

2014 Northeast District Flood Control Reservoir Survey Results

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
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Several flood control reservoirs dot the landscape of the Northeast District ranging in size from approximately 25 to 700 surface acres. The primary species making up the fish communities in most of these lakes are largemouth bass, bluegill, black crappie, and channel catfish. However, Willow Creek Reservoir near Pierce is the largest of the flood control reservoirs in the Northeast District and management is geared toward a large reservoir fishery that includes walleye, wipers, white bass, and channel catfish. It also provides some very good opportunities for crappie anglers. Walleye are found in some of the smaller reservoirs also but in relatively low numbers, the exception being Maple Creek Reservoir near Leigh where very good numbers of walleye have been observed the last couple of years. Most of the flood control reservoirs receive annual stockings of channel catfish and about half are stocked with walleye on an annual basis. Species in these lakes other than the channel catfish and walleye maintain their populations through natural reproduction and recruitment.

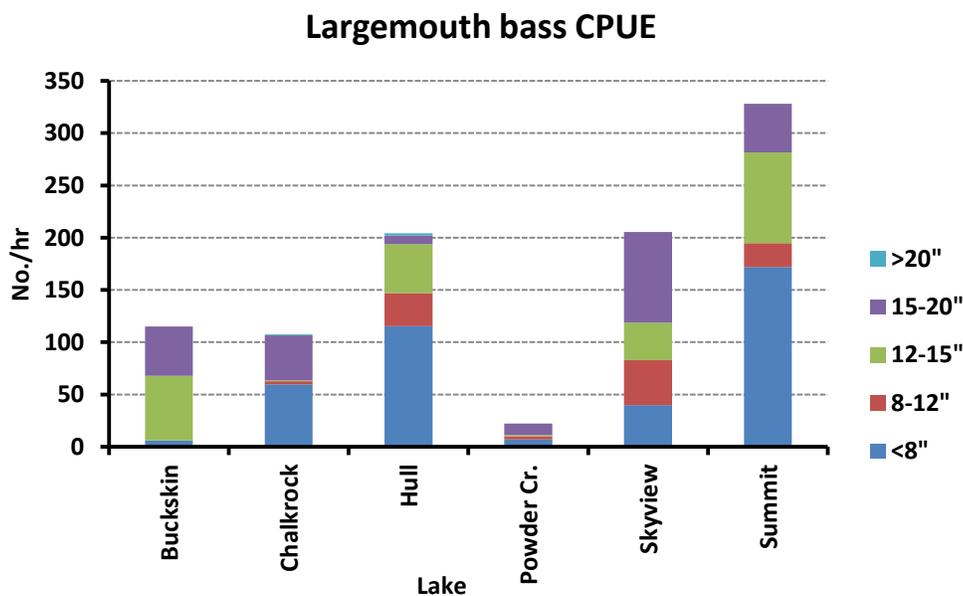
In 2015, another flood control reservoir will be added to the pool of fishing opportunities in this part of the state. Kramper Lake, located on the Danish Alps Recreation Area just east of Hubbard, will encompass approximately 250 surface acres and has been initially stocked with largemouth bass, bluegill, black crappie, channel catfish, and walleye. It is projected to open in July 2015.

The spring of 2014 exhibited somewhat unstable weather patterns that likely affected panfish catch rates in our frame nets. Thus, similar to 2013 with the cool spring, the results may not adequately represent the fish populations in some of the lakes.

