

Trout Fishing *in Nebraska's Streams*





A large brown trout is pulled from the south fork of the Dismal River in Hooker County.

Trout in Nebraska

Though few anglers associate trout fishing with Nebraska, some historical accounts, but little scientific evidence, indicate cutthroat trout might have been native to northern streams now within the state's borders.

Today, three species of trout, all imports, live in Nebraska. The brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) was introduced from Europe, the rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) was imported from the West Coast, and the brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) was brought from the East Coast.

Most of Nebraska's trout-supporting streams flow through private land in the northern and western areas of the state; anglers must receive landowner permission to fish in streams on private property. However, there are some public-access areas that offer quality trout fishing in Nebraska.

Trout require the right habitat to live and reproduce. Trout streams must have clean, cold water, vegetated banks, and a tree canopy to maintain cool water temperatures on sunny summer days. Some Sandhills trout streams lack tree cover. To compensate, they are fed by numerous coldwater springs and streams, which add cool water to the flows, maintaining acceptable temperatures.

Several Nebraska streams have naturally reproducing brown trout populations, and brook trout maintain their numbers through natural reproduction in some Pine Ridge streams. Because rainbows spawn mainly in late winter and early spring, few streams have self-sustaining rainbow populations. Most Nebraska waters that have rainbow trout depend on regular stockings of hatchery-raised fish.

Brown Trout

The brown trout is Nebraska's most abundant trout species in streams. It is the toughest and most adaptable of the trout; it tolerates warmer and less clear water than either rainbows or brookies. The brown trout also can grow faster and live longer than the state's other trout species. Often found in rivers and streams, browns reproduce naturally if gravel deposits are present.

The brown is a handsome trout. The light brown on its back turns to a lighter yellow-brown on its sides and belly. It has prominent black spots, and red or orange spots accented with halos on its back, sides and dorsal fin. The tail fin is usually free of spots.

The brown trout is most at home in streams that offer protection of abundant, dark hiding places, such as undercut banks, tree branches hanging into the water and fallen logs.

The Nebraska state record for a brown

trout is 20 pounds and 1 ounce. The fish was taken from the Snake River in 1973 on a grasshopper.

Rainbow Trout

Most Nebraska anglers recognize rainbow trout. In 2000 the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission stocked 60,060 keeper rainbows through its Urban Fisheries and Winter Trout Fishing programs.

Rainbows are also stocked at a popular put-and-take trout lake at Two Rivers State Recreation Area near Venice, in Lake Ogallala, and in Panhandle ponds and pits.

Rainbow trout are also present in numerous streams where they naturally reproduce at varying levels depending on available spawning gravel and the quality of the habitat.

The rainbow is torpedo-shaped. It has a short head and short tail, which is slightly forked in adult fish. Its back is dark green and the color fades to silver on the sides and turns to a light-yellow or cream on the belly. A contrasting stripe ranging from pink to bright red runs horizontally along the lateral line on its sides from head to tail. It is speckled with black spots on the body, the tail and dorsal, or top, fins.

An active fish, the rainbow well deserves its reputation as a wild, cartwheeling fighter when hooked.

A Nebraska record 14-pound, 2-ounce rainbow trout was taken from a Keith County canal in 1975 on a nightcrawler.

Brook Trout

The brook trout is Nebraska's least abundant and smallest trout species – the state record tipping the scales at only 5 pounds, 1 ounce. It is also the least adaptable, requiring streams with moderate current and cold, crystal-clear water that sunlight can easily penetrate, promoting the growth of aquatic vegetation. Most small, meandering Pine Ridge streams fit that category perfectly, especially the headwaters of larger streams where brook trout thrive.

The brook trout is the most colorful trout. It is easily identified by the beautiful red spots with blue aureoles (or halos) on its sides, the dark, wavy lines (called vermiculations) and forest-green swirls on its back and dorsal fin, and by the pink or reddish color of the lower fins that are delicately edged with white. Brook trout are at their most colorful during the spawning season, which occurs from mid-September to late-October. The tail, or caudal fin, is very slightly forked, sometimes appearing to be almost square, accounting for its nickname, "squaretail."

In the early 19th century, the brook trout



Marked by prominent spots, often red or orange and accented with halos, **brown trout** (*Salmo trutta*) are more wary and adaptable than brook or rainbow trout. Browns reproduce in Nebraska streams that have adequate deposits of gravel.



Identified by the small black spots on the entire tail, dorsal fins and side, and by the pink lateral band, the **rainbow trout** (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) is a mainstay in coldwater lakes and streams in northern and western Nebraska. In waters with little or no natural reproduction, rainbows are seasonally stocked from Game and Parks Commission hatcheries.



The colorful **brook trout** (*Salvelinus fontinalis*), which usually grows to a maximum of about 10 inches in Nebraska streams with naturally reproducing populations, is a trophy at any size. Small Sandhills and Pine Ridge coldwater streams, including Soldier Creek above Fort Robinson State Park, harbor brook trout populations.

FISH ART BY DUANE RAVER, UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

was among the most sought-after fish in the country, and it is said to be responsible for the popularity of trout fishing in the United States. Though brookies were widespread in the 1880s, their numbers and availability have dwindled, primarily because pollution, silty conditions and warm water temperatures have reduced suitable habitat.

The state record brook was taken from Pawnee Springs near North Platte in 1965.

Pine Ridge

Pine Ridge streams flow slowly through the rough, wooded country in the northwestern Panhandle. Narrow and shallow, these cold, clear waters are spring-fed and lined with dense vegetation. Often small enough for an angler to step across, these streams are home to brook and brown trout. The best fishing usually occurs during the spring and again in the fall.

Monroe Creek

The creek is northwest of Harrison in Sioux County.

Brook trout.

There is public access for about 1 mile on Gilbert-Baker Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The rest of the creek is accessible only through private property and landowner permission is required. Because of normal low-water flows and

occasional flash floods, Monroe Creek has about 5 miles of trout-supporting waters. The best trout habitat is on the public area of the stream and a mile below. Because it is small, the stream cannot support heavy fishing pressure.

Sowbelly Creek

This creek is northeast of Harrison in Sioux County.

Brown and brook trout.

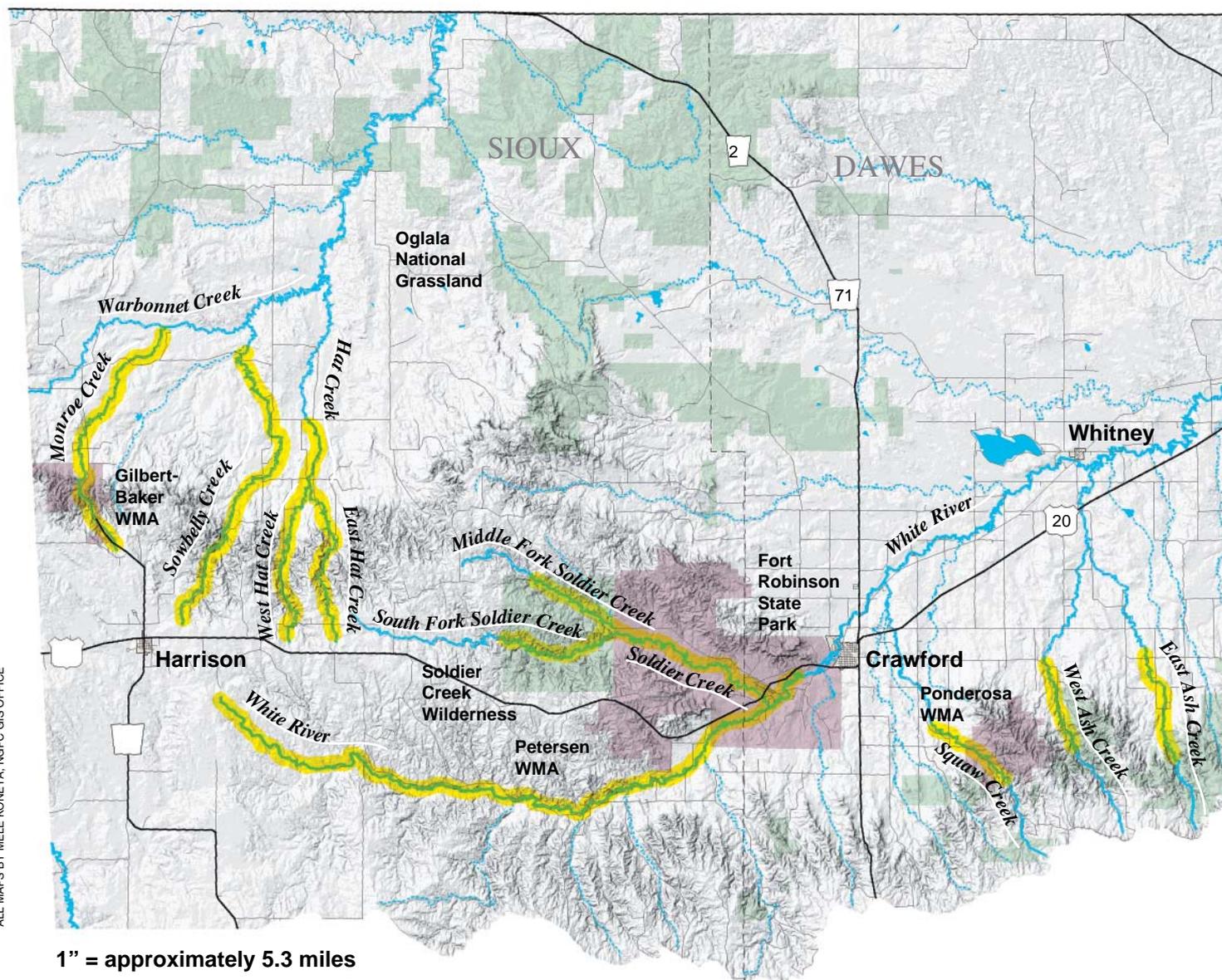
The creek is accessible only by private access; landowner permission is required. This small, low-flow stream contains 6.9 miles of trout-supporting water. Its trout habitat and spawning gravel are rated fair, but the stream has a few deep holes, which support a population of naturally reproducing brown trout.

West Hat Creek

The creek begins about 4.5 miles east of Harrison in Sioux County.

Brook trout.

Private access only, permission required. West Hat Creek is a small stream containing 4.5 miles of trout-supporting water. This



stream supports a self-sustaining brook trout population, but its small size and low flows limit productivity.

East Hat Creek

East Hat Creek begins about 6 miles east of Harrison in Sioux County.

