

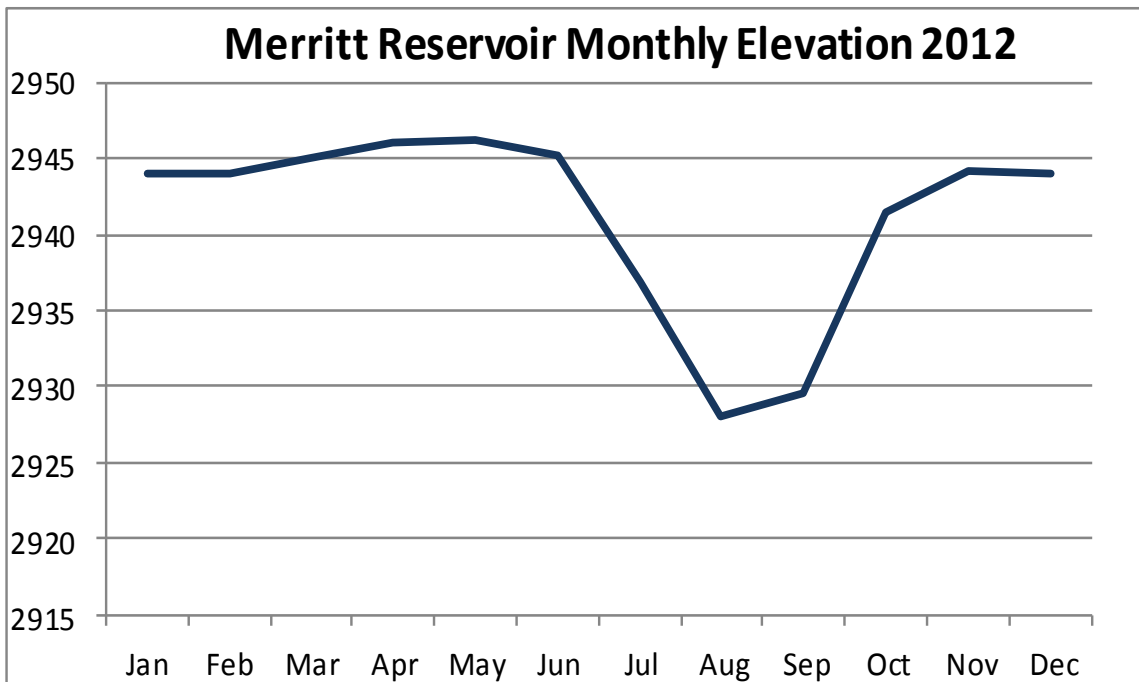
Merritt Reservoir 2012 Fall Survey Summary

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Merritt Reservoir is located in the Nebraska sandhills approximately 26 miles southwest of Valentine, NE. The area is comprised of 2905 acres of water with 6000 acres of land adjacent to the reservoir. The reservoir was built in 1964 by the Bureau of Reclamation for irrigation purposes. When built, the Snake River was dammed near its confluence with Boardman Creek, flooding both valleys along with the Powder Horn arm of the reservoir. Flows from both the Boardman Creek and Snake River contribute to filling the reservoir to full pool each year. A graph showing fluctuations in lake levels over the last year can be seen below. The water and land adjacent to the reservoir is managed by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission for fishing, hunting, and recreational activities. Fishing is available year round and several different fish species are present in Merritt Reservoir which include: alewife, walleye, white bass, muskellunge, northern pike, yellow perch, bluegill, pumpkinseed, black crappie, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, freshwater drum, black bullhead, white sucker, and common carp.

Facilities at Merritt Reservoir include eight campgrounds (one with electrical hookups and ADA accessible shower), one dump station, vault toilets, picnic shelters, two fish cleaning stations, five boat ramps with lighted parking lots, and an area concessionaire which provides permits, groceries, fee camping with RV hookups, boat rentals, fuel, cabins and guide services.