Many of the Northeast District Lakes contain dense beds of aquatic vegetation on a seasonal basis. Curly-leaf pondweed is found in this area and is classified as an Aquatic Invasive Species. Those lakes that develop especially dense stands of curly-leaf include Pibel, Grove, Summit, Buckskin, & Maskenthine. In a typical year curly-leaf pondweed begins growing aggressively as the water temperature warms in the month of April, peaks in density in May and early to mid-June, and dies back to more tolerable levels by the first part of July. **Anglers are reminded of the new regulations that went into effect in 2013 requiring any boat that has been on a waterbody to drain all water from all compartments, equipment, or containers before leaving the launch area and to remove all aquatic vegetation from the boat and trailer before leaving the launch area.** These

new regulations are meant to control the spread of aquatic invasive species such as zebra mussels, Eurasian watermilfoil, and the aforementioned curly-leaf pondweed to name a few. Additional information about aquatic invasive species and preventing their distribution can be found in the 2013-2014 Nebraska Fishing Guide (pp. 28-29) and at the University of Nebraska Invasive Species website: <http://www.neinvasives.com>. More information for Northeast District lakes such as location, boat ramps, species present, special regulations etc. can also be found in the Nebraska Fishing Guide.

Largemouth bass

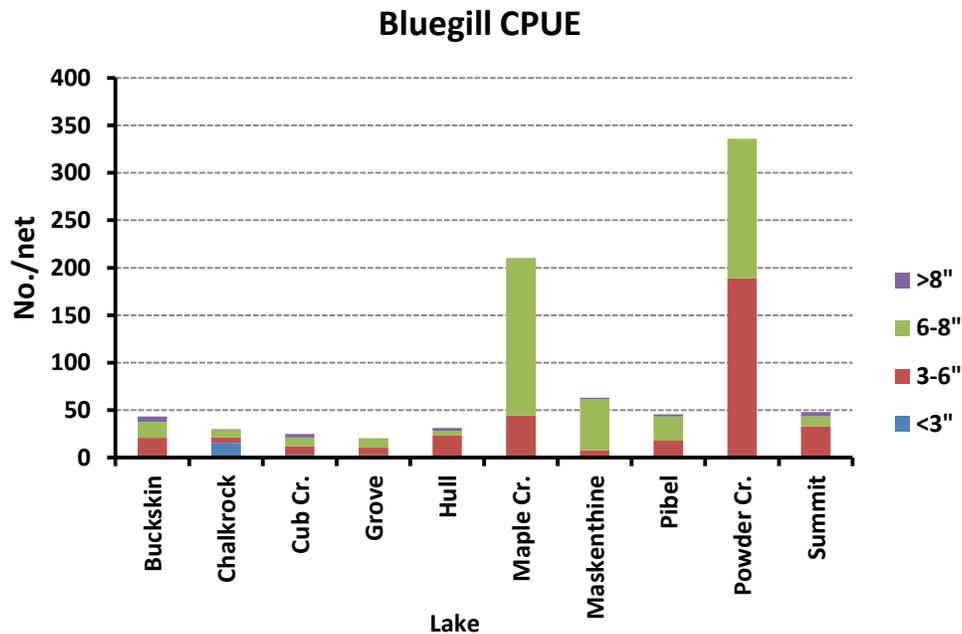


Bass are collected by night-time electrofishing efforts that are conducted in the spring of the year. A catch rate of at least 150 bass per hour of electrofishing is desirable. This minimum catch rate not only equates to good catch rates for anglers seeking bass but also limits panfish recruitment so that desirable growth rates and size structure on those panfish can be maintained.

With the possible exception of Powder Creek, each of the lakes sampled should provide quality angling opportunities for those seeking bass in 2015. Excellent catch rates and good size distribution were apparent in five of the lakes, including some larger fish. Powder Creek Reservoir continues to support a low-density bass population but does hold some pretty nice fish. It was encouraging to see the smaller bass (those less than 8") in the sample there. Very few of those have been observed in the reservoir since 2006. Other flood control reservoirs in the Northeast District that should provide good bass angling opportunities but were not

