

Medicine Creek

2020 Survey Summary

NEBRASKA

– GAME



PARKS –

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Fish populations are sampled each fall at Medicine Creek Reservoir using gill nets, a method commonly used to sample fish such as walleye, white bass, channel catfish and wipers. Gill nets are set on approximately the same dates and locations each year to reduce variability.

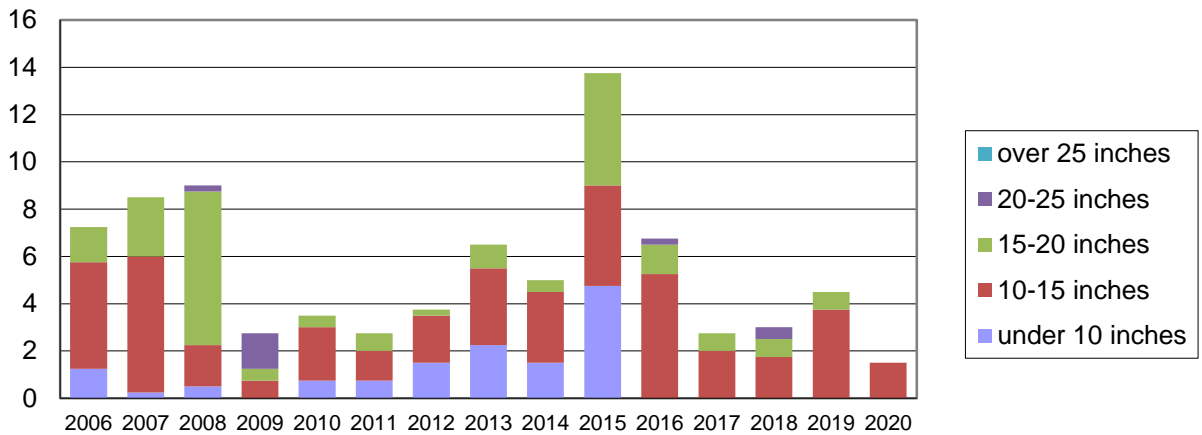
Walleye catch rates dipped in 2020 to under 2 fish per net. While lower than normal, when combined with over 7 saugeyes per net, our total catch was over 9 fish per net. The combined total would be the second best walleye catch since 2002. It can be difficult to differentiate between walleye and saugeye but its not a major concern to anglers as they are regulated using the same length and bag limits. To assist biologists in identification of stocked fish, walleye and saugeye are being stocked on alternating years. We will continue to evaluate the success of saugeye in Medicine Creek. If evaluations continue to find saugeye to be the more successful species in Medicine Creek we will adjust stocking strategies accordingly. There are 180,000 saugeye fingerlings requested for late spring 2021.

Wipers continued to be a part of our management plan at Medicine Creek in 2020. They were not stocked between 2008 and 2013 but have been stocked regularly since 2013. This stocking hiatus explains the low catch rates seen during those years. Catch rates increased to 3 fish per net in 2020. Due to high success rates of wiper fry stockings at both Harlan County Reservoir and Swanson Reservoir, we are adjusting our stocking strategy at Medicine Creek to include fry stockings. Hopefully, this strategy will lead to more consistent year class strength in Medicine Creek. There are 275,000 wiper fry requested for spring 2021. White bass catch rates continue to be variable at Medicine Creek. In 2020, we saw an increase in catch to just over 16 fish per net. The white bass survey showed a good distribution of year class strength. The strong 2018 year class is starting to push that 12 inch size range and should provide excellent opportunities for anglers in 2021. Also observed in the survey was a large age-0 year class that should provide a quality fishery for the next several years.

Medicine Creek continues to produce quality channel catfish for anglers. Biologists sampled just over 7 fish per net in 2020. Anglers need to be aware that blue catfish are present in Medicine Creek and are more strictly regulated than channel catfish. Proper identification is a must if anglers are going to harvest catfish. Blue catfish were sampled at over 3 per net in 2020 and will continue to grow and provide opportunities for anglers. There are 5,550 blue catfish requested for fall 2021.