The following text and graphs are the results of netting surveys completed during October 2012 at Merritt Reservoir. For comparative purposes it shows the results from previous years. Biologists use gill nets to sample species that are primarily found in open water such as walleye and white bass. Electrofishing surveys will be conducted every other year at Merritt Reservoir to sample species such as largemouth and smallmouth bass. The nets and electrofishing stations are sampled each year at approximately the same locations and dates as previous years to allow for trend comparisons.

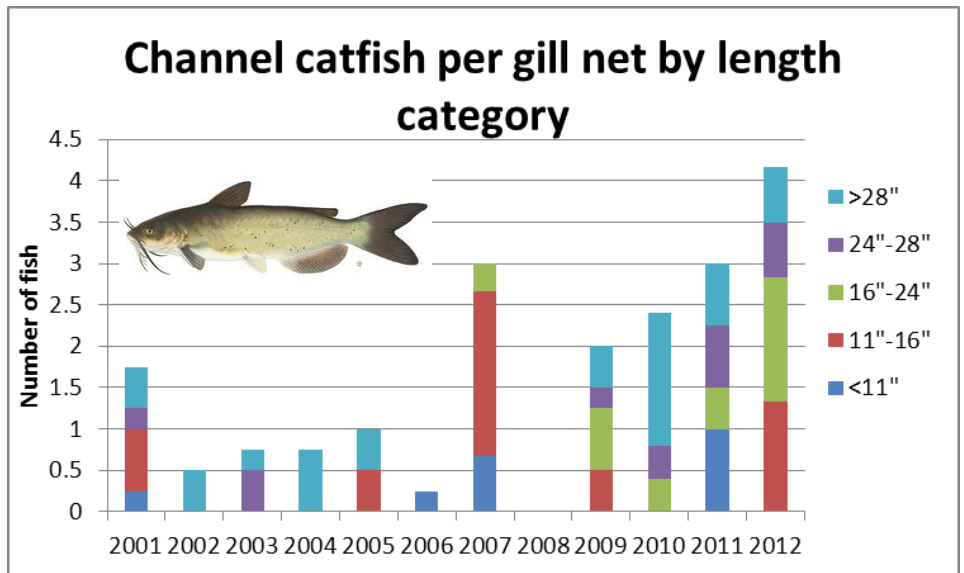
Channel Catfish

Merritt Reservoir has always been a top place for anglers to target trophy channel catfish. Merritt Reservoir holds the state record channel catfish which was caught in 1986 and weighed 41.5 pounds.

Channel catfish abundance continued to increase in 2012 with a net catch of 4.16 fish per net. Every length category was sampled except fish under 11 inches. The average catfish sampled was 23.3 inches and the

largest catfish was 32 inches. Anglers are reminded there were some changes to fishery regulations for the 2013-2014 fishing seasons. The daily bag limit for channel catfish is 10 on rivers, streams and canals but the daily bag limit of five is still in effect on reservoirs, lakes, ponds and pits. The possession limit on channel catfish was increased in 2012 from 10 fish to 20. Merritt Reservoir is stocked annually with 14,250 fish (9-10) inches to maintain the population. However, in 2011 there was a surplus of channel catfish in the hatchery system and Merritt was stocked with 21,640 fish which have recruited into the population and can be seen as fish under 16 inches. We will continue to monitor channel catfish abundance and the goal will be to provide quality channel catfish fishing opportunities at Merritt Reservoir.

Abundance of channel catfish has continued to increase and anglers should find increased opportunities for channel catfish and improved chances for fish greater than 24 inches in length. For more information be sure to check out the Merritt Creel Summary.