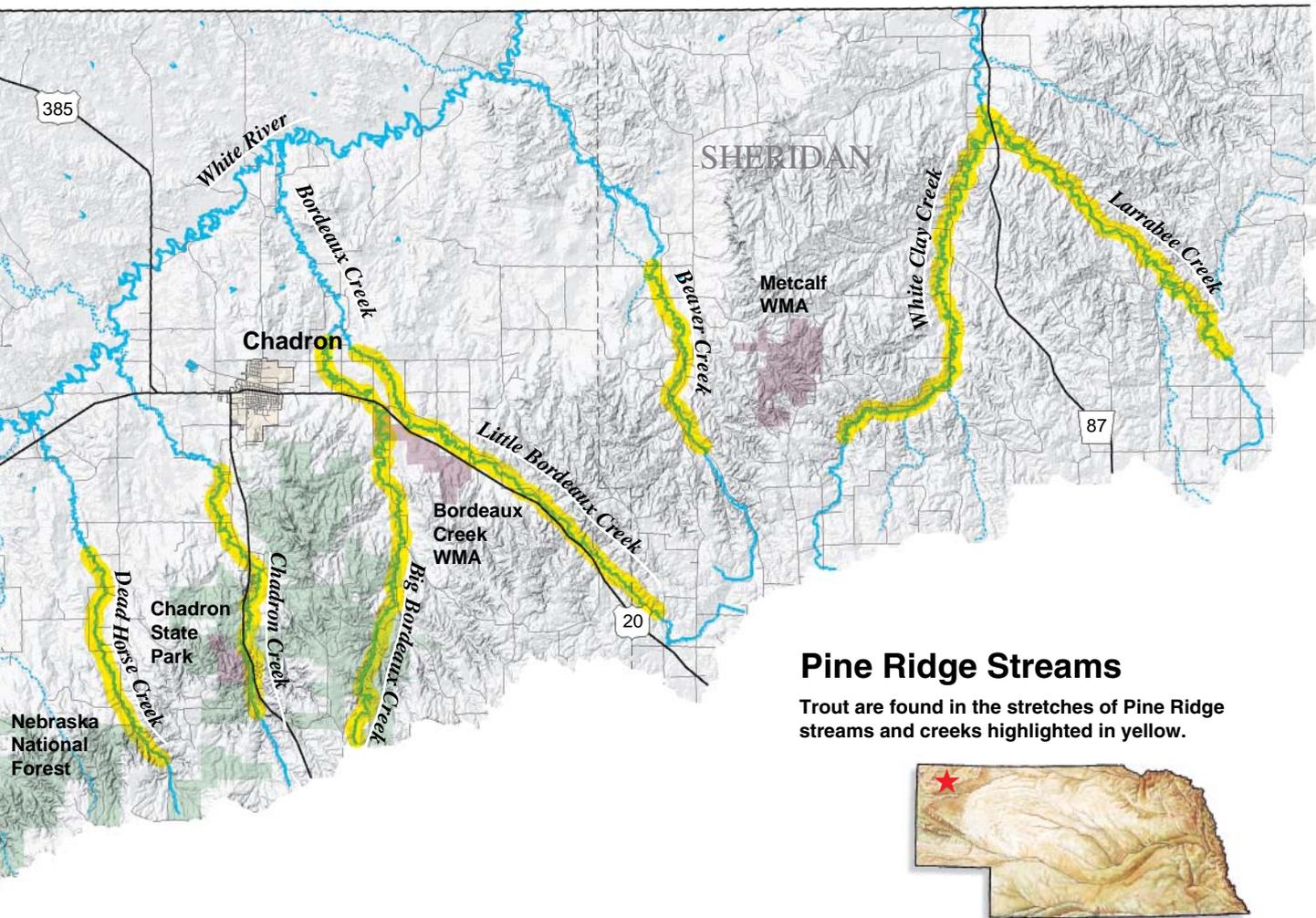
Brown and brook trout.

There is no public access. Permission is required to enter private land. East Hat Creek has about 5.5 miles of trout-supporting water. Because of limited stream flows and occasional flooding, the creek provides only fair trout fishing. Currently, brown trout is the most common species, but an effort to establish a brook trout population is underway.



BOB GRIER

Fly-fishing equipment is nestled in an antler found near a Pine Ridge stream.



Pine Ridge Streams

Trout are found in the stretches of Pine Ridge streams and creeks highlighted in yellow.



Pine Ridge (continued)

Hat Creek

Hat Creek is located 5.5 miles north and 6 miles east of Harrison in Sioux County.

Brown and brook trout.

Private access only, permission required. A 3-mile stretch of the stream supports trout. Downstream, a stretch of Hat Creek is dewatered during irrigation season. Brown and brook trout are present upstream in East and West Hat creeks.

Soldier Creek

(middle and south forks)

This stream is located in northern Sioux and Dawes counties.

Brown and brook trout.

Public access is available along most of the creek. The middle fork of Soldier Creek is fed at its origin by springs located on U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land. It runs about 13 miles and empties into the White River in Fort Robinson State Park. The primary trout waters run 8.7 miles from the creek's origin to Carter P. Johnson Lake. The creek

has fair spawning gravel and supports natural reproduction of brown and brook trout. The south fork is 7 miles long and is almost entirely within the USFS's Soldier Creek Wilderness Area. It empties into the middle branch of Soldier Creek at Fort Robinson. The south fork is limited by low flows. In 1993, brook trout were stocked in the stream in the wilderness area and it has developed into an excellent fishery. This stream offers a unique fishing experience for avid trout anglers.

White River

From its headwaters in north-central Sioux County, this river angles northeast through Dawes County. It enters South Dakota northeast of Chadron.

Rainbow and brown trout.

Nearly all the river is private access except for about 6 miles that runs through Fort Robinson State Park. Landowner permission is required to access the river on private land. A 250-year flood swept through the

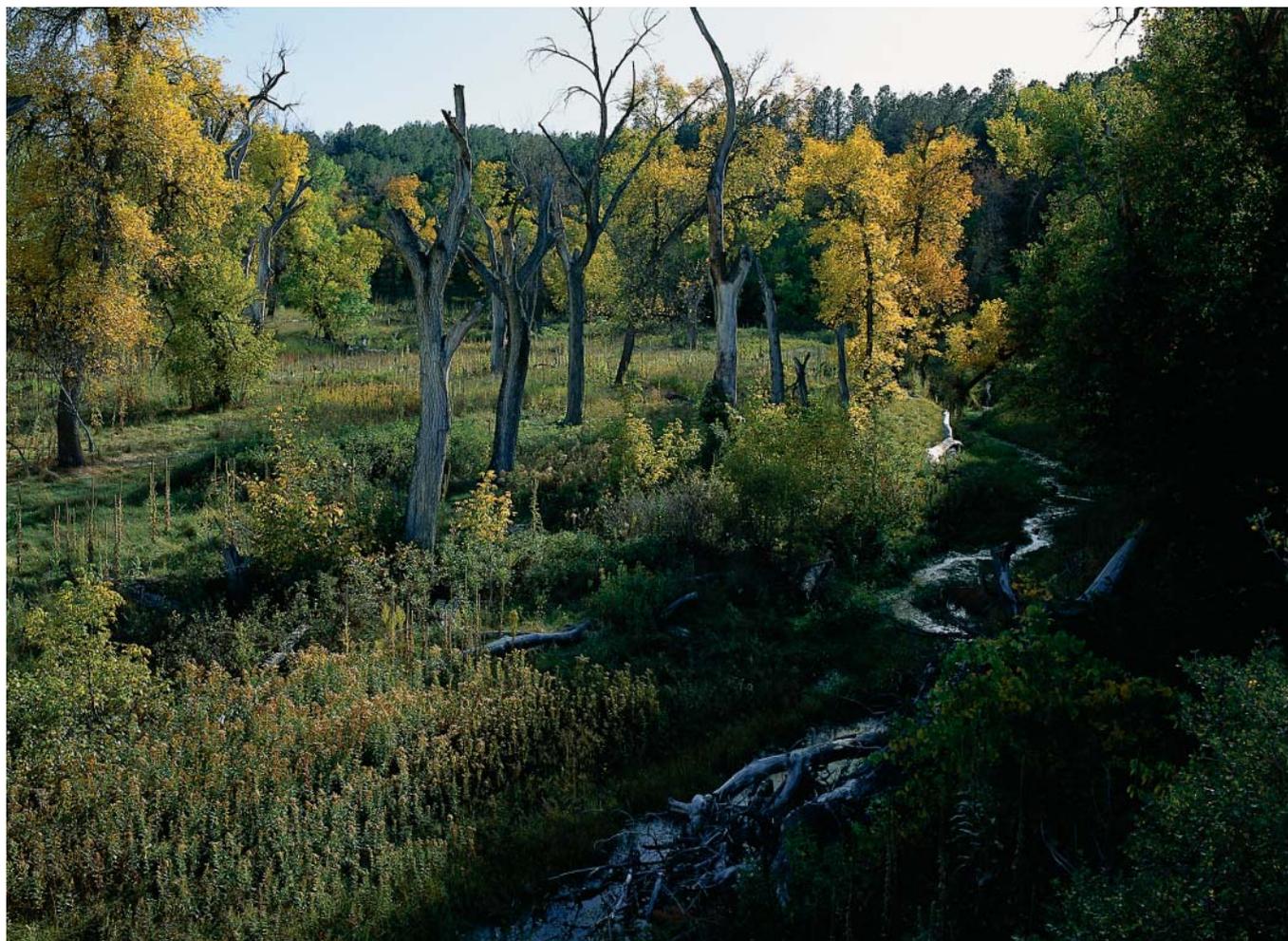
drainage in 1991, reducing trout habitat. The effect of the flood will probably continue for many years. The stretch of river between Andrews and Kreman Crossing in north-central Sioux County is the only section that is now considered to be trout-supporting. The river has been stocked extensively over the years, and it is currently stocked each year with 1,000 keeper brown trout and 1,000 keeper rainbow trout. Cattle grazing along the stream in privately owned areas has reduced trout habitat. The trout-holding habitat of the White River could be greatly increased through stream enhancement projects if funding becomes available. Natural reproduction of brown trout occurs in the upper reaches of the river.

Squaw Creek

This creek is 4 miles east and 3 miles south of Crawford in Dawes County.

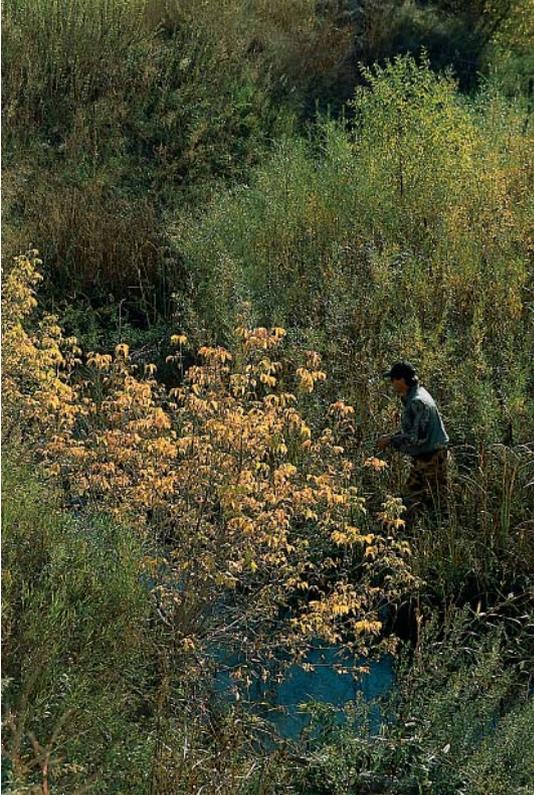
Brook trout.

