

2013 Northeast District Flood Control Reservoir Survey Results

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Phil Chvala, Fisheries Biologist, NE District

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. Most of these lakes 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.

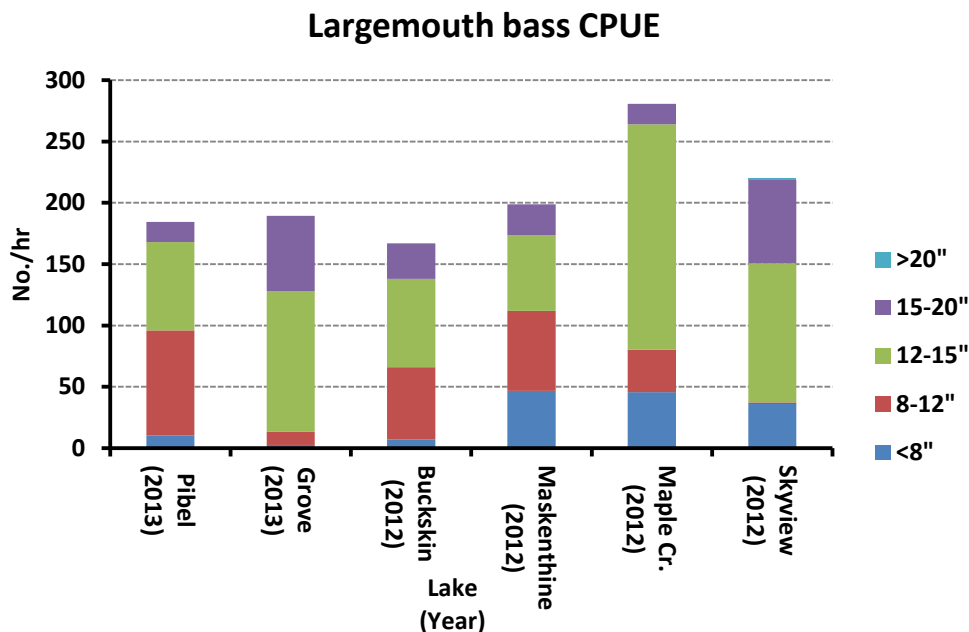
In 2015, another flood control reservoir will be added to the pool of fishing opportunities in this part of the state. Kramper Lake, located on the Danish Alps Recreation Area just east of Hubbard, will encompass approximately 250 surface acres and will be initially stocked with largemouth bass, bluegill,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

Only a couple of flood control reservoirs were sampled for bass in 2013 so the previous year's data was also included in that graph. All bluegill and crappie results represent 2013 data. The spring of 2013 could be considered "abnormal" with it being quite cool with a warm day mixed in on occasion. Due to that weather pattern, panfish sampling was quite variable and the sampling results may not represent the various populations as well as in other years.

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. 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

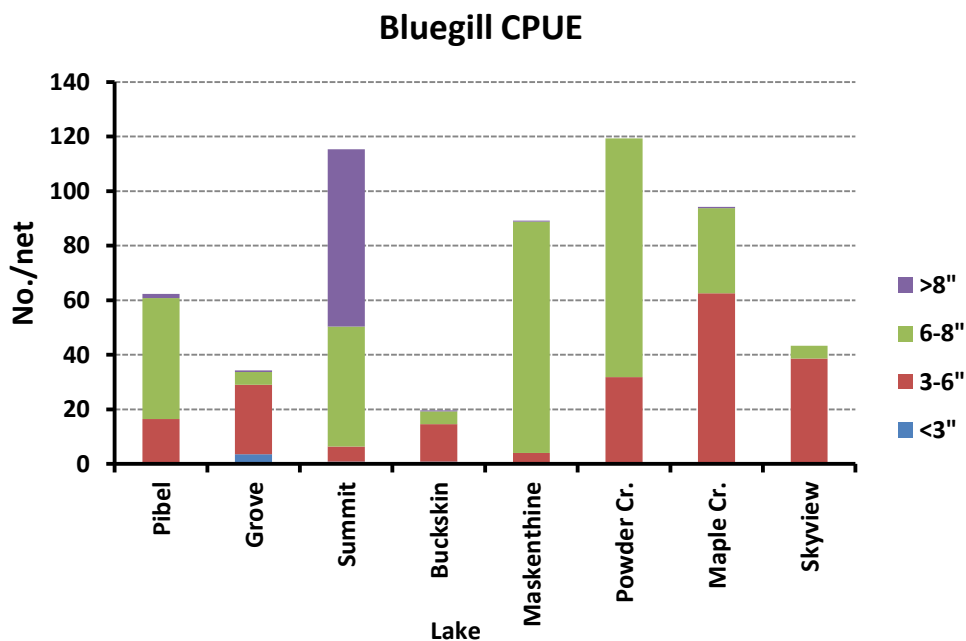


Grove Lake near Royal and Pibel Lake in Wheeler County were the only two flood control reservoirs sampled for largemouth bass in 2013. 2012 data from Buckskin Hills near Newcastle, Maskenthine near Stanton, Skyview on the west side of Norfolk, and Maple Creek, a new lake just northwest of Leigh, are also included in the graph for comparative purposes. 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.