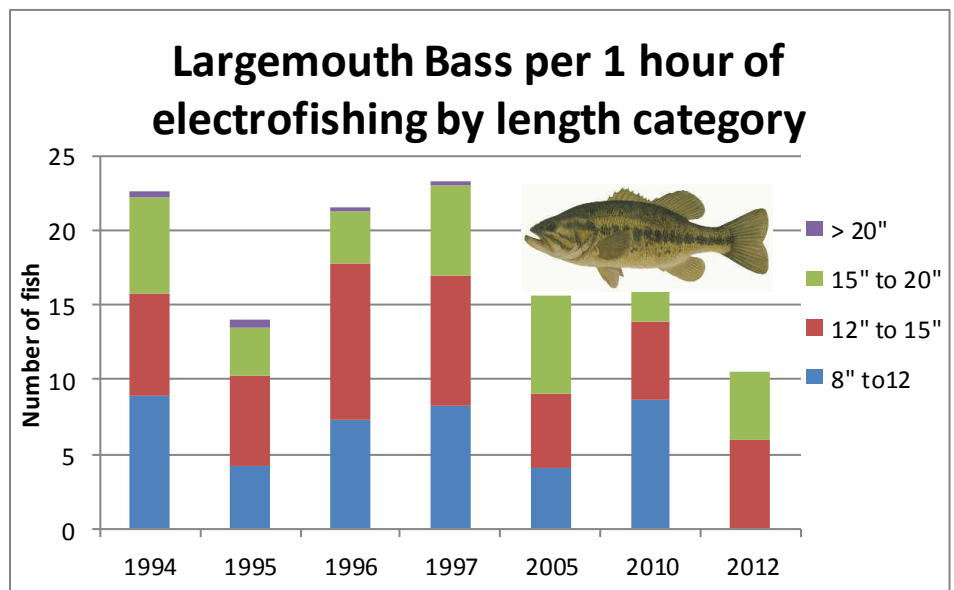


Largemouth Bass

The largemouth bass catch per unit of effort fell in 2012 to 10.4 fish sampled per hour. This catch rate is also below the historic average of 17.8 fish per hour and no fish over 20 inches were sampled in 2012. The average size of largemouth bass sampled was 14.8 inches and the largest fish sampled was 18.1 inches. Even though largemouth abundance seemed to have declined, approximately 42% of the fish sampled were over the state-wide minimum of 15 inches.

Smallmouth bass allow for some additional angling opportunity at Merritt Reservoir. During electrofishing surveys only 1.5 fish were sampled per hour and these fish averaged 12 inches. Larger fish do exist but are difficult to sample during our electrofishing surveys.

Statewide regulations for black bass species on inland waters are a daily bag limit of 5 fish with a minimum length limit of 15 inches and only one fish may be over 21 inches.



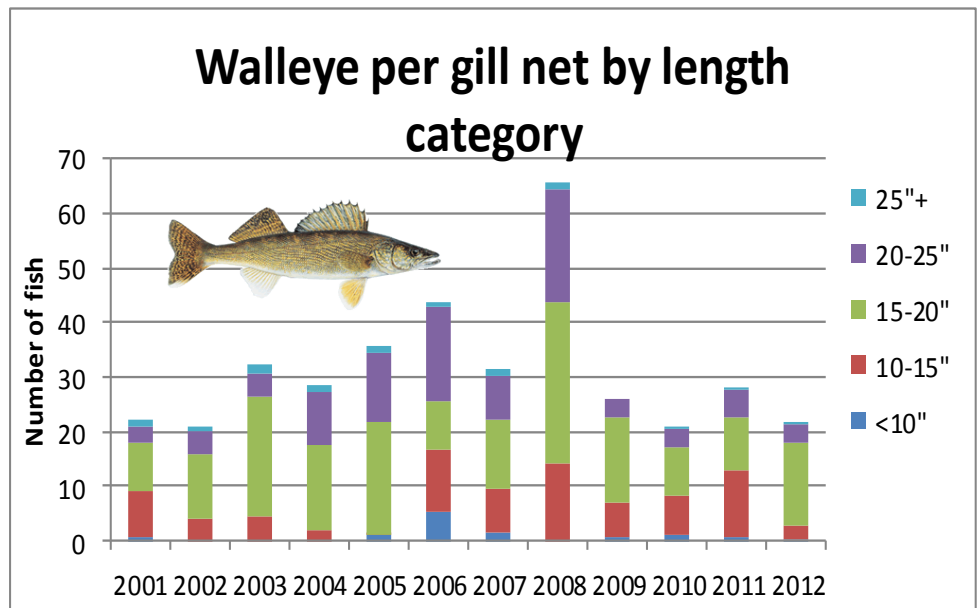
Walleye

The gill net catch for walleye at Merritt Reservoir was down from 2011 with a catch of 21.8 fish per net. This catch also remains below the average since 2001 of 31.3 walleye per net. Every length category was sampled except for fish under 10 inches. Of the fish that were sampled, 86% of them were over the state-wide minimum of 15 inches and approximately 20% of those fish were over 20 inches. The average size of walleye collected was

