

Interstate 80 Lakes Overton to Sutherland 2023 Survey Summary



There are 20 Interstate 80 (I-80) Lake fisheries between Overton and Sutherland that are actively managed by NGPC's Southwest District personnel. These lakes range from 6 to 53 surface acres and are primarily managed as Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) but some areas are owned and managed by other government agencies. For more information concerning I-80 Lakes consult NGPC's [Fishing the Interstate](#) publication and the [2024 Fishing Guide](#). Statewide harvest regulations apply at most I-80 Lakes in this region, but West Brady and East Hershey are Catch & Release Only.

Please don't litter as there is no designated litter control method at many of these I-80 Lakes. Investigate [WMA Regulations](#) as camping has been prohibited or more stringently regulated at many of these locations. Investigate the [2024 Boating Guide](#) for boating restrictions.

On average, four of these I-80 Lake Fisheries are sampled per year. Although Pawnee Slough was not formed by I-80 construction, it is lumped into this category. During the spring, nighttime boat electrofishing is used to sample largemouth bass while trap nets are used to sample other shoreline-oriented species such as bluegill. For additional survey information investigate [Survey Summaries](#) on NGPC's website.



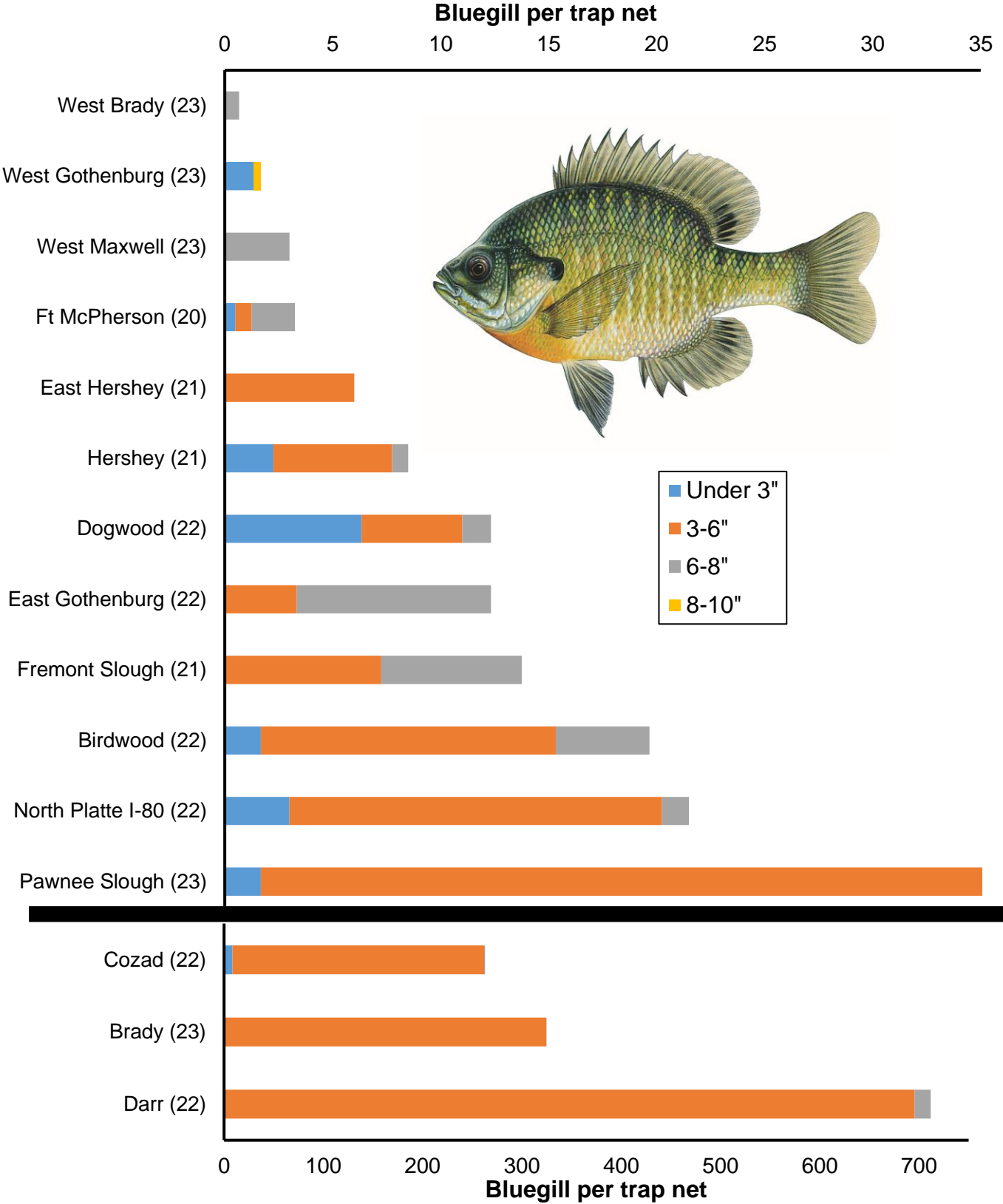
Bluegill are prevalent in many I-80 Lakes and serve as the primary prey item for predatory species. For their size, bluegill are “scrappy” fighters especially on light tackle. Their tendency to inhabit shoreline habitats make them a good target for bank anglers.