Each of the lakes sampled should provide some great opportunities for anglers seeking bass in 2014. Excellent catch rates and good size distribution were apparent at each of the lakes, including some larger fish. The fishery in Maple Creek is still developing but is well represented with high numbers and a few larger

fish in the mix. Other flood control reservoirs in the Northeast District that should provide good bass angling opportunities that were not sampled in 2012 include Summit and Chalkrock Lakes. Of the four lakes sampled, Buckskin and Skyview are managed with a 21-inch minimum length limit while the other two fall under the statewide 15-inch minimum length limit.

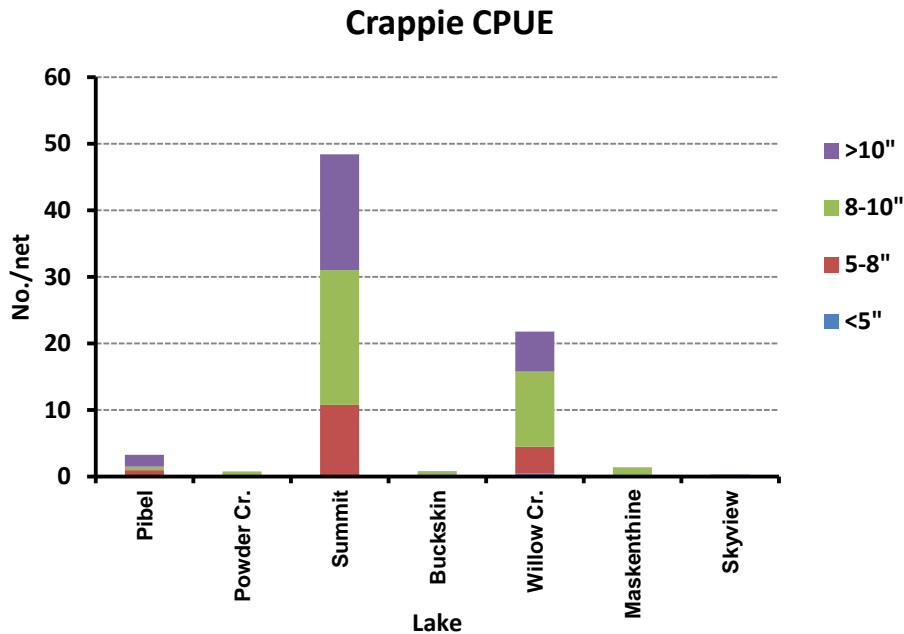
Bluegill



Frame net sampling for bluegill also takes place in the spring, from late April through June. Eight reservoirs were sampled in 2013. Similar to 2012, Summit Lake led the way with an average catch of 65 bluegill over 8 inches per net. With the exception of Skyview and Powder Creek, bluegill anglers shouldn't overlook any of the other lakes listed on the graph as they may not have had many of those 8-inch bluegill but they do have a good number of fish over 7 inches. Powder Creek bluegill are competing with an over-abundance of hybrid sunfish and some green sunfish resulting in fairly poor bluegill size structure for the time being. As mentioned earlier, weather limited the success of the frame netting efforts in the spring of 2013, thus size structure may have been underestimated in some of the lakes. 2013 was also a fairly tough year for panfish anglers in the Northeast as bluegill fishing was slow on many days, including ice fishing at the end of the year and into 2014. However, that may bode well for bluegill anglers in 2014 with many

of those relatively abundant 7-inch bluegill still in the systems with another growing season “under their belts”.

Crappie



Summit Lake near Tekamah and Willow Creek near Pierce, revealed the best crappie fishing opportunities in the District with a fair representation of 10-inch and longer fish in both lakes. Sampling at Pibel Lake, a 25-acre lake just off of Highway 281 south of Bartlett, indicated low numbers but good size structure. Crappie catch was quite low in the remaining flood control reservoirs sampled, likely due to timing and/or the weather patterns in the spring of 2013. Additionally, dense stands of vegetation hamper crappie sampling at times and spring sampling of crappie can be hit or miss depending on spawning activity. Lakes such as Grove, Buckskin Hills, and Maskenthine contain higher numbers of crappie than the netting data suggests. Willow Creek is sampled for crappie in the fall while the others are done in the spring.

Other Species

Anecdotal information indicates good numbers and size structure of **channel catfish** are present in most all of the flood control reservoirs in the district with

many fish in the 15 to 20 inch range. Fall gill netting is the standard method for sampling channel catfish population but manpower constraints do not allow for this sampling on a routine basis. Instead, we rely on catfish collection data and observation while using other gear (primarily frame nets) to gauge population density and general size distribution. Powder Creek Reservoir, between Martinsburg and Newcastle, and Buckskin Hills southwest of Newcastle are two lakes in close proximity to each other that may warrant the interest of catfish anglers. Frame netting at Powder Creek averaged almost 130 per net and fish up to 24 inches.

Netting efforts at Willow Creek Reservoir near Pierce once again indicated low **walleye** abundance (1 per net). However, anglers still managed to find some harvestable fish last spring. 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. Summit Lake has provided some good walleye fishing opportunities at times and anglers did have good success catching mostly sub-legal walleye at Maple Creek this past spring.

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.