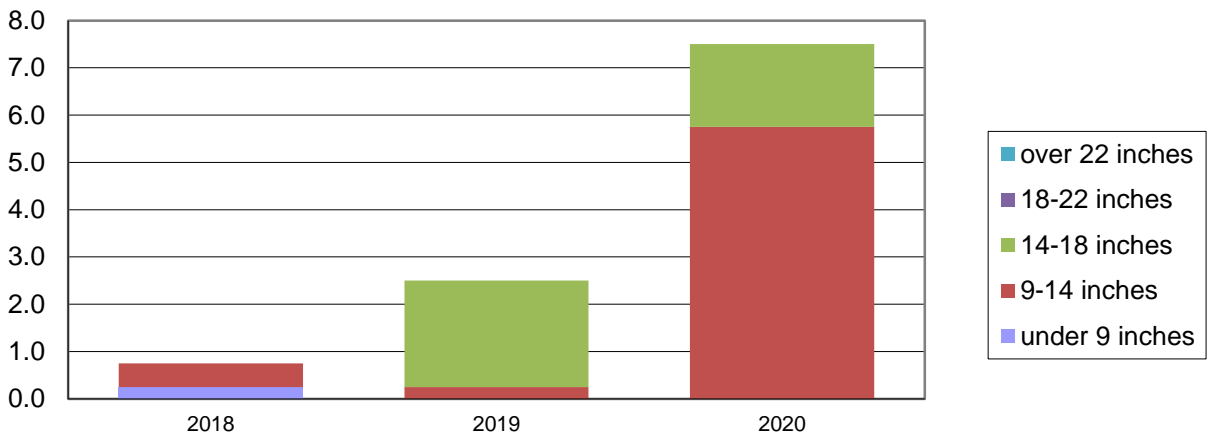
The following graphs show the average number of fish caught per net and the relative abundance of fish within several length categories. The text provides a brief explanation of the information shown in the graphs.

Walleye Catch Per Unit Effort



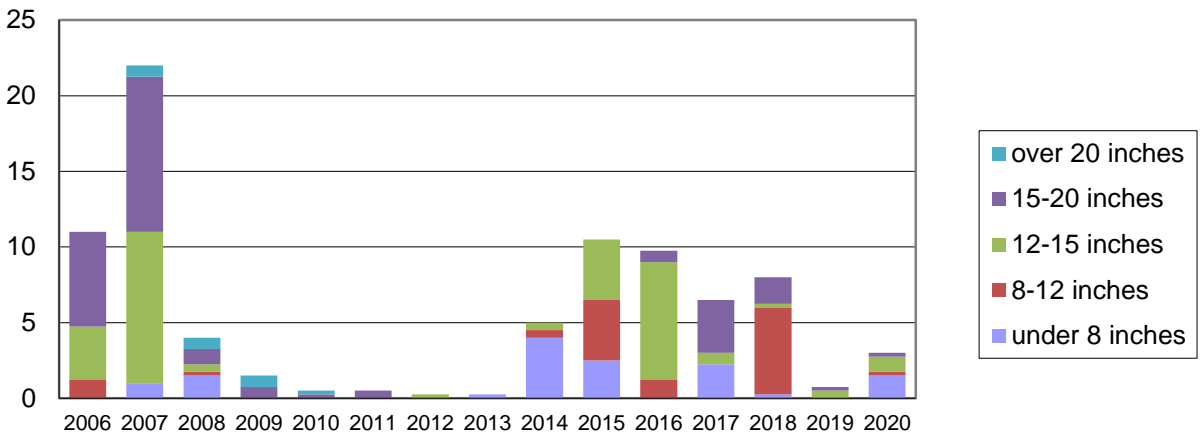
Walleye numbers dipped to under 2 per net in 2020. Size structure will provide anglers opportunities to harvest legal fish in 2021. Walleye will continue to be stocked on alternating years opposite of saugeye. The first year without a walleye stocking in Medicine Creek was 2019. There are no walleye requested for 2021.

