

2024

FISHING FORECAST

INFORMATION FOR:

- Fish Sampling Charts
- Best Waters to Catch Large Fish

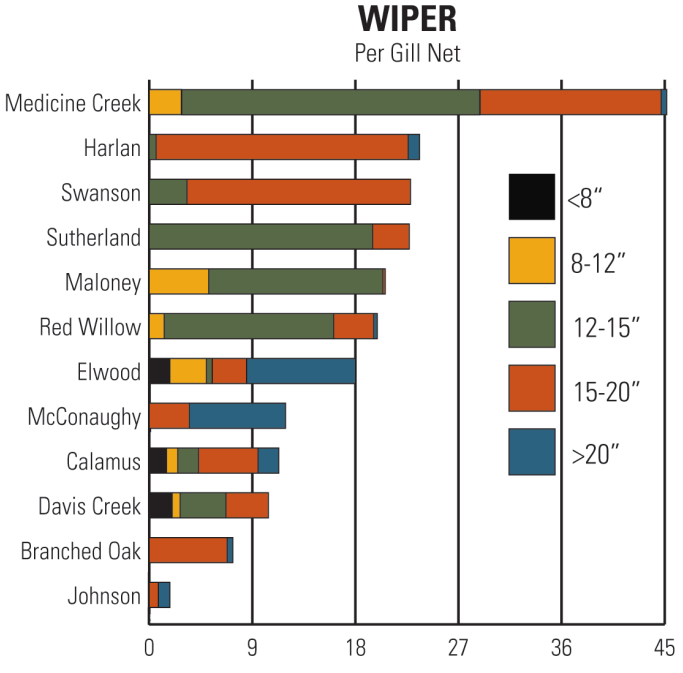
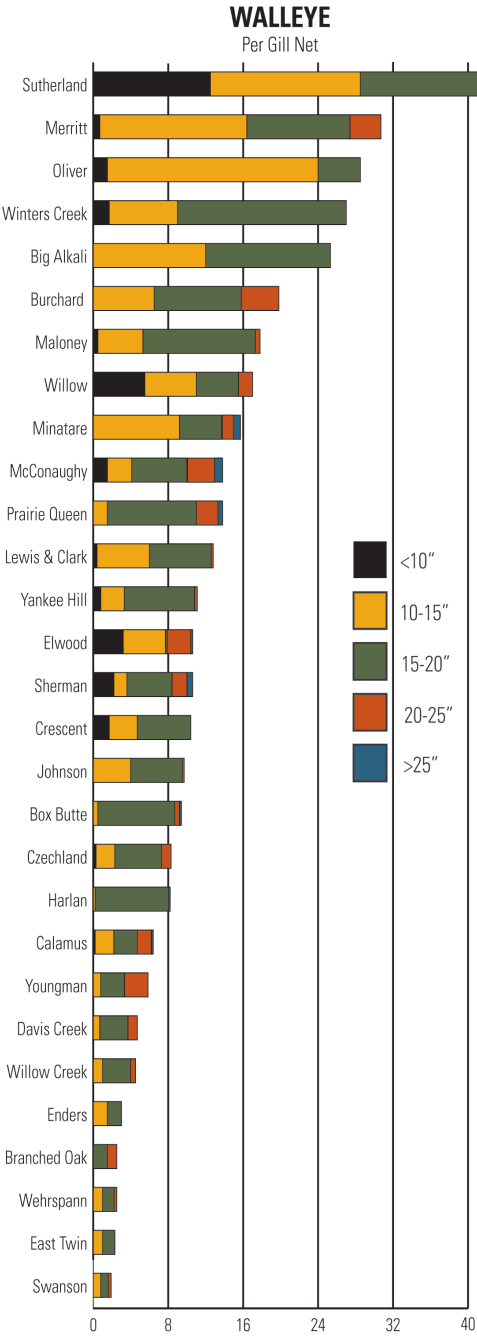
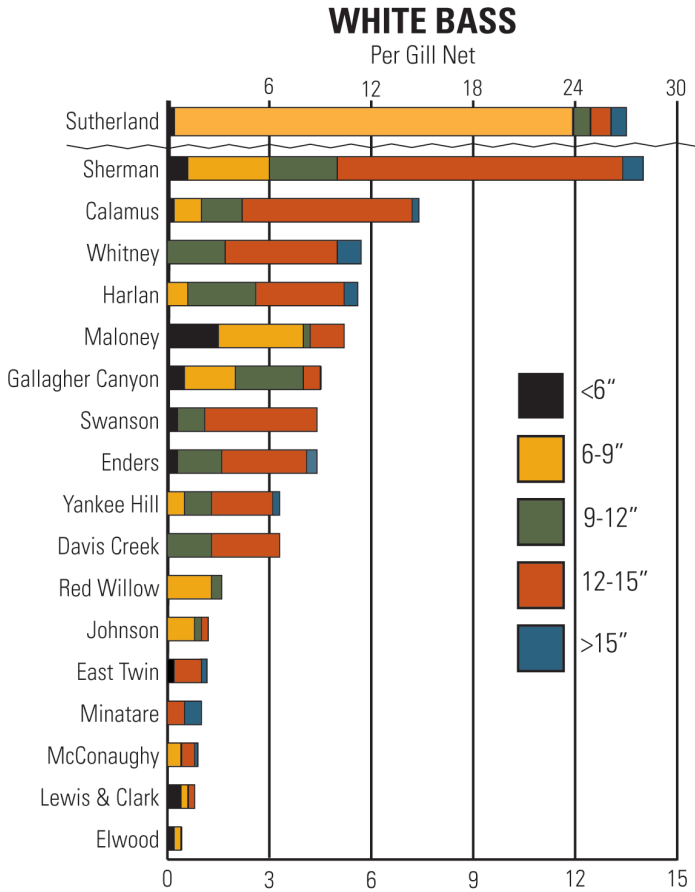