About 3 miles of the stream contain trout-supporting water, most of it within the



Upper Bordeaux Creek winds through a scenic wooded area in Dawes County.

BOB GRILLEN



BOB GRIBER

Brush turning to fall colors shades the cool waters of Soldier Creek in Fort Robinson State Park near Crawford.

Ponderosa WMA, which is public access. The remainder of the creek is private access, where landowner permission is required to enter. The creek often has low-flow conditions and occasional flooding, but it contains excellent stream bank cover. Squaw Creek is small and does not support heavy fishing pressure; however, some stretches have excellent, self-sustaining populations of brook trout.

West Ash Creek

West Ash Creek is located 6.5 miles east of Crawford in Dawes County.

Brook trout.

About 1.5 miles of the creek flows through public land (USFS pasture 9). The rest is private access where permission is required. The creek has about 6 miles of trout-supporting water. Occasional flooding, low flows, and poor land practices have resulted in poor trout habitat. Brook trout naturally reproduce in a short stretch.

East Ash Creek

This creek is located 9 miles east of Crawford in Dawes County.

Brook trout.

There is public access along a stretch about 1.5 miles from USFS pasture 16. The rest is private access where permission is required. East Ash Creek has about 5 miles of trout-supporting water. Trout habitat is fair to poor. A short stretch of the creek, mostly on private land, has a small, naturally reproducing population of brook trout.

Dead Horse Creek

Dead Horse Creek is located 4 miles west of Chadron State Park in Dawes County.

Brown and brook trout.

This small, low-flow stream has no public access. Permission is required to enter private land. It has 7.8 miles of trout-supporting water. The stream floods and has limited trout habitat. Natural reproduction of brook trout has been documented near the stream's headwaters. The lower part of the stream is dewatered annually for irrigation.

Chadron Creek

This creek's headwaters are located just south of Chadron State Park in Dawes County, where it flows to the northwest into the White River.

Brown and brook trout.

The public access is along a short stretch in Chadron State Park. The remainder is private access, and landowner permission is required. The creek has 13.2 miles of trout-supporting water and sufficient spawning gravel to sustain natural reproduction of both brown and brook trout.

Big Bordeaux Creek

From its headwaters about 3 miles east and 3 miles south of Chadron State Park in Dawes County, this creek flows north and merges with Little Bordeaux Creek.

Brown and brook trout.

There is a short stretch of public access from Big Bordeaux Creek WMA, which is open to catch-and-release fishing only. There is additional public access from USFS pastures 35 and 37. The remainder is private access and landowner permission is required to enter.

Big Bordeaux has 16.5 miles of trout-supporting waters but limited suitable spawning gravel. A brook trout population is self-sustaining in the extreme upper reaches of the creek and brown trout naturally reproduce on a lower stretch.

Little Bordeaux Creek

Its headwaters are about 4 miles south and 9 miles east of Chadron in Dawes County. The creek flows to the northwest into Bordeaux Creek.

Brown trout.

The entire 19.4 miles of trout-supporting

water flows through private land. To enter, landowner permission is required. Trout habitat is limited, but there is a small population of naturally reproducing brown trout.

Beaver Creek

It is located 10 miles north and 2.5 miles west of Hay Springs in Sheridan County.

Brook trout.

Private access, permission required. It consists of about 2 miles of trout-supporting water with fair trout habitat. There is a small population of self-sustaining brook trout.



DARYL BAUER

This large male brook trout in spawning color was caught from Soldier Creek in October.

White Clay Creek

This creek is about 10 miles northwest of Rushville in Sheridan County and continues north into South Dakota.

Brown trout.

There is no public access. To enter private land, landowner permission is required. White Clay Creek has 20.8 miles of trout-supporting water and fair-to-poor spawning gravel deposits. In some stretches, there are excellent self-sustaining populations of brown trout.

Larabee Creek

The headwaters of Larabee Creek are located about 12 miles north of Rushville in Sheridan County. It flows for 13.7 miles before emptying into White Clay Creek.

Brook trout.

Private access, permission required. Flow is intermittent in the upper reaches and water is withdrawn from the creek downstream for irrigation. Spawning gravel is fair at best.

North Platte Valley

The North Platte Valley contains numerous streams capable of supporting natural trout reproduction. These streams are similar; they are about 30 feet wide, fast-flowing, clear, and have large areas of gravel and rock. They flow through pastures and farm fields. Shoreline vegetation is present in some areas, while in other stretches the land is farmed to the edge of the stream. In either case, anglers can walk to a stream's edge to cast for brown and rainbow trout. These waters do not freeze and can be fished in the winter.

Sheep Creeks

Sheep Creek is located along the Wyoming border north of Henry in Scotts Bluff and Sioux counties. Dry Sheep Creek's headwaters are about 10 miles north of Morrill.

Rainbow and brown trout.

There is no public access. Permission is required to enter private lands. Together

these two creeks contain about 15 miles of trout-supporting waters. Trout habitat is poor to fair with limited amounts of spawning gravel. But sufficient natural reproduction occurs to allow fishing for browns and rainbows. Both rainbows and browns were stocked in the past. Browns were stocked annually from 1985 to 1992. Currently no stockings are being conducted.

Spottedtail Creeks

Spottedtail Creek and Dry Spottedtail Creek are located north and northwest of Mitchell in Sioux and Scotts Bluff counties.

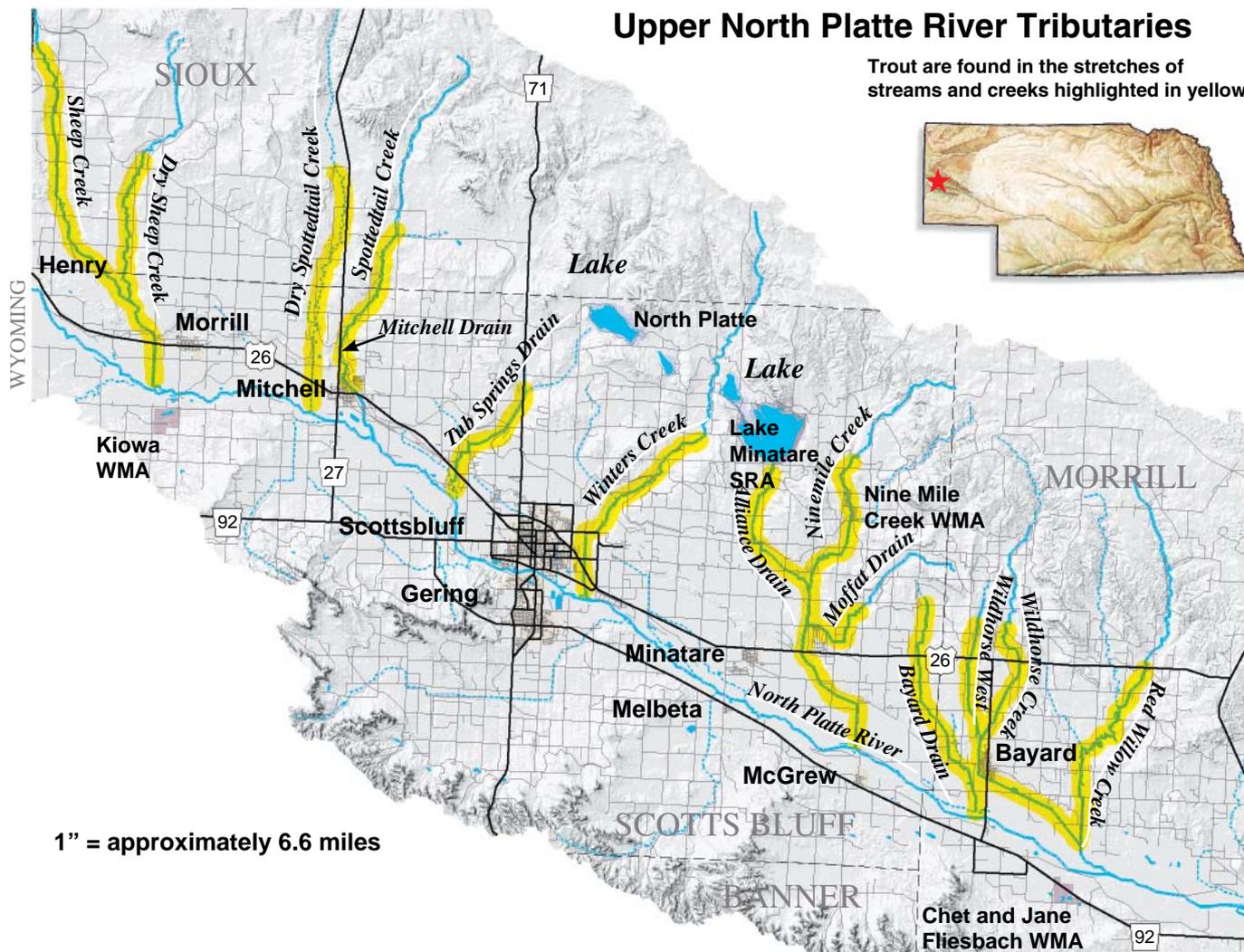
Rainbow and brown trout.

There is private access only, and permission to enter is required. Together these creeks contain about 11 miles of trout-supporting waters. They have fair stream flows but trout habitat, especially spawning gravel, is limited.

Limited natural reproduction of both browns and rainbows maintains the populations. Dry Spottedtail Creek has about five miles of good trout waters before it flows into a large irrigation canal. Spottedtail Creek has about 6 miles of trout-supporting waters between a private hatchery and the North Platte River.

Upper North Platte River Tributaries

Trout are found in the stretches of streams and creeks highlighted in yellow.



Mitchell Drain

This stream is located on the north and east sides of Mitchell in Scotts Bluff County.

Rainbow and brown trout.

Private access only, permission required. This very small stream has about 4 miles of trout-supporting water and contains areas of spawning gravel and good trout habitat. Fishing is currently maintained through natural reproduction.

Tub Springs Drain

This stream starts 7 miles north of Scottsbluff, flows around west edge of town and enters the North Platte River west of the city.

Brown trout.

The drain contains 5.5 miles of trout-supporting water with fair trout habitat and a small population of naturally reproducing brown trout. The stream is diverted into the main irrigation canal during irrigation season in section 27, just west of the Victory Hills school house, and from this point downstream the flow is very restricted. After the irrigation season the flow is restored.