17.9 inches and the largest sampled was 28 inches. Fourteen different year classes of walleye were sampled at Merritt Reservoir during 2012. Merritt Reservoir is stocked annually with 142,250 fingerling walleye (2 inches) in June to maintain the population. This is a stocking rate of 50 per acre.

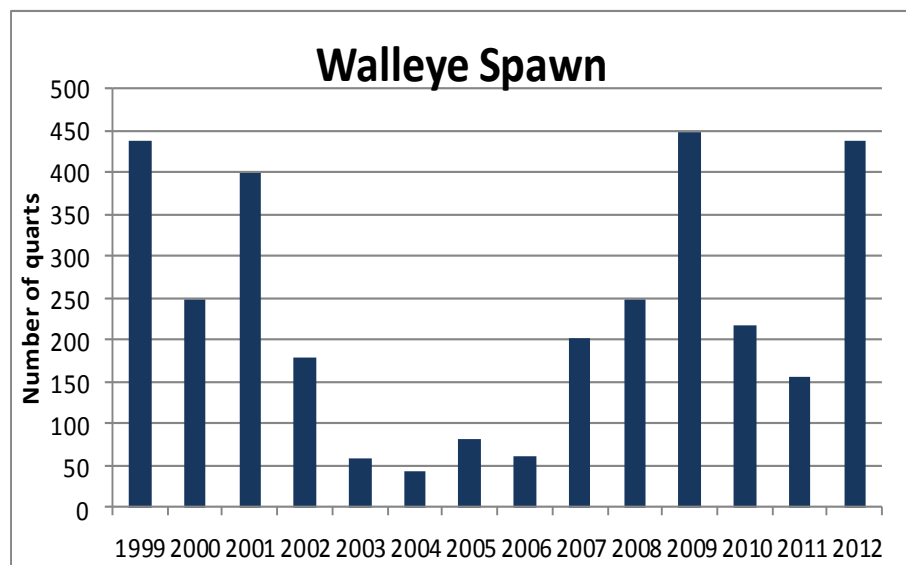
Anglers at Merritt are allowed a daily bag limit of four walleye which may include one from 15 to 18 inches (it is allowable to have all fish over 18 inches) but no more than one fish over 22 inches in length is allowed.

Walleye abundance has remained lower over the past several years but anglers should still see good opportunities to harvest walleye especially on fish between 15 and 20 inches.



Walleye Spawn

Fisheries Division will be conducting walleye spawn operations at Merritt, Sherman, and McConaughy Reservoirs during 2013. These operations usually occur during late March or early April and last until hatchery production needs are met. Nets are set parallel to the dam or shore line in order to collect females as they come in to spawn. These nets are marked with a buoy on each end so anglers are reminded not to cast between the buoys or lures will be lost. During the 2012 spawning operation, fishery personnel collected approximately 438 quarts of walleye eggs from Merritt Reservoir.



Northern Pike and Muskellunge

Northern pike and muskellunge numbers have increased over the past several years. These fish are sampled on alternate years with trap nets and will be sampled in 2013. Past surveys indicate that the average length of pike collected was 28 inches with the largest being 39 inches. Regulations for northern pike allow a daily bag limit of 3 fish and a possession limit of 10 fish. Muskellunge populations are difficult to sample during our standard surveys at Merritt Reservoir but are often collected during spring walleye egg collection. In 2012 the largest fish collected measured 47 inches and weighed approximately 34 pounds. Northern pike and muskellunge are both collected from Merritt Reservoir to produce northern pike, pure strain muskellunge, and hybrid tiger muskellunge (northern pike x muskellunge) production needs. Muskellunge are stocked on alternate years with 1,400 fish to maintain the population. Muskellunge regulations allow a daily bag limit of 1 fish with a minimum length of 40 inches.