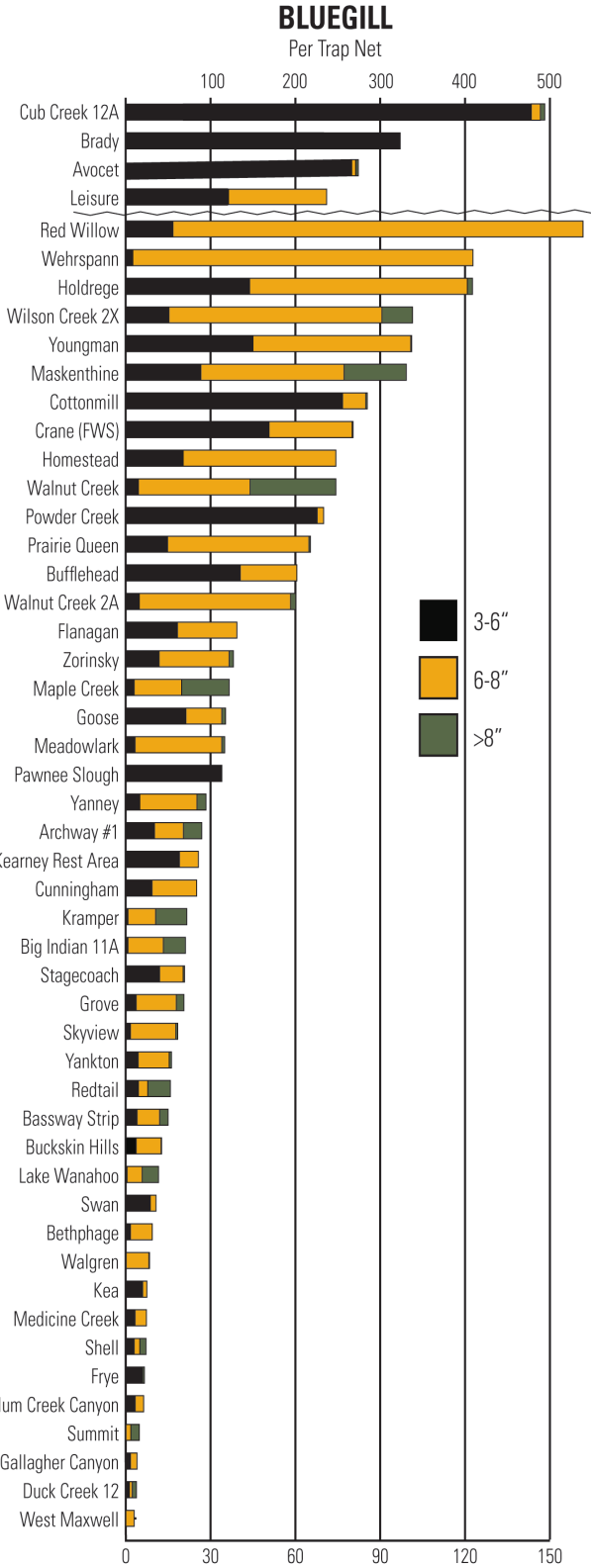
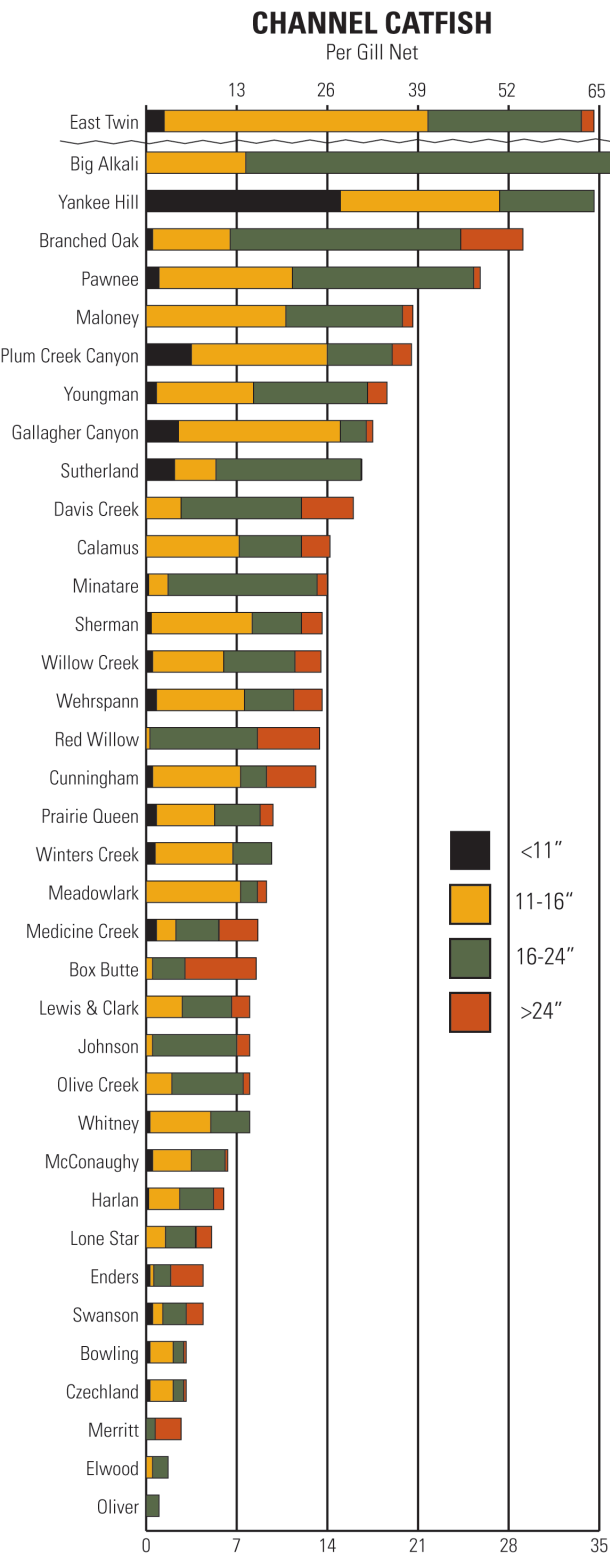
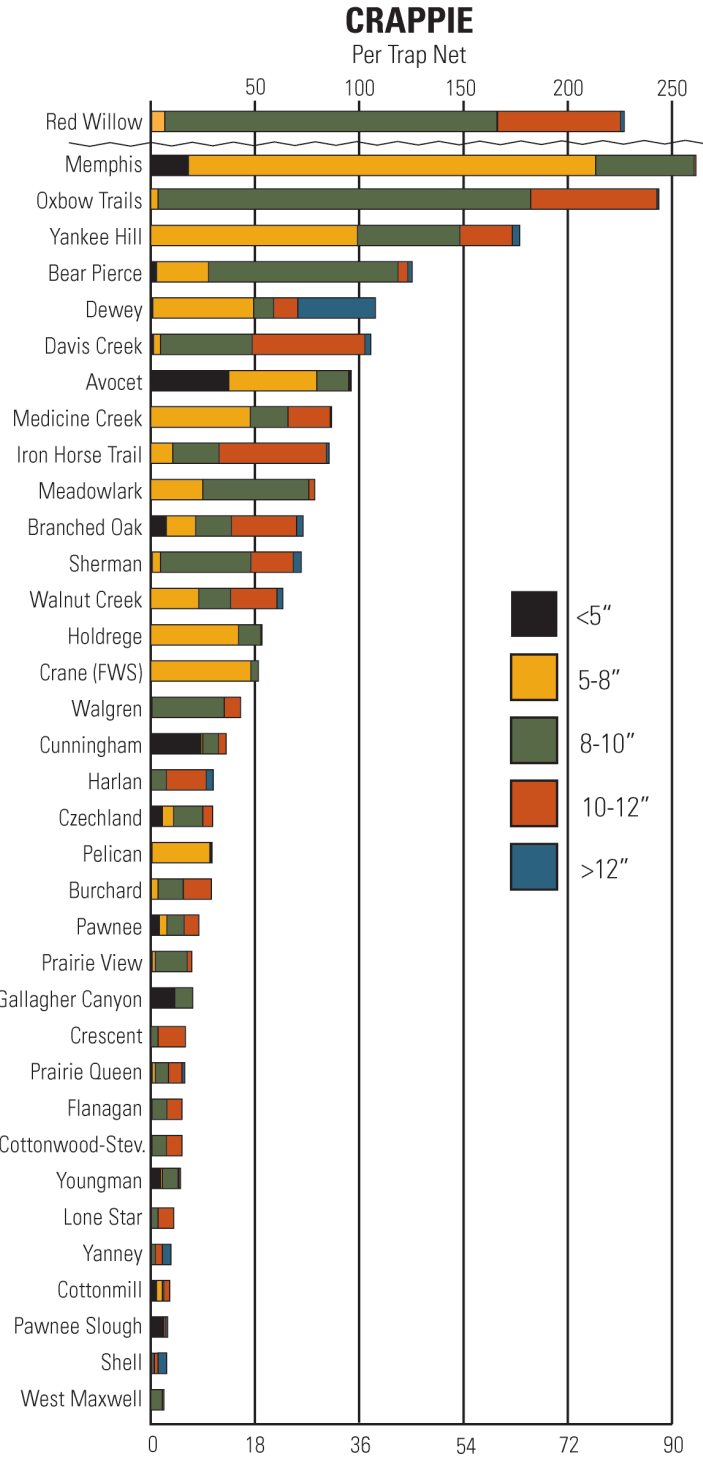