Winters Creek

This stream begins northeast of Scottsbluff and flows east of the city, entering the North Platte River southeast of town.

Rainbow and brown trout.

Private access only, permission required. About 9 miles of this stream contains trout-supporting habitat. In the stream's fair habitat, rainbow and brown populations are self-reproducing. Winters Creek receives high-water releases during irrigation season.

Alliance Drain

This stream is 4 miles north of Minatare in Scotts Bluff County.

Rainbow and brown trout.

Private access only; permission is required for entry. This drain has about 7 miles of trout-supporting water with fair trout habitat and adequate spawning gravel for natural spawning of rainbow and brown trout. Most of the rainbows are less than 10 inches long, but some of the browns caught there are as long as 14 inches.

Ninemile Creek

Located east of Minatare in Scotts Bluff County, Ninemile Creek flows south into



Wading knee-deep into Ninemile Creek east of Minatare, an angler watches for a strike.

the North Platte River.

Rainbow and brown trout.

There is public access to about 1.5 miles of the stream at Nine Mile Creek WMA, but the remainder of the stream flows through private land. Permission is required to enter private property.

Ninemile Creek is the best of all the trout streams in the North Platte Valley. It contains about 11 miles of good trout-supporting waters with excellent stream flows and excellent spawning gravel in the upper end. It holds a large number of browns and a fair number of rainbows. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the North Platte Natural Resources District (NRD), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and concerned landowners are conducting stream-enhancement projects to improve both trout habitat and the land adjacent to the stream. No trout are stocked and there is ample natural reproduction. At times during the irrigation season, large amounts of water are discharged from a large canal into Ninemile Creek.

Moffat Drain

This small stream is located 2 miles east and a mile north of Minatare in Scotts Bluff County.

Rainbow and brown trout.

There is private access only and permission to enter is required. Moffat Drain contains less than a mile of trout-supporting water that flows directly into Ninemile Creek. It supports small numbers of browns and rainbows that migrate in and out of the

stream from Ninemile Creek.

Bayard Drain (Stuckenhole Creek)

This stream is west and northwest of Bayard in Scotts Bluff and Morrill counties.

Rainbow and brown trout.

No public access. Permission is required to enter private land. Bayard Drain consists of 4 miles of poor quality habitat and is a limited resource. Poor spawning habitat limits the trout numbers, but there are short stretches where the habitat is sufficient to support a few browns and rainbows. Fishing is currently maintained through natural reproduction.

Wildhorse Creek

Wildhorse Creek is located north of Bayard in Morrill County.

Rainbow and brown trout.

Private access only, permission required. The east and west branches of the creek join north of Bayard. The creek flows south through the town and then into Red Willow Creek. Wildhorse Creek contains fair trout habitat with adequate flow and limited spawning gravel. Currently, browns and rainbows are present and sustained through natural reproduction.

Red Willow Creek

Located 4 miles east of Bayard in Morrill County, Red Willow Creek flows south into the North Platte River.

Rainbow and brown trout.

Access is available only through private property; landowner permission is required

North Platte Valley (continued)

for entry. The creek, which has about 12 miles of trout-supporting water, drains a large watershed that sometimes causes flooding. Large amounts of spill water from an irrigation canal during spring and summer have a detrimental effect on trout numbers. The creek has areas of spawning gravel and good trout habitat, but uncontrollable water quality problems limit the creek as a trout fishery. Trout population is currently maintained through natural reproduction.

Otter Creek

Otter Creek feeds into the north side of

Lake McConaughy in Keith County.

Rainbow and brown trout.

There is public access along the creek a half-mile immediately north of the lake. The remaining stretch of the creek is private access; landowner permission is required for entry. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission leases the upper 1.5 miles of the creek to exclude cattle. High quality gravel and stable, cold water temperatures provide for good natural spawning and year-round trout habitat. Rainbow trout were last stocked in 1986 and the population is now sustained entirely through natural

reproduction.

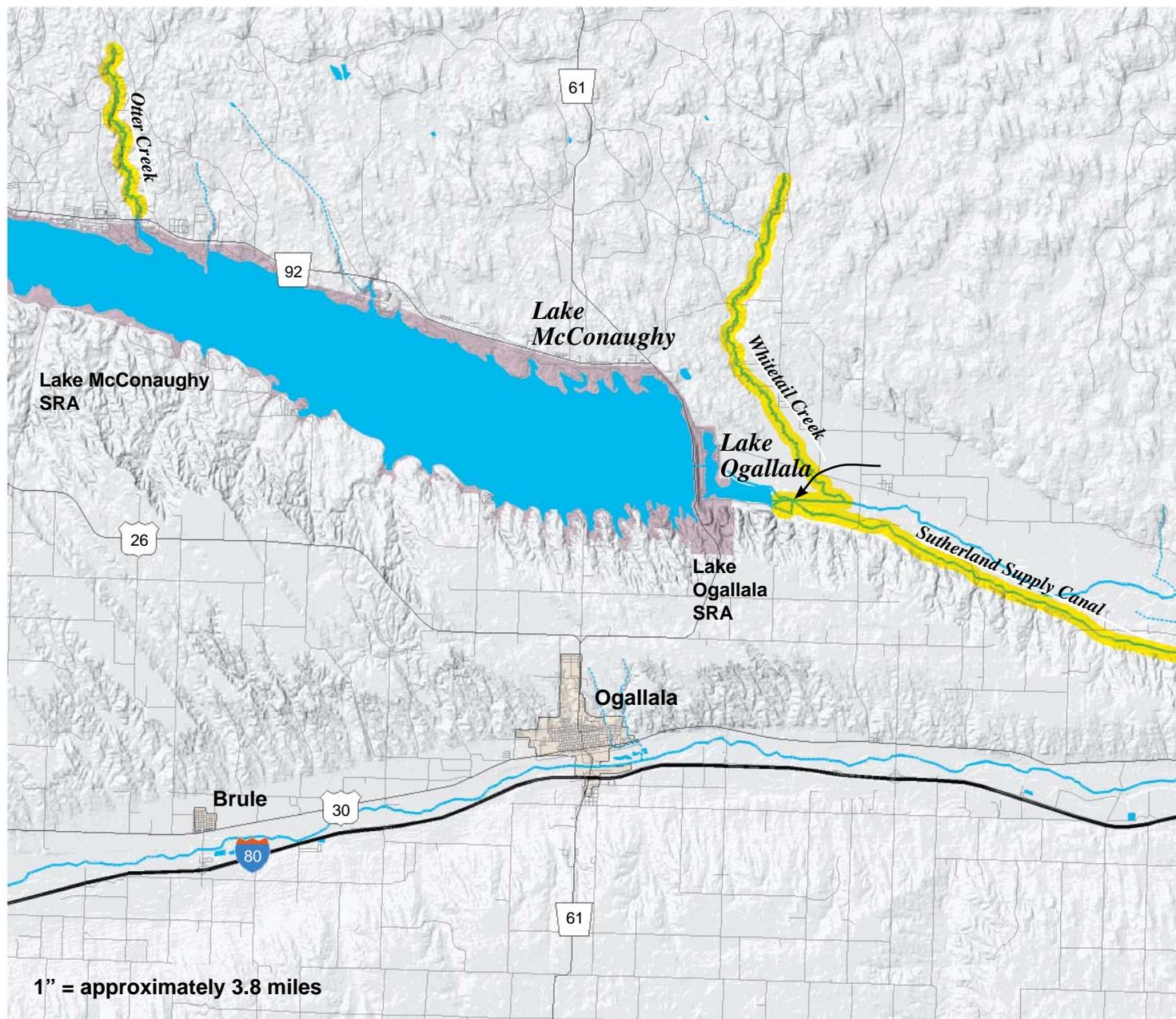
North Platte River

There are trout in about a mile of the river below the Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) Diversion Dam at the lower end of Lake Ogallala in Keith County.

Rainbow and brown trout.

There is good public access to this stretch where three rock weirs form large pools that hold rainbow and brown trout that have migrated out of Lake Ogallala.

Excellent trout fishing is available during the summer when high irrigation flows





The large North Platte River pools formed by rock weirs below Lake Ogallala in Keith County hold rainbow and brown trout.

occur. Fall and winter fishing is also good when flows are present after the irrigation season. The population is maintained by fish that escape from Lake Ogallala; very little stocking has been done in this stretch.

Sutherland Supply Canal

(also known as Keystone and NPPD Canal)

This 30-mile segment of canal originates at the Lake Ogallala Diversion Dam and flows east across Keith and Lincoln counties to Sutherland Reservoir.

Rainbow and brown trout.

A public access road runs along most of the canal from Lake Ogallala to Sutherland Reservoir. The canal offers ideal coldwater habitat and has been a trophy trout fishery (mostly rainbows and occasional browns) since the early 1970s. The 16-mile stretch from Lake Ogallala to Paxton is among the best trout fisheries in the state and the most likely place to catch a rainbow weighing 5 pounds or more.

The canal is drained at five-year intervals to allow for federally mandated safety inspections. Trout are reintroduced following the inspections. The population is maintained by fish escaping from Lake Ogallala and through annual hatchery stockings.

Whitetail Creek

This creek begins 7 miles north of Lake Ogallala in Keith County.

Brown trout.