Saugeye Catch Per Unit Effort



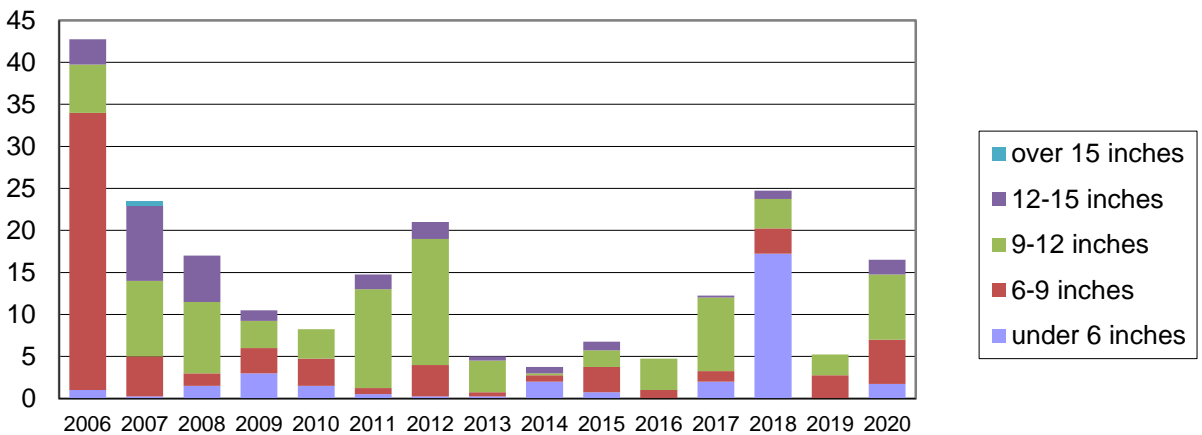
In an effort to take advantage of what should be suitable habitat, saugeye were introduced to Medicine Creek in 2017. Saugeye are managed the same as walleye so identification shouldn't concern anglers. Surveys in 2020 yielded just over 7 saugeyes per net. Multiple year classes were sampled with several measuring in over the 15 inch minimum length limit. Saugeye will continue to be stocked on alternating years opposite of walleye. There are 180,000 saugeye fingerlings requested for late spring 2021.

Wiper Catch Per Unit Effort



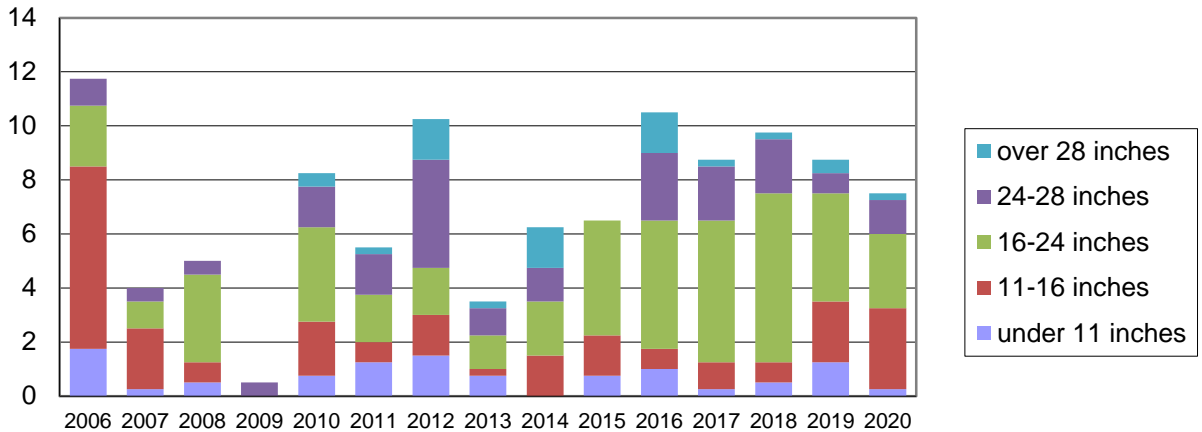
Wiper catch increased to 3 per net in 2020. Several of the fish sampled were from the spring fingerling stocking. There are still adult fish available for anglers to catch but they could be difficult to find as the population rebounds. Due to success at Harlan County Reservoir and Swanson Reservoir, stocking strategies have been adjusted to include wiper fry. The goal is to maintain more consistent year class strength within the wiper population at Medicine Creek. There are 275,000 wiper fry requested for spring 2021.