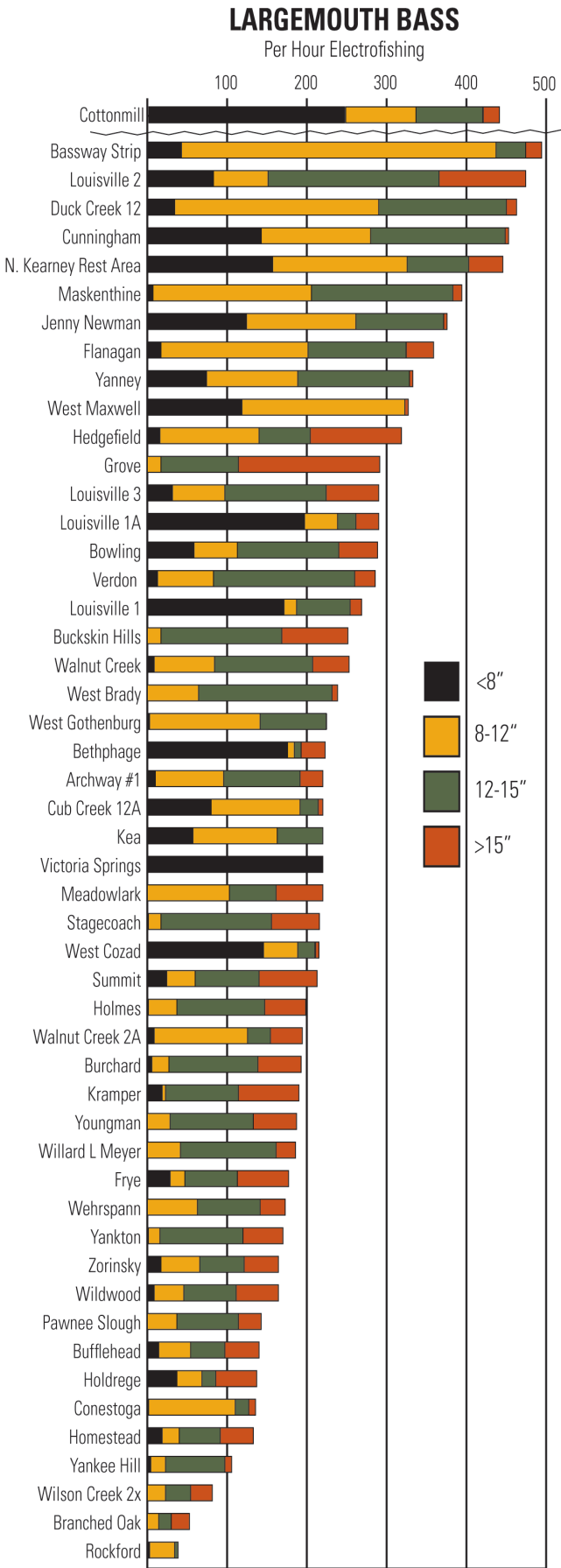
NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —



Flanagan Lake
northern pike sampled
in March 2023.

» OutdoorNebraska.gov

2023 Sampling Charts



A GUIDE TO FISHING NEBRASKA IN 2024

By Daryl Bauer, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, fisheries outreach program manager

WALLEYE

Nebraska's largest waters are the state's best walleye habitats and consistently provide the best fishing. Walleye populations in these waters are always changing often in response to fluctuating water levels. The highest total sampling rates of walleyes last fall were at **Sutherland, Merritt, Oliver, Winters Creek** and **Big Alkali**. **Sutherland, Winters Creek, Big Alkali** and **Maloney** will be particularly good for 15- to 20-inch walleyes in 2024. Anglers targeting big walleyes should plan trips to **McConaughy, Minatare** and **Sherman** reservoirs. Smaller waters are less ideal as walleye habitats, but several of those will offer some walleye opportunities this year. **Burchard, Prairie Queen** and **Yankee Hill** will give anglers a chance to catch walleyes in eastern Nebraska. **Oliver Reservoir** in the Panhandle again had a lot of walleyes sampled last fall, but most of them need another year to grow.

WHITE BASS

White bass also are open-water predator fish that thrive in Nebraska's largest reservoirs. Water level fluctuations also drive reservoir white bass population dynamics. The most white bass in 2024 will be found at **Sutherland, Sherman, Calamus, Whitney, Harlan** and **Maloney**. **Sherman, Calamus, Whitney, Swanson, Harlan** and **Enders** will be particularly good for white bass larger than 12 inches this year. For fish larger than 15 inches, anglers should target **Sutherland, Whitney, Sherman** and **Minatare**.