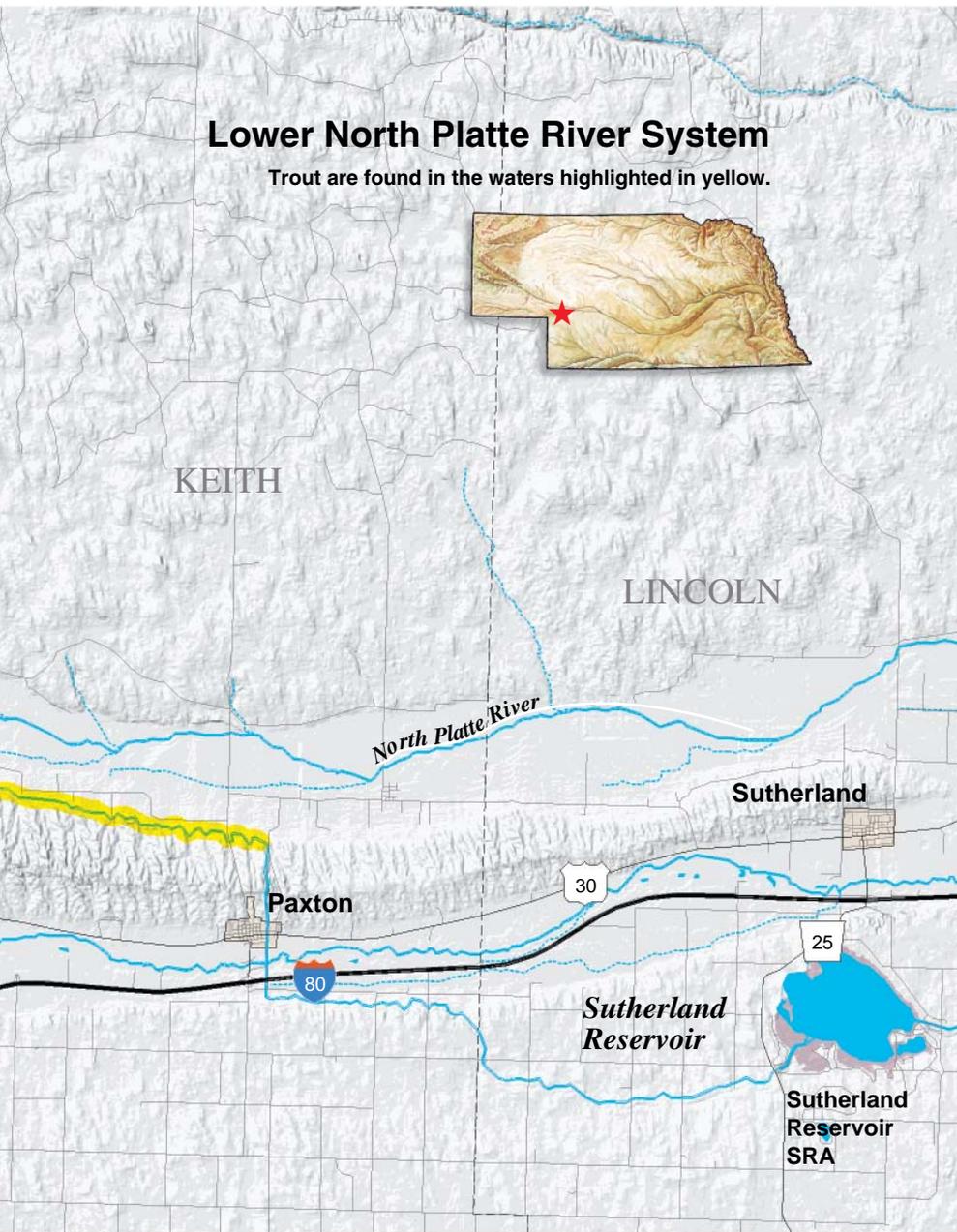
Private access only; to enter private property landowner permission is required. Whitetail Creek flows into the North Platte River 1.5 miles below the Lake Ogallala Diversion Dam. This stream contains about 9 miles of trout-supporting water. The last stocking, which was of rainbows, occurred in 1989. Browns are a self-sustaining population. The stream carries a heavy load of sand sediment originating from a heavily grazed watershed. This detracts from the quality of the trout habitat, but the stream still has fair coldwater potential.

Blue Creek

Blue Creek is northwest of Lewellen in Garden County. (Not shown on the accompanying maps.)

Brown and brook trout.

Private access only, permission required. The creek contains about 30 miles of trout-supporting stream, which has fair coldwater habitat but lacks spawning gravel. While general land practices are considered fair, water diversions sometimes have a negative effect on trout. Over the years all three species of trout have been introduced in attempts to establish a self-sustaining population. Most recently, brook trout were stocked in 1999. Blue Creek is noted for its small population of large brown trout.



Niobrara Valley

Niobrara Valley streams flow through the scenic wooded canyons of north-central Nebraska into the Niobrara River. Favorites of anglers from throughout the state, these easily waded streams attract anglers who use fly-fishing, bait-casting, or spinning equipment. These streams offer quality fishing during spring after high water caused by snowmelt recedes, and again in fall.

Niobrara River

Located in northern Nebraska, the river's best trout-fishing waters are in Sioux, Dawes and Box Butte counties.

Browns and a few rainbow trout.

There is public access at Agate Fossil Beds National Monument. Most of the river flows through private property and permission to enter is required. The Niobrara's

trout-supporting water stretches from the Wyoming border to Box Butte Reservoir.

Keiper brown trout and some rainbows are stocked in the river annually between the Agate Fossil Bed National Monument and the

river lacks good trout habitat.

Poor quality and quantity of spawning habitat results in minimal reproduction.

Snake River (upper)

Located in Sheridan and Cherry counties, the upper Snake River supports trout from near the western Cherry County line to the Doughboy bridge south of Cody.

Brown and rainbow trout.

Private access, permission required. The Snake River above Merritt Reservoir has a sand bed with fair trout habitat. The stream has an ample flow of cold water. Occasional outcroppings of rock and shale provide spawning areas. Currently 2,500 five-inch rainbows and 2,500 five-inch browns are stocked annually.

Snake River (lower)

Located southwest of Valentine in Cherry County, the river flows out of Merritt

Reservoir.

Brown and rainbow trout.

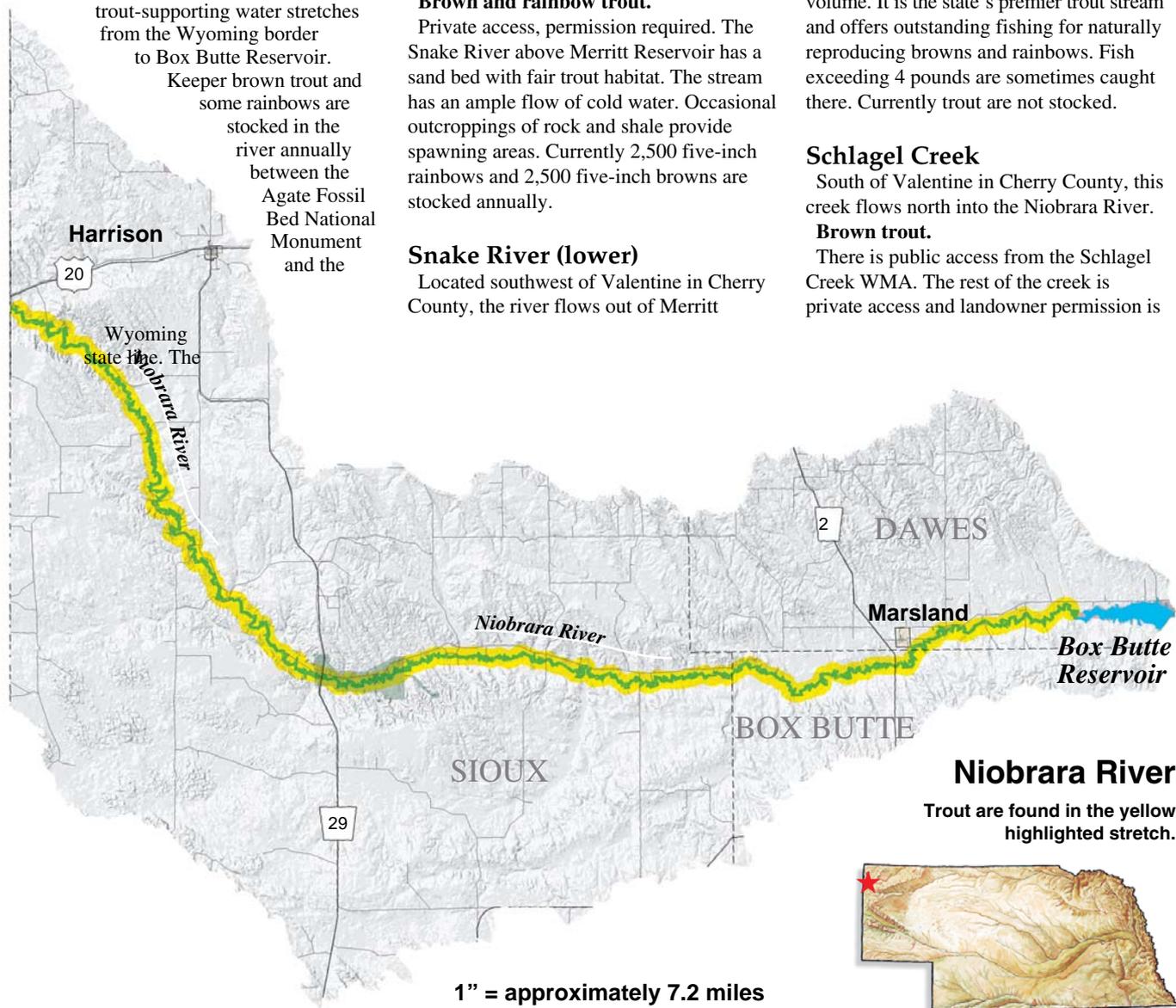
There is public access at Merritt Reservoir State Recreation Area (SRA), but the rest of the river flows through private land and permission is required for entry. Below Merritt Reservoir, the Snake cuts through a beautiful canyon and creates Snake Falls, Nebraska's largest waterfall by water volume. It is the state's premier trout stream and offers outstanding fishing for naturally reproducing browns and rainbows. Fish exceeding 4 pounds are sometimes caught there. Currently trout are not stocked.

Schlagel Creek

South of Valentine in Cherry County, this creek flows north into the Niobrara River.

Brown trout.

There is public access from the Schlagel Creek WMA. The rest of the creek is private access and landowner permission is



Niobrara River

Trout are found in the yellow highlighted stretch.



BOB GRIER

A family enjoys a late summer afternoon on the upper Niobrara River, which is only a small stream south of Harrison.

required to enter. It has 10 miles of trout-supporting waters with 2.5 miles located on the WMA, where there is good trout fishing. The canyon section has the best trout habitat and the most fish. Browns naturally reproduce in the stream, which is not well-known beyond the Sandhills.

Fairfield Creek

The creek is in Cherry and Brown counties, north of Wood Lake. It flows

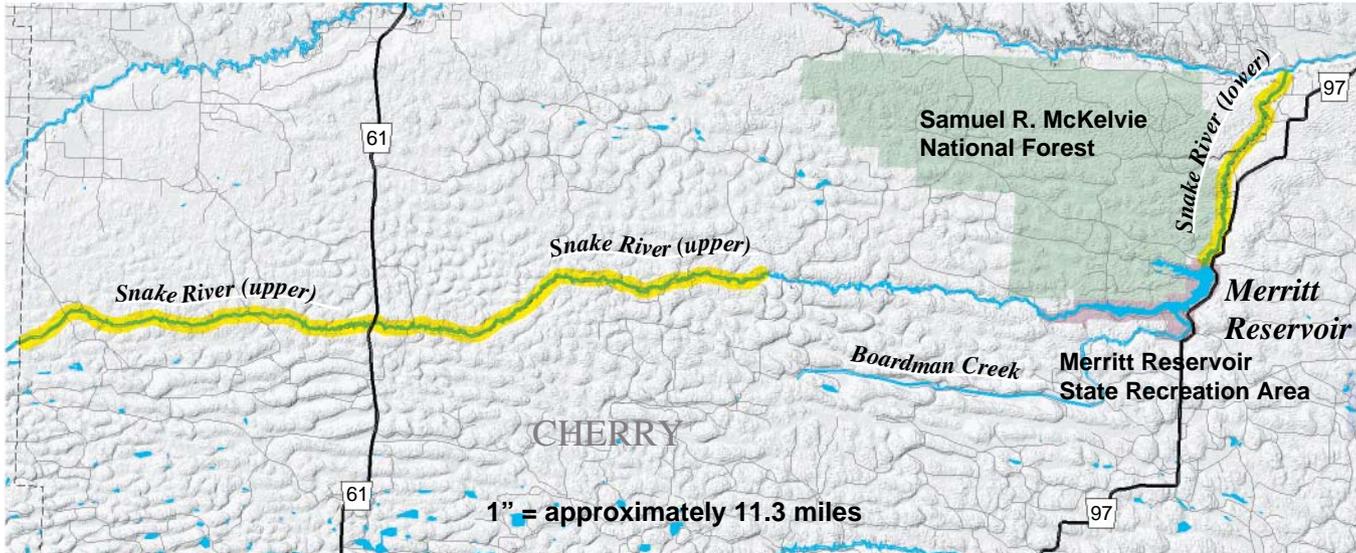
northeast into the Niobrara River.