White Bass Catch Per Unit Effort



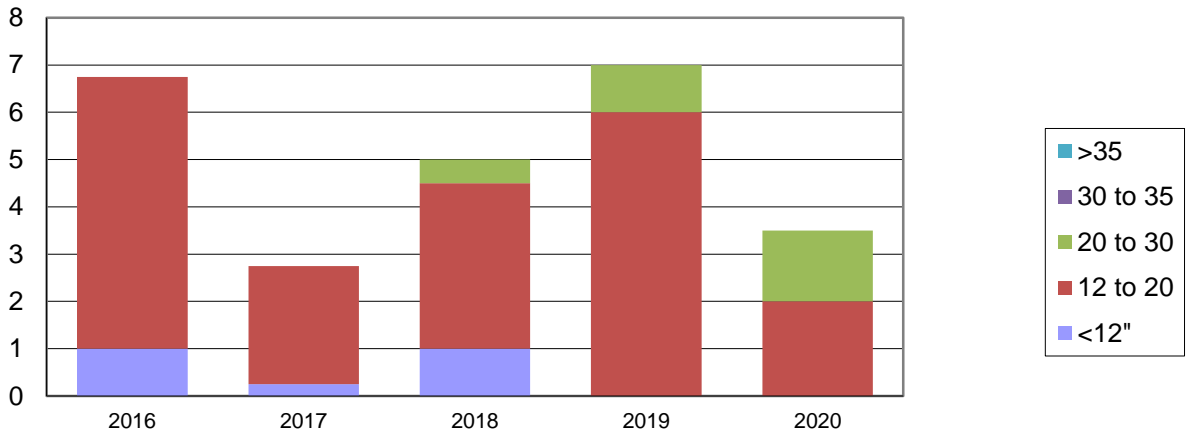
White bass numbers increased to over 16 fish per net in 2020. Medicine Creek ranked 3rd in the state for white bass total catch behind Swanson and Harlan. Observed in the catch were multiple year classes and including a solid number of age-0 fish. The outlook for 2021 and beyond is positive and should continue to provide ample opportunity for limits of white bass.

Channel Catfish Catch Per Unit Effort



The channel catfish population remained stable with biologists sampling just under 8 fish per net in 2020. Channel catfish continue to maintain their population in Medicine Creek naturally. Size structure will provide anglers the opportunity to catch large trophy fish as well as smaller fish for the frying pan. Any angler looking to harvest catfish at Medicine Creek needs to be aware that blue catfish are managed differently than channel catfish and need to be identified properly.

Blue Catfish Catch Per Unit Effort



Blue Catfish were introduced into Medicine Creek Reservoir in 2015 and have been requested regularly since the introduction. Biologists surveyed over 3 blue catfish per net in 2020. Blue catfish were introduced based on success at Swanson Reservoir and a strong existing catfish fishery at Medicine Creek. The goal of this introduction is to increase the trophy fishing opportunities in the Southwest District and provide unique opportunities for anglers where possible. There are 5,550 advanced blue catfish requested for fall 2021. Any angler looking to harvest catfish at Medicine Creek needs to be aware that blue catfish are managed differently than channel catfish and need to be identified properly.

Blue catfish are known to grow in excess of 80lbs and are a very popular species for some catfish anglers. It is important to point out that there is a **1 fish daily bag limit** for blue catfish statewide. Anglers need to take care to identify their catch before harvesting any catfish species at Medicine Creek. The most foolproof method to distinguish between the species is to look at the anal fin. Blue catfish have a straight anal fin with more than 30 rays while channel catfish have a curved anal fin with fewer than 30 rays. There are other cosmetic differences such as body shape, color, and spots but those differences can be misleading depending on the environment and individual fish.