WIPERS

Wipers are white bass X striped bass hybrids, and like their parent species, they also are most successful in open-water habitats – Nebraska's largest reservoirs. Southwest reservoirs **Medicine Creek, Swanson** and **Red Willow** will offer high numbers of wipers in 2024. **Harlan** will have numbers of wipers this year as well as the canal reservoirs **Sutherland** and **Maloney**. Anglers looking for trophy wipers in 2024 will find **Elwood** and **McConaughy** offering the most and biggest with some fish larger than 20 inches also present in **Calamus, Harlan** and **Johnson**. In eastern Nebraska, **Branched Oak** will provide anglers opportunities to catch wipers (remember all wipers caught at Branched Oak must be immediately released).

BLUEGILL

Anglers can take their kids to catch some "sunnies" on just about any small body of water in Nebraska. The best waters always are the ones that produce numbers of 8-inch and larger bluegills. Small- to medium-size reservoirs offer some of the best bluegill fishing every year, with **Walnut Creek, Maskenthine, Maple Creek, Kramper** and **Wilson Creek 2X** topping the list in 2024. Sandhills lakes offer lower densities of bluegills but can produce some trophy bluegills, with the biggest fish exceeding a pound. The best Sandhills lakes this year will be **Shell, Dewey** and **Frye**. Anglers should remember that bluegills that big are rare fish and worthy of having a picture taken and then returned to the water. Pits and ponds like **Redtail, Archway #1** and **Yanney** will also produce some quality bluegills this year.

CRAPPIES

Crappies are another panfish that can be found throughout Nebraska, with the quest being finding waters that will produce fish larger than 10 inches. **Red Willow, Oxbow Trails, Davis Creek, Iron Horse Trail** and **Branched Oak** will be some of the state's best crappie waters 2024. Other reservoirs that will be good for crappies will be **Yankee Hill, Walnut Creek, Sherman, Medicine Creek** and **Harlan**. Again, Sandhills lakes tend to have lower densities of panfish like crappies, but can offer some of the biggest, fattest, black crappies in the state. **Crescent** and **Dewey** lakes will be the best of the Sandhills crappie fisheries this year.

LARGEMOUTH BASS

Water bodies that offer stable water levels, clean water and an abundance of shallow water cover, especially aquatic vegetation, are those in which largemouth bass thrive. In Nebraska, small reservoirs, Sandhill lakes, pits, and ponds tend to provide the best of that habitat. Some of those waters can have high densities of bass which favor producing excellent panfish fishing as largemouth bass keep panfish numbers in check. However, waters with lots of bass may not necessarily be the best for big bass. When looking at the sampling data for the best bass waters, those with the highest numbers of bass may not offer opportunities to catch fish larger than 15 inches. On the other hand, lower densities of largemouth bass can

offer anglers the best chances to catch bass larger than 15 inches. Some small- to medium-size reservoirs that will be particularly good this year include **Grove, Hedgefield, Buckskin Hills, Kramper** and **Summit**. Pits are some of the best bass fisheries in the state, **Louisville State Recreation Area pits #2 and #3, Bufflehead** and **North Kearney Rest Area** will offer some excellent bass fishing in 2024. Many Sandhills lakes suffered winterkill last winter, but **Frye Lake** will still be a good bet for 15-inch and larger bass. Private waters always produce some of the best bass fishing in the state, and many Nebraska anglers have permission to fish at least one of those privately-owned waters. In addition, some private pits and ponds have been enrolled in the Open Fields and Waters program and are open to the public. See the Public Access Atlas at OutdoorNebraska.gov.

CHANNEL CATFISH

Channel catfish are a popular fish in Nebraska and are found widely across the state. **Big Alkali, East Twin, Branched Oak, Pawnee, Minatare** and **Sutherland** reservoirs will all offer good numbers of 16-inch and larger channel cats in 2024. For even larger cats, fish longer than 24 inches, anglers should plan to fish **Box Butte, Red Willow** and **Davis Creek**. Catch and release of large, trophy catfish is a practice that should be considered by anglers on any Nebraska water as it takes years to grow channel cats that large. For a different experience, try Nebraska's warm-water rivers like the **Missouri, Platte, Elkhorn** or **Niobrara** as they also are excellent catfish fisheries. There are some areas where public access is available on Nebraska rivers, check out the Open Fields and Waters program for access to warm-water streams and rivers on private lands.