Brown trout.

Private access, permission required. About 15 miles of its habitat is suitable for trout. The best habitat begins at the Brown County line, where the creek drops over two waterfalls a few hundred yards apart. From that point to its mouth, it is a cold, clear stream flowing in a narrow canyon. Browns reproduce naturally in the stream.

Snake River

Trout are found in stretches of the Snake River highlighted in yellow.



Niobrara Valley (continued)

Long Pine Creek

Located in Brown County, the creek runs north through the town of Long Pine.

Brown and rainbow trout.

There is public access at Seven Springs, a wellfield for the town of Long Pine, Pine Glen WMA, Long Pine WMA and Long Pine SRA. The rest of the creek has private access and permission is required for entry.

One of Nebraska's best trout streams, Long Pine Creek has about 20 miles of

trout-supporting water. Both brown and rainbow trout naturally reproduce in the creek's abundant gravel beds. The creek's middle section from Seven Springs to Camp Witness, a church camp, provides the best habitat and the most fish; larger fish are more common downstream. Few trout are found below its confluence with Bone Creek.

Plum Creek

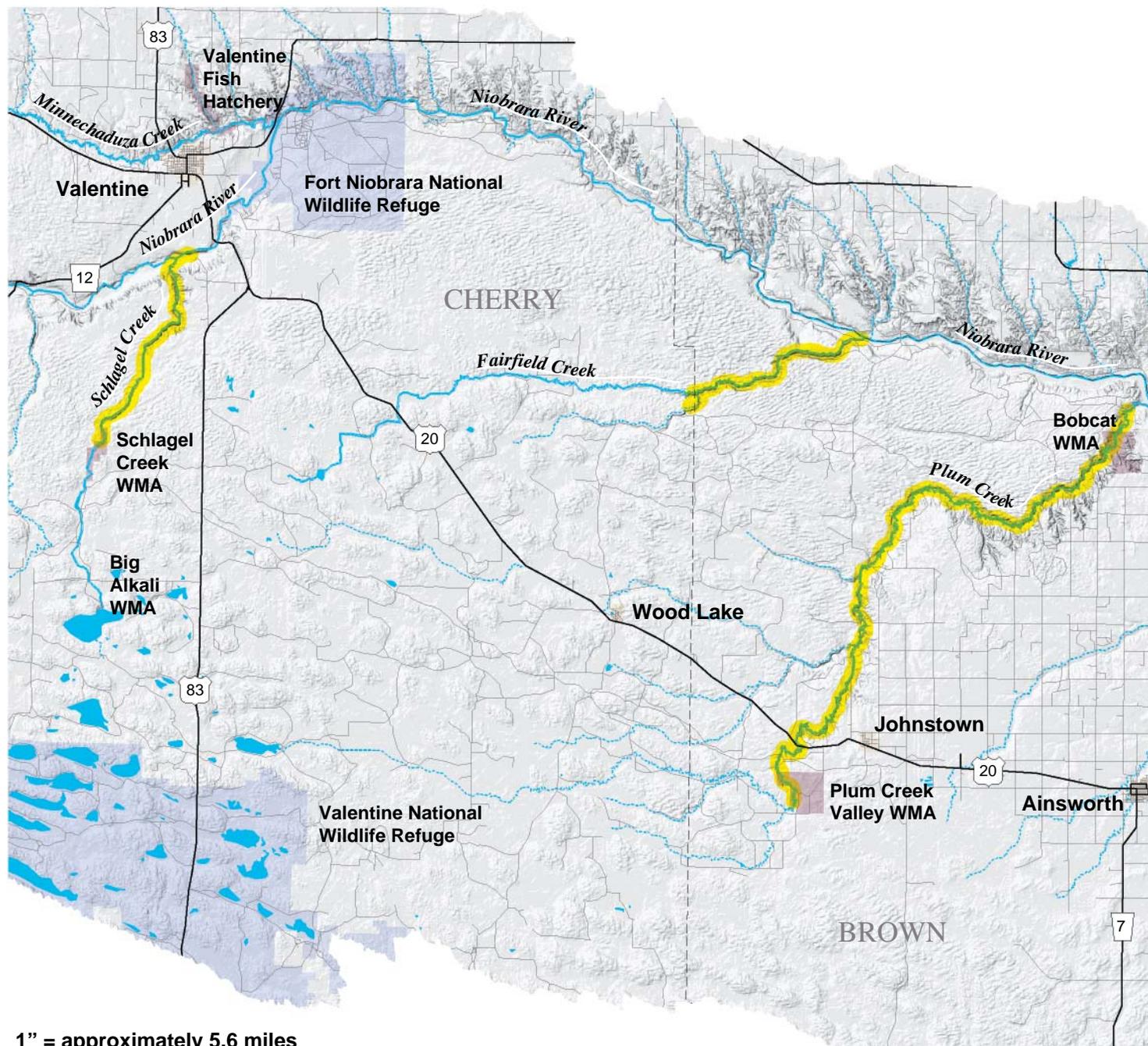
Plum Creek crosses U.S. Highway 20 west

of Johnstown and flows northeast before entering the Niobrara River.

Brown and rainbow trout.

There is public access to the creek from the Bobcat and Plum Creek Valley WMAs. The remainder is private access. Landowner permission is required to enter private property.

The creek offers fair fishing for browns in its middle and lower reaches (just north of U.S. Highway 20 to the creek's



1" = approximately 5.6 miles

mouth). It drains a large Sandhills area and some irrigated cropland, which results in occasional high flows and heavy sand loads.

There is still some natural reproduction of brown trout. Bobcat WMA and Plum Creek Valley WMA both provide public access for anglers to more than a mile of the stream. Visitors must hike in and out of a canyon to reach the creek.

Pine Creek

The creek's trout-supporting water is east of Nebraska Highway 250, 15 miles south of Rushville in Sheridan County.

Low trout densities.

Private access, permission required. It has about 16 miles of trout-supporting water. It has no natural trout reproduction, but overall trout habitat is considered fair to good. Because an endangered minnow species is present in the creek, trout

stockings are currently not permitted.

Deer Creek

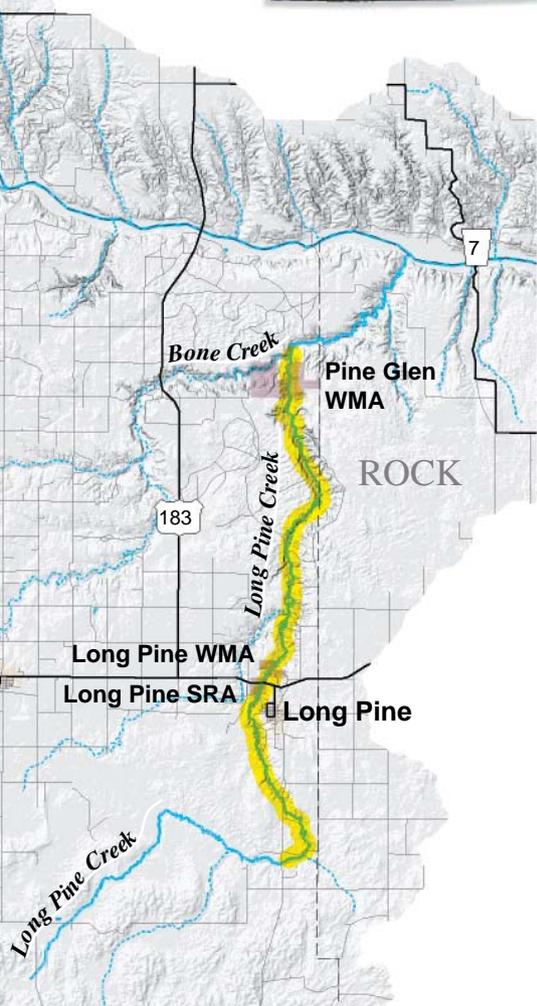
This creek is 10 miles south and 6 miles east of Rushville in Sheridan County.

Rainbow and brown trout.

It is all private access, and requires permission to enter. It contains about 5 miles of trout-supporting water. A landowner is stocking the creek with brown and rainbow trout.

Niobrara River Tributaries

Trout found in the creek stretches highlighted in yellow.



Probing a shady spot beneath fallen branches, a fisherman seeks trout in Long Pine Creek north of U.S. Highway 20 in Brown County.

JON FARFAR

Niobrara Valley (continued)

Verdigre Creek (east branch)

This stream is in Antelope County 1 mile north and 1.5 miles east of Royal.

Rainbow and brown trout.

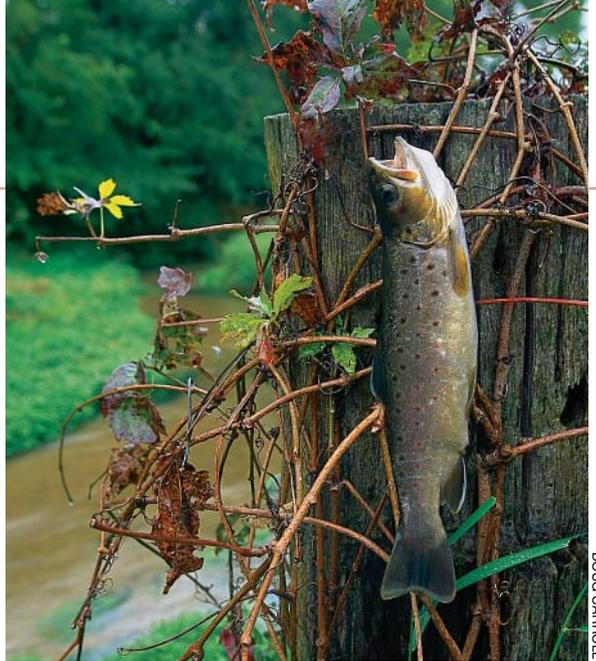
There is public access from Grove Lake WMA, where about two-thirds of the trout-supporting stretch of the stream is located. The rest is private access, and landowner permission is required to enter.