Blue Catfish



Straight fin with more than 30 rays

Channel Catfish



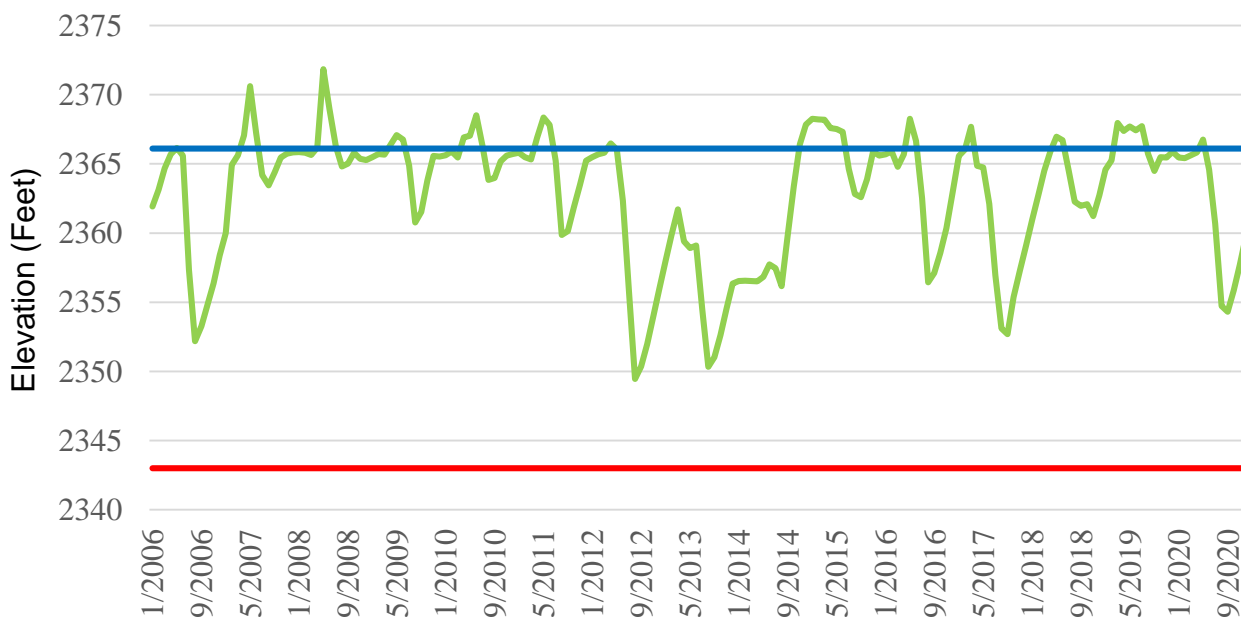
Curved fin with less than 30 rays

Medicine Creek Fish Stocking Summary

Year	Walleye	Wiper	Yellow Perch	Saugeye	Blue Catfish
2020	137,859 (1")	9,250 (1")			
2019		9,658 (1")		252,380 (1.25")	
2018	93,210 (1.25")	9,296 (1.25")			2,711 (12")
2017	92,622 (1.25")	9,336 (1.5")	59,939 (1.5")	129,980 (1.25")	3,500 (13")
2016	144,840 (1.5")				5,075 (5")

Above is a table of fish stockings for the last 5 years at Medicine Creek Reservoir. The species stocked, number stocked, and fish size are presented in the table. Multiple species are stocked annually and a comprehensive database of fish stockings can be found at the Nebraska Game and Parks website or by following the link below. [Stocking Database](#)

End of Month Elevation, Medicine Creek Reservoir 2006-2020



Medicine Creek is the only Southwest reservoir that irrigates annually but also refills due to high inflows and the NCORPE stream augmentation flow. The graph above is a representation of monthly mean elevations. The dark blue line indicates the top of the conservation pool, the green line indicates the end of month elevation, and the red line indicates the top of the inactive pool. For current lake elevations visit this webpage:

[Current Elevation](#)



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Aquatic invasive species (AIS) have reached Nebraska! Zebra mussels are currently established in Lewis and Clark Reservoir, Offutt AFB pond, and the Missouri River. Anglers and boaters should be on the look out for personnel performing boat inspections and decontaminations statewide. Follow the link: [Nebraska Invasive Species Program](#) or call 402-472-3133 to report any possible AIS sightings or for more information about AIS in Nebraska.

Preventative Steps and Regulations

- It is unlawful for a boat to arrive at or leave any body of water in Nebraska with water other than from a domestic source except for fire-fighting purposes. Drain water before leaving an area
- It is unlawful for a boat or trailer to arrive or leave a launch area with any aquatic vegetation from that waterbody still attached. Boat blinds cannot use plants listed as invasive species or noxious weeds
- Wash mud off waders. Felt-sole waders are not allowed

Nonresident Aquatic Invasive Species Stamp

Motorized watercraft registered outside Nebraska are required to purchase and display the Aquatic Invasive Species Stamp before launching from any Nebraska boat ramp. Stamps must be affixed on the starboard side toward the rear of the boat above the waterline. The fee for each stamp is \$18 dollars and includes the \$3 issuing fee. Stamps can be purchased online or at Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Offices.



Left: Zebra Mussel
Right: Quagga Mussel