White Bass

White bass also persist in Merritt Reservoir even though numbers have remained low. In 2012, two white bass were sampled that averaged approximately 10 inches and were two years old. Hopefully this is an indicator that there was survival from our 2010 stocking of 18,465 fingerling white bass. In 2011 an additional 61,184 white bass fingerlings were stocked to supplement the population. White bass regulations allow a daily bag limit of 15 fish and only one fish may be over 16 inches in length. Possession limit for white bass is 30 fish.



Panfish

Yellow perch, black crappie, and bluegill are other popular species for anglers at Merritt Reservoir. Black crappie are generally targeted during the early spring spawning period or through the ice during the winter months. Bluegill and yellow perch are caught year round and are a favorite for anglers during the late summer months when other species can be tough to find. Statewide regulations allow a daily bag limit of 15 fish in combination (all panfish species).

For more information on angling opportunities for these species be sure to check out the 2012 summary for Merritt Reservoir.



Angler Creel Survey

A five year angler creel survey is being conducted at Merritt Reservoir. The study is being done by an agreement with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit through the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. This survey will be run from April 1 until October 31, 2013. This is the final year of the five year study which started in 2009. During this time, anglers are counted and interviewed for twenty randomly selected days per month, fourteen week days and six weekend days. Information gathered from this survey allows fisheries managers to look at estimates of angling pressure, size structure of fish caught, catch and harvest, and catch rates per hour. Anglers are encouraged to cooperate with creel clerks: it will only take a few minutes of their time. The information gathered from the creel survey will help managers to provide an optimum sport fishery. Be sure to check out the 2012 Merritt Creel Summary report.

Zebra and Quagga Mussels

Anglers and boaters should know that AIS (Aquatic Invasive Species) issues have become a rising concern in Nebraska. Zebra mussels (pictured right) and quagga mussels are small fingernail-sized mussels and adults are usually 1/4 to 1/2 inches long with alternating yellow and brownish colored stripes on their shell. Statewide monitoring in Nebraska has begun since the zebra mussels were confirmed in Nebraska at Offutt Lake and Zorinsky Lake near Omaha and are present in several reservoirs in Colorado and Kansas.



Sampling for veligers (free-swimming larvae of adult mussels) occurs statewide from the months of May through September. Fortunately, no evidence of these mussels has been discovered in any other lakes that were sampled.

These mussels can spread in their immature form known as veligers by being transported in bilge, ballast, or live –well water or as adults attached to boat hulls, engines, aquatic vegetation, or other surfaces. Once established these mussels can cause millions of dollars in damage to recreation, water systems, and fisheries. Anglers should always remember to **CLEAN DRAIN DRY** which will help to prevent the spread of these unwanted invasive species.

CLEAN– Remove plants, animals, mud , and thoroughly wash equipment that came into contact with the water.

DRAIN– Drain all water before leaving, including wells, bilge, ballast, and any parts or equipment that can hold water.

DRY– Allow all equipment to dry completely before launching into another body of water.

For more information on invasive species in Nebraska make sure to visit the University of Nebraska’s invasive species project website at <http://snr.unl.edu/invasives>.

NEW REGULATIONS: Any conveyance (boats) that has been on a waterbody must drain all water from their compartments, equipment or containers before leaving the launch area. All aquatic vegetation from that waterbody must be removed before leaving the launch area. Felt sole boots or waders are not allowed to be used on Nebraska waters.



**STOP AQUATIC
HITCHHIKERS!**

Prevent the transport of nuisance species.
Clean all recreational equipment.
www.ProtectYourWaters.net

For additional information about fisheries management at Merritt Reservoir please contact the following NGPC personnel by phone or email addressees listed below.

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