, Sutherland, and McConaughy. Big Alkali, Winters Creek, Maloney, and Sutherland will be particularly good for eating-size, 15- to 20-inch walleyes in 2022. Anglers targeting big walleyes should plan trips to McConaughy, Merritt, Box Butte, Sherman, and Elwood reservoirs. Smaller waters are less ideal as walleye habitats, but several of those will at least offer some walleye opportunities this year. Youngman, Burchard, and Maple Creek will offer anglers a chance to catch walleyes in eastern Nebraska while anglers in western Nebraska should check out Oliver.

WHITE BASS
White bass also are open-water predator fish that thrive in Nebraska’s largest reservoirs. The most white bass in 2022 will be found at Harlan, Yankee Hill, Swanson, Enders, and Davis Creek. Most of the white bass at Harlan will be less than 12 inches this year, but that big-year-class should produce great fishing in years to come. Also, Calamus, Minatare, Johnson, and Lewis & Clark will offer fewer white bass overall, but bigger white bass: fish larger than 12 inches and even some 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. Swanson, Elwood, Davis Creek, Calamus, and McConaughy reservoirs will offer the most wipers in 2022. Harlan and Red Willow also will offer some good wiper fishing this year. Anglers looking for trophy wipers in 2022 will find Elwood and McConaughy hard to beat, but Johnson and Branched Oak have some big fish, too. All wipers caught at Branched Oak must be released immediately.

BLUEGILL
Anglers can take their kids to catch some “sunnies” on just about any small body of water in Nebraska. The best waters always are the ones that produce numbers of 8-inch-and-larger bluegills. Small- to medium-size reservoirs across Nebraska offer some of the best bluegill fishing every year, with Yankee Hill, Wildwood, Walnut Creek, Summit, Box Butte and Willard Meyer topping the list in 2022. Nebraska’s Sandhills lakes offer lower densities of bluegills but can produce some trophy bluegills, with the biggest fish exceeding 1 pound. The best Sandhills lakes in 2022 will be Avocet, Frye and Watts. Anglers should remember that bluegills that big are rare fish and worthy of having a picture taken and then returned to the water. Pits, ponds and oxbows like Fort Kearny No. 7, Ravenna, Windmill No. 2 and No. 6 and Louisvile No. 1 also will produce some quality bluegills this year.

CRAPPIES
Crappies are another panfish that can be found throughout Nebraska, with the quest being finding waters that will produce fish larger than 10 inches. Whitney Reservoir is a perennial favorite and again will be in a class by itself in 2022. Other reservoirs that will be good for crappies this year will be Hedgefield, Sherman, Big Indian, Homestead, Burchard, Walnut Creek and Red Willow. Sandhills lakes tend to have lower densities of panfish like crappies, but can offer some of the biggest, fattest, black crappies in the state. Crescent and Home Valley lakes will be the best of the Sandhills lakes 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 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 Wanahoo, Burchard, Holmes, Oxbow Trail and Wehrspann. Pits, ponds and oxbows are some of the best bass fisheries in the state, Fremont Slough, East Hershey, Ravenna, Birdwood and Arnold will offer some excellent bass fishing in 2022. Sandhills lakes should be particularly good for some pretty, chunky bass this year. Duck, Rice, Frye, and Goose 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 public, walk-in access. Refer to the Public Access Atlas for those waters (outdoornebraska.gov/publicaccessatlas).

CHANNEL CATFISH
Channel catfish are a popular fish in Nebraska and are found widely across the state. Pawnee, Minatare, East Twin, Branched Oak, Big Indian and Sutherland reservoirs will all offer good numbers of 16-inch-and-larger channel cats in 2022. For cats longer than 24 inches, fish Maple Creek, Kramper, Medicine Creek, Meadowlark, Iron Horse Trail and Merritt 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 that large. Special regulations apply to channel catfish caught at Merritt. 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. In addition, check out the Open Fields and Waters Program for additional access to warm-water streams and rivers on private lands.

OTHER SPECIES
Nebraska is known for its diverse fishing opportunities. Besides the species highlighted in the fish-sampling graphs on the reverse side, there are a variety of other fish that can be pursued.

In addition to bluegills, Nebraska offers opportunities to catch other sunfish species, like REDEAR SUNFISH, at Louisille SRA, Prairie Queen, Bowling and Walnut Creek.
SMALLMOUTH BASS can be caught at Johnson and McConaughy, as well as the Missouri River in northeastern Nebraska.

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

FLATHEAD CATFISH 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 also should consider releasing big flatties on other fisheries.

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

SAUGEYE are a walleye X sauger hybrid and stocking is producing some excellent angling opportunities for them at Big Indian 11a, Willard Meyer, Olive Creek, Red Willow, and Meadowlark.

YELLOW PERCH always are a tasty and popular panfish; in 2022 some of the best yellow perch fishing will be found at Avocet, Dewey and West Long lakes in the Sandhills.

Sandhills lakes are some of the best NORTHERN PIKE habitats in the state, as well; Dewey and Crescent lakes will be best, along with Box Butte Reservoir. Reservoirs in southern and eastern Nebraska typically are too warm for cool-water northern pike, but Wanahoo and Flanagan are relatively new and currently have some pike habitat and pike fishing. All pike must be released at Wanahoo and all fish must be released at Flanagan.

MUSKELLUNGE also can be found in Nebraska. To catch this trophy, toothy predator, anglers should target Merritt, Calamus and Zorinsky reservoirs, as well as Mormon Island West and L.E. Ray Lake. Cottonwood-Steverson, deep in the Sandhills, also has an excellent population.

Nebraska also has waters that support cold-water fish year-round where anglers can pursue a TROUT Slam by catching rainbows, browns, brooks, and possibly even cutthroats and tigers (brown trout and brook trout hybrids). Most of these cold-water streams are in western and northern parts of the state; the East Branch of Verdigre Creek, Long Pine, Soldiers, and Ninemile creeks are favorites among trout anglers. In 2022, 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 the Pine Ridge.

Photo: Nebraskaland Magazine/NGPC