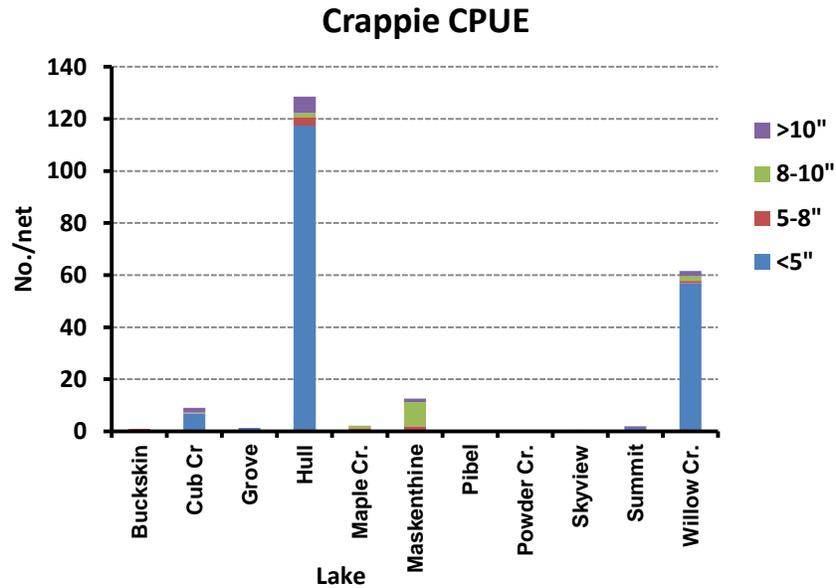
sampled in 2014 include Grove, Maskenthine, Pibel, Cub Creek, and Maple Creek Lakes. Of the six lakes sampled, Buckskin, Powder Creek, and Skyview are managed with a 21-inch minimum length limit while the others fall under the statewide 15-inch minimum length limit.

Bluegill



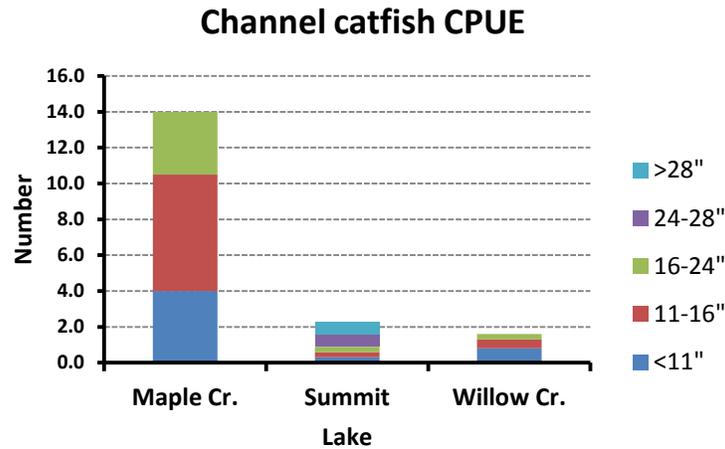
Frame net sampling for bluegill also takes place in the spring, from late April through June. Eleven flood control reservoirs were sampled in 2014. Summit, Buckskin, Maple Creek, Maskenthine, and Pibel Lakes will likely be the best bets for nicer bluegill in 2015. As mentioned earlier, unstable weather patterns likely limited the success of the frame netting efforts in some lakes in the spring of 2014, thus size structure and abundance may have been underestimated in some of the lakes. However, with the exception of Skyview and Powder Creek, opportunities for a decent day of bluegill fishing are available in the other lakes as well. Skyview was left off the graph due to its high catch rate of over 800 per net, which would have made it difficult to distinguish the size distributions for the other lakes in the graph. Less than 1% of the bluegill collected in Skyview exceeded 6 inches. Size structure was only slightly better in Powder Creek with only a small proportion exceeding 6 ½ inches. Powder Creek bluegill are competing with an over-abundance of hybrid sunfish, bullheads, and green sunfish resulting in poor bluegill size structure. Thus, those two lakes may be a good to take a youngster to for lots of action but unfortunately there won't be many "keepers". Maple Creek looks similar to Powder Creek but most of those fish in the 6-8 inch range are 7 inches or longer.