About 3 to 4 miles of the stream supports trout. In this stretch, the stream is usually 10 to 15 feet wide. Aquatic vegetation is abundant from late spring through late fall. Habitat

consists of a series of pools, riffles and runs. Some pools are about 3 feet deep.

Verdigre is a high-quality trout stream. It is managed for intensive fishing with 200 keeper rainbow trout stocked weekly by the Grove Trout Rearing Station, which is located upstream. Brown trout reproduce naturally and some natural reproduction of rainbows supplements the stockings. Brown trout are not stocked but continue to show up in angler creels.

Verdigre Creek is a favorite year-round destination for Nebraska anglers.



DOUG CARROLL

Brown trout reproduce naturally in Verdigre Creek near the Grove Trout Rearing Station.

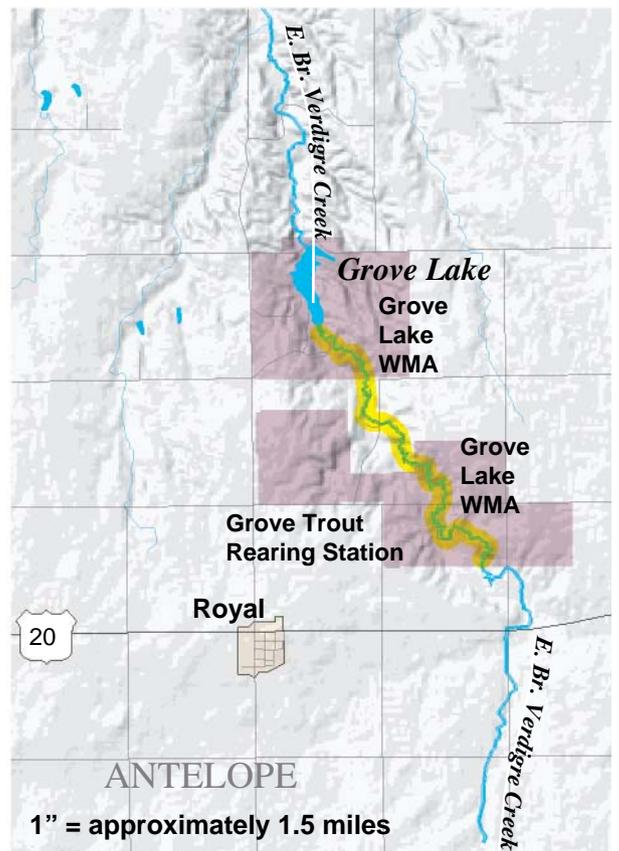
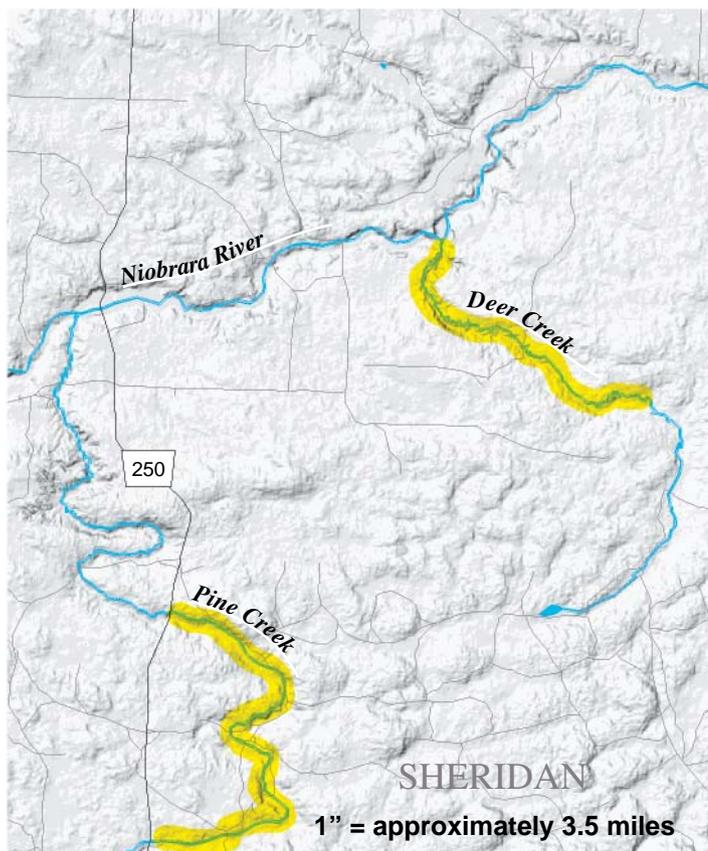
Deer Creek and Pine Creek

Trout found in the stretches of these streams highlighted in yellow.



Verdigre Creek

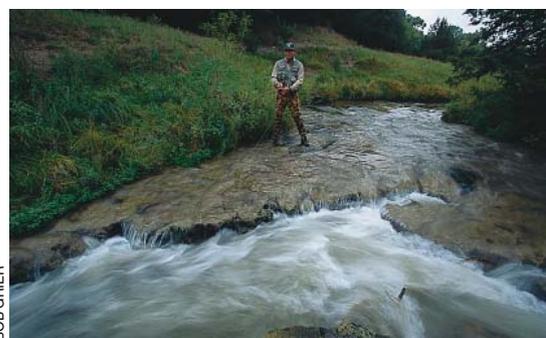
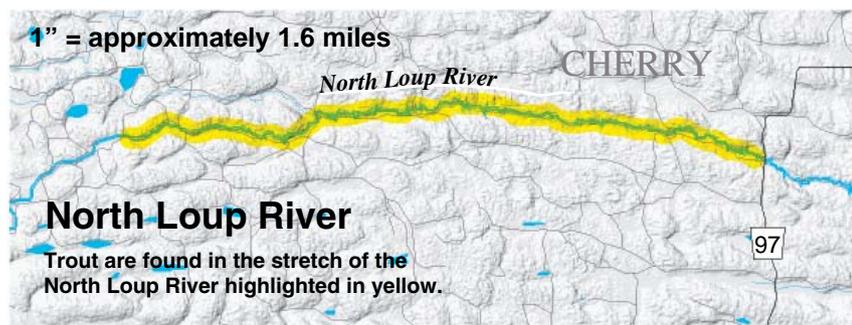
Trout are found in the yellow highlighted stretch.



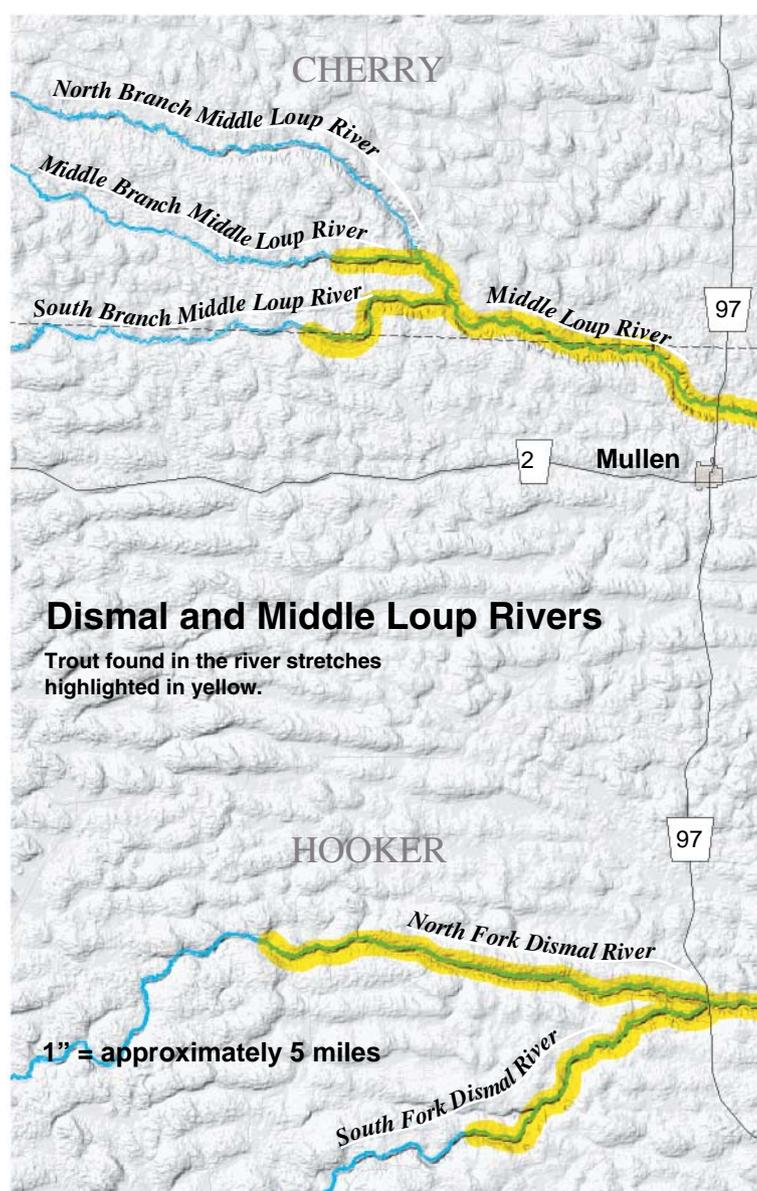
Loup River Drainage



The streams in the Loup River drainage flow through Nebraska's Sandhills. Most are remote, sand-bottomed streams ideal for fly anglers or those who prefer using spinning equipment. Permission is required before fishing these waters because they flow through private land.



Fast, cool water flows in the south fork of the Dismal River in the central Sandhills.



North Loup River

The North Loup River supports trout in Cherry County, north of Mullen and west of Nebraska Highway 97.

Brown and rainbow trout.

The river flows through private land. Permission to enter is required. Of its approximately 20 miles of trout water, the best fishing on this stream is in the upper reaches, with a few trout found below Horseshoe Falls. Because the stream bed is mostly sand, trout habitat is limited. Occasionally, a fish of more than 4 pounds is taken. No natural reproduction has been documented and, because of the poor survival rate, stocking has been discontinued. Most of the access is by trail roads and a four-wheel-drive vehicle is recommended.

Middle Loup River

The Middle Loup River flows through Cherry and Hooker counties. It intersects Nebraska Highway 97 north of Mullen.

Brown and rainbow trout.

The Middle Loup flows through private property, and landowner permission is required to enter. The north, middle and south branches of the Middle Loup offer fishing downstream to Nebraska Highway 97, about 15 miles of river. Natural reproduction is limited. The river is stocked with 1,500 five-inch rainbows and 1,500 five-inch browns annually.