OTHER SPECIES

Besides the species highlighted in the fish-sampling graphs, there are a variety of other fish that can be pursued. In addition to bluegills, Nebraska offers opportunities to catch other sunfish species, like **REDEAR SUNFISH** at **Prairie Queen, West Brady** and **Walnut Creek**.

SMALLMOUTH BASS can be caught at **Johnson, Big Elk** and **McConaughy** as well as the **Missouri River** in northeast Nebraska.

BLUE CATFISH can be found in reservoirs like **Medicine Creek, Swanson, Pawnee** and **Branched Oak**, but look to the **Missouri River** in the southeast for blue cats weighing up to triple digits.

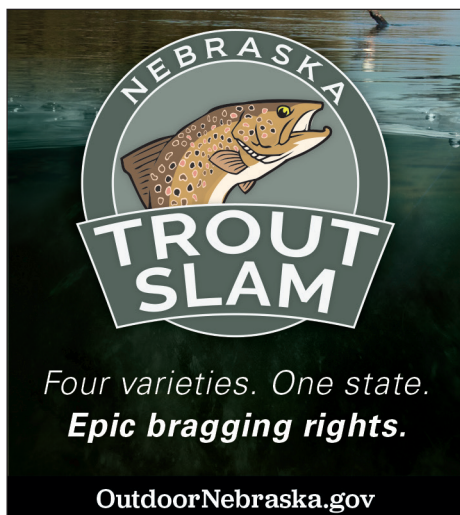
FLATHEAD CATFISH are another species of large catfish that can be found in the **Missouri River** as well as in reservoirs like **Harlan, Sherman, Branched Oak** and the **Tri-County canal system**. All flatheads at Branched Oak must be released immediately after capture. Anglers should consider releasing big flatties on other fisheries as well.

SAUGER fishing will be best on **Lewis and Clark Reservoir** and the **Missouri River** in northeast Nebraska, but **Johnson Reservoir** and the **Tri-County canal system**, including **Gallagher Canyon** and **Plum Creek Canyon**, also have good numbers of sauger.

SAUGEYE are a walleye X sauger hybrid and stocking is producing excellent opportunities for anglers to catch some in **Cunningham, Olive Creek** and **Whitney**.

Following winterkills last winter, **YELLOW PERCH** numbers will be limited in 2024, but some yellow perch fishing will be found at **Crane Lake** in the Sandhills. **Sutherland** and **Maloney** reservoirs will also offer anglers some yellow perch.

Sandhill lakes are some of the best **NORTHERN PIKE** habitats in the state as well; **Clear, Dewey, Smith (Wildlife Management Area)** and **Walgren** lakes will provide some pike fishing in 2024 along with **Box Butte Reservoir**. Reservoirs in southern and eastern Nebraska typically are too warm for cool-water northern pike, but **Wanahoo** and **Flanagan** are relatively new and have some pike habitat and pike fishing now. All pike are required to be



released at Wanahoo and Flanagan.

The “king of freshwater sport fish,” **MUSKELLUNGE**, also can be found in Nebraska waters. To catch this trophy, toothy predator, anglers should target **Merritt, Calamus** and **Zorinsky** reservoirs, as well as **Mormon Island West** and Grand Island’s **L.E. Ray Lake**. **Cottonwood-Steverson** in the Sandhills also has an excellent muskie population.

Nebraska also has waters that support cold-water fish year-round where anglers can pursue a **TROUT** Slam catching rainbows, browns, brooks, and possibly even cutthroats and tigers, brown trout X brook trout hybrids. Most of the cold-water trout streams are in western and northern parts of the state; the **East Branch of Verdigre Creek, Long Pine, Soldier** and **Ninemile** creeks are favorites among trout anglers. In 2024, the rainbow trout fishing at **Lake Ogallala** will rebound after renovation last fall. Anglers might even catch some cutties from the **White River** and the **Wood Reserve Ponds** in northwest Nebraska’s Pine Ridge.

Photo: Jerry Kane/NGPC