Crappie



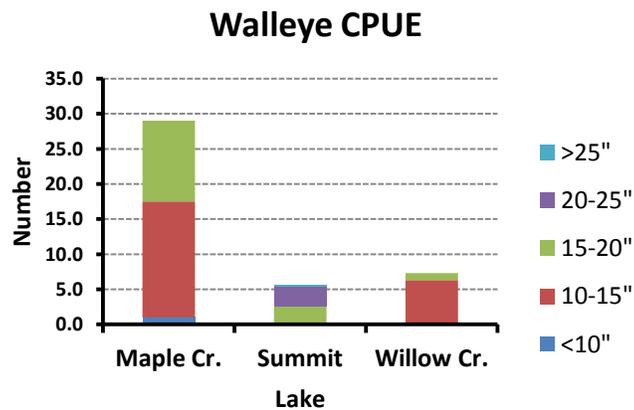
Crappie catch was quite low in most of the flood control reservoirs sampled, likely due to timing and/or weather patterns. Additionally, dense stands of vegetation hamper crappie sampling at times and spring sampling of crappie can be hit or miss depending on spawning activity. All of the lakes except Willow Creek that are included in the graph were sampled in the spring. The Willow Creek catch rate is based on fall netting efforts and showed promise for the future with what appeared to be a strong 2014 year class (represented by those fish less than 5 inches). However, there were some nice crappie in the mix also, so it shouldn't be overlooked for angling opportunities in 2015. Similarly, Hull Lake near Butte had a high number of small fish with a few larger ones present. While samples were quite small in the remaining lakes; Grove, Buckskin Hills, Cub Creek, Summit, and Maskenthine likely hold higher numbers of crappie than the netting data suggest.

Channel catfish



Fall gill netting is the standard method for sampling channel catfish populations and three flood control reservoirs were surveyed with gill nets in 2014. Netting at Maple Creek indicated a fairly abundant catfish population but lacking some larger fish, likely due to the lake being a fairly recent addition to the fishing opportunities in this part of the state. Summit revealed a low number of catfish with some nice fish while Willow Creek lacked those larger fish. Willow Creek did experience a die-off of channel catfish in the spring of 2014 which would account for the lack of larger fish. Incidental catches of catfish in frame nets indicate that there are quality opportunities for catfish (both numbers and size) in other lakes in the district also, including: Buckskin, Powder Creek, Pibel, and Maskenthine.

Walleye



The 2014 walleye catch in Willow Creek was the highest since 2008 with a catch rate around 7 per net. The majority of the catch was made up of age-1 fish that averaged about 13 inches in length. Those fish should easily reach 15 inches in

length in 2015. Willow Creek is the only reservoir on the list that could be considered a "walleye lake" but there are a few others that do provide some opportunity. Additional sampling indicated that Summit Lake has a relatively low-density walleye population with very good size structure and that Maple Creek should provide anglers with good catch rates on walleye with a fair proportion being harvestable-size fish. Maple Creek is a relatively new reservoir and survival of stocked walleye has been excellent thus far. It's doubtful that these high numbers of walleye will be maintained in the future as the fishery continues to develop. Buckskin was not sampled with fall gill nets but is known for producing occasional walleye also. Walleye populations in these lakes are maintained through stocking. Approximately 2-inch fingerlings are annually stocked in all of the lakes except Summit and Willow Creek which are stocked with 3 to 5 day old fry.

Other Species

White bass were introduced into Willow Creek Reservoir and, while numbers are still relatively low, there is some opportunity there. The objective of the white bass introduction was to provide a self-sustaining population to provide summertime fishing and take advantage of the shad prey base.

Those interested in additional information on these and other lakes in the Northeast region can contact Jeff Schuckman (jeff.schuckman@nebraska.gov) or Phil Chvala (phil.chvala@nebraska.gov) at 402-370-3374.