Dismal River (north and south forks)

The Dismal River is located in Hooker County south of Mullen, west of Nebraska Highway 97.

Brown and rainbow trout.

The river flows through private property and permission to enter is required. The north fork has 12 miles of trout water, the south fork 10.5 miles. The best trout fishing is above the confluence of the forks. The streams cut deep, cedar-lined canyons where numerous springs add to the flow. Trout populations are maintained with annual stockings of 750 five-inch rainbows and 750 five-inch browns in each fork. Most fish are small, but a brown exceeding 4 pounds is occasionally taken there.

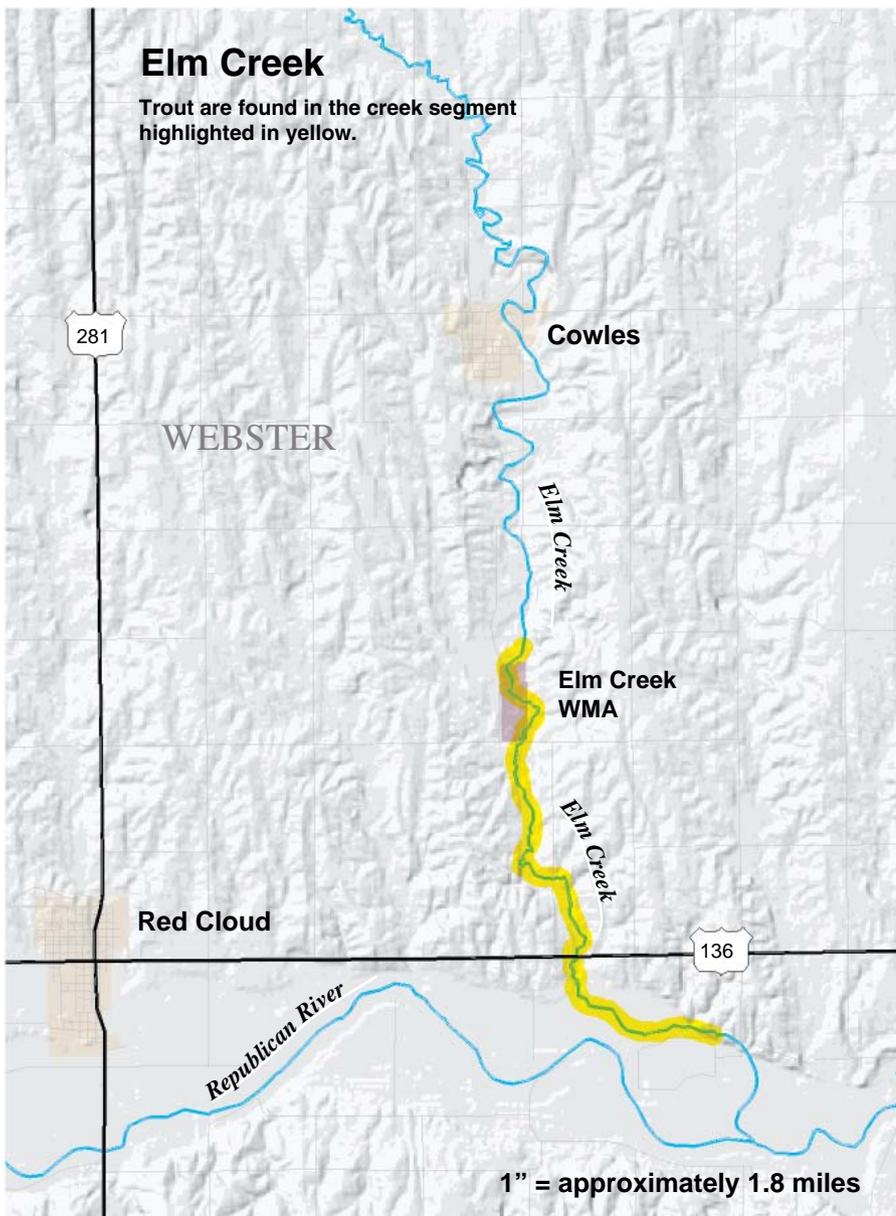
Republican River Drainage



CARL WOLFE

This rainbow trout took an artificial nymph fished near the bottom of a creek.

Located in south-central Nebraska, Elm Creek offers anglers a chance to experience the thrill of catching rainbow trout. The surrounding terrain is flat and the creek's banks are densely vegetated. In some spots anglers can cast flies or lures, but in most places the best strategy is to allow the current to carry bait to hungry trout.



Elm Creek

About 3 miles of Elm Creek's 22-mile drainage support trout, including a stretch along the Elm Creek WMA in Webster County northeast of Red Cloud.

Rainbow trout.

There is public access from the 1-mile segment located in the Elm Creek WMA. The remainder of the creek runs through private land. Permission is required to enter private property.

Elm Creek is a put-and-take trout fishery where 1,000 rainbows are stocked each March and 500 more each September. Trout habitat is limited, but habitat structures have been placed at Elm Creek WMA and near U.S. Highway 136. Except for excessive runoff during high flows, the stream offers good habitat for trout. It is 8 to 12 feet wide in most places, has good pool and run habitats (the pools average 4 feet deep), and abundant growth of water cress and buttercup.



DOUG CARROLL

Elm Creek has some deep, trout-holding pools at the Elm Creek WMA.

Fishing for Trout

Nebraska anglers enjoy trout waters ranging from small streams in the northern and western areas of the state to larger man-made waters such as Lake Ogallala and the Sutherland Supply Canal. The diversity of waters and habitats challenge anglers to learn the best trout fishing methods for each.

To avoid snagging lines and hooks on brush and trees lining stream banks, anglers must learn to fish effectively in cramped quarters. In such conditions, the ideal fishing rod is long enough to reach beyond snags and over-hanging banks where trout might be hiding, but short enough for maneuvering through the brush. Spinning, spin-cast or fly-fishing equipment can be used effectively on small streams. Casts should almost always be short, and baits, flies or lures are often dabbled into openings where the current can carry them toward the fish.

Sneak Up on Trout

The key to catching trout is to not spook the fish. When trout are not scared, they are easier to catch, especially in small streams. A stealthy approach similar to sneaking up on a deer might be necessary. Anglers should avoid wearing bright colors; dark, camouflage colors are more difficult for fish to see.

The sneaky approach also applies to equipment. Light lines present baits naturally and delicately, and are less likely to spook fish. On most small Nebraska streams 4- or 6-pound-test line is adequate. On larger waters where bigger fish are a possibility, 8- or 10-pound-test line might be used, but heavier line is easier for a fish to see through clear water.

When fishing with natural baits, use small, light-wire hooks matched with the size of the bait. If weight must be added to fish in heavy current or deep water, add the smallest split shot possible by pinching it on the line a few inches above the hook. A weight heavier than a split shot might be required in deep or very fast trout waters, such as the Sutherland Supply Canal. There anglers sometimes use barrel weights as heavy as 3/4-ounce to roll along the bottom in the fast-moving water. Barrel weights are slip weights that slide up the line and are held a foot or two above the hook by a swivel or split shot.

Trout Techniques

Trout can be caught on a variety of

baits and lures. Rainbow trout bite on everything from marshmallows and cheese to worms, nightcrawlers, grasshoppers and “scientifically” developed baits impregnated with irresistible scents. Most anglers test a number of baits to determine which the fish prefer. Natural baits found in or near the water being fished work for rainbow and brook trout, as well as the more finicky browns. When trout are actively feeding, they can be caught using many artificial lures, including small spinners, spoons and jigs. For larger trout, especially brown trout, minnow-imitating lures such as Rapalas and Thundersticks are good choices. Trout or salmon eggs are effective baits for rainbow trout, especially in the late winter and early spring.

Many anglers equate trout fishing with fly-fishing, a traditional method of taking trout. The selection of fly-fishing gear is a matter of personal choice, and when choosing equipment the angler should consider several factors, including the type of water to be fished, the types and sizes of flies to be used, the size of the fish being pursued and the skill of the angler. For most Nebraska trout fishing, a 4-, 5-, or 6-weight rod, 7 to 8 feet long, with a weight-forward, floating line is a good choice. Tapered leaders ending with 2- or 4-pound-test tippets present most trout flies in a natural manner and eliminate the problems caused by algae and debris being caught in the knots of hand-tied leaders.

Every natural food item that Nebraska trout eat can be effectively imitated by a fly pattern. Trout are sometimes very selective feeders, which makes the size and appearance of the fly critical. A good selection of fly patterns includes dry flies, nymphs, terrestrials and baitfish, all in sizes 8-to-20. This selection of flies allows the angler to fish all types of cover and water levels – on the surface, at mid-depth and on the bottom. A fly selection should include dry flies such as the Adams, royal Wulff, elk-hair Caddis, and black gnat; terrestrials such as Dave’s hopper, black flying ant, and cricket; streamers such as wooly buggers, marabou muddlers, Mickey Finn, and black or gray ghost; and nymphs such as the gold bead pheasant tail, hare’s ear, Bitch Creek, Montana stone fly, peeking caddis, caddis larva and fur caddis pupa.



Dry flies, such as this Adams, are used to catch surface-feeding trout. Other flies are designed to fish at mid-depth or on a creek bottom.



Spawn or egg sacks contain a few trout or salmon eggs. They are bounced along the bottom with the current.



Small spinners imitate small fish and are most effective when they are fished just fast enough to rotate the blade near undercut banks, logs or other cover.



Though there are many ways to fish for trout, using traditional fly-fishing gear is one of the most enjoyable and productive methods.

PHOTOS BY KEN BOUC

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission thanks the following fishing organizations for their interest in trout fishing and trout waters across the state.

Nebraska Trout Unlimited Chapter 710

Trout Unlimited's mission is to conserve, restore and protect coldwater fisheries and their watersheds. Chapter 710 has worked to protect the clean watershed of the East Verdigre Creek in north-central Nebraska.

Meetings: Fourth Tuesday of the month at the Papiro/Missouri NRD building located at Chalco Hills Recreation Area (Wehrspann Lake) 8901 S. 154th St., Omaha. Meetings start at 7 p.m.

Contact: (402) 721-9514 or (402) 453-0698;
RMKTrout@aol.com or HBFatty@aol.com

Cornhusker Fly Fishers

A member club of the Federation of Fly Fishers Promotes fly-fishing for all warmwater and coldwater fish species.

Meetings: Third Wednesday of the month, at the Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium, Schramm State Park near Gretna. Meetings start at 7 p.m.

Contact: Cornhusker Fly Fishers,
Cornhusker Fly Fishers, Inc., P.O. Box 57185,
Gateway Branch, Lincoln, NE 68505-7185;
<http://www.warmwaterflyfisher.com>

For more information about Nebraska's trout streams, contact the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission office near the area where you plan to fish.

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