According to 2023 survey data, Brady and Pawnee Slough have high densities of small bluegill. Average length of bluegill at Brady was 4.7 inches and 3.5 inches at Pawnee Slough. West Maxwell exhibited a decent population with some being just short of 8”. West Gothenburg’s survey indicated some bluegill over 8” while West Brady’s bluegill showed good growth but low density.

The graph on the next page shows survey data from previous years and displays the most recent data (yr) from all surveyed I-80 Lakes. Two vertical axes are used to allow presentation of large values. Darr, Brady and Cozad’s bluegill surveys are represented by the lower axis while several other surveys are represented by the top axis. Statewide harvest regulations apply at many I-80 Lakes but West Brady and East Hershey are Catch & Release Only.



Bluegill

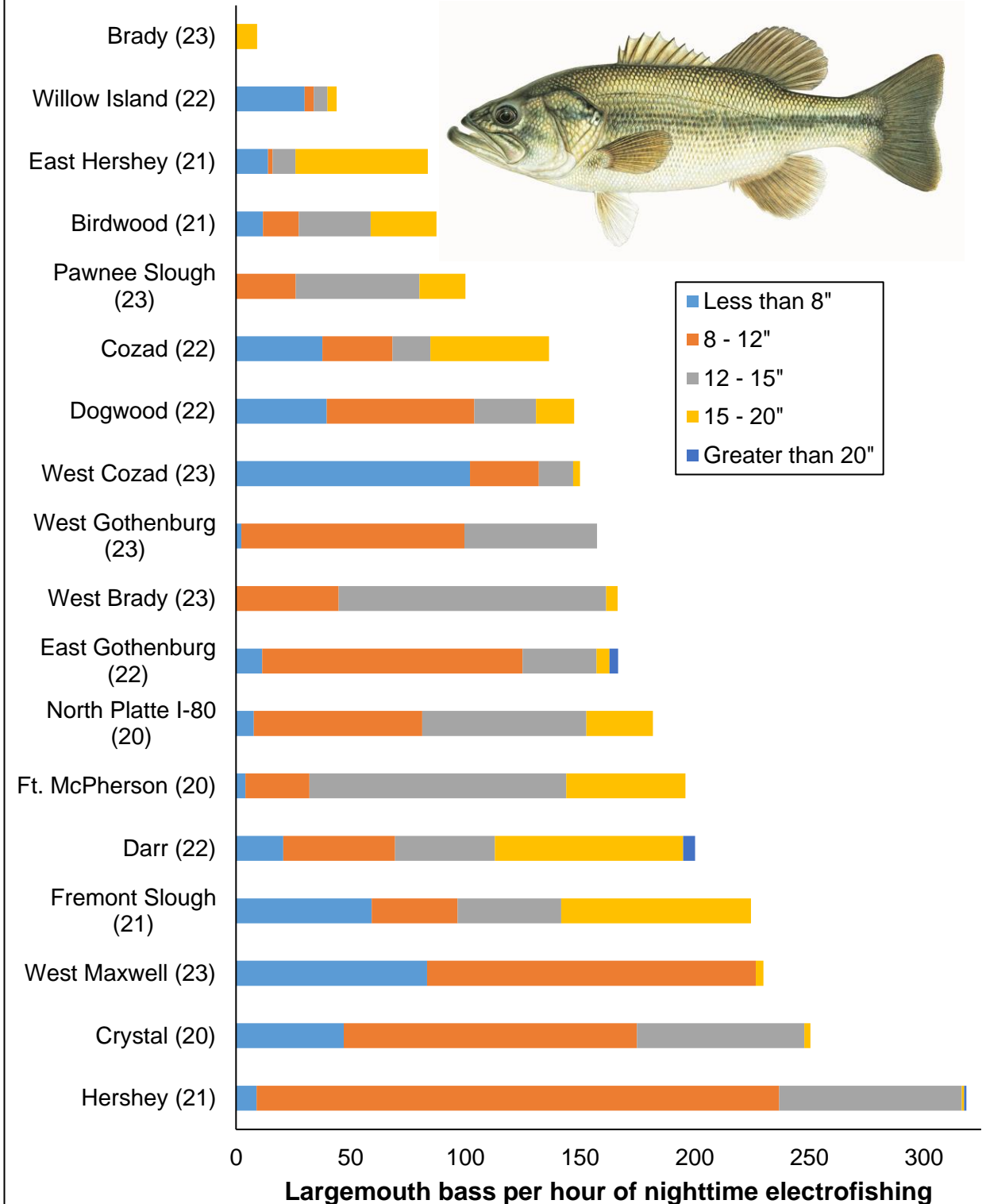
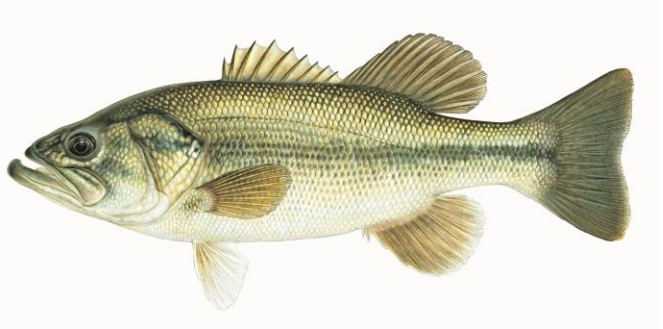


Largemouth bass are the main predatory species in many I-80 Lakes. The 2023 survey revealed that West Maxwell had the highest catch although these fish were small. Average length was greater at West Brady with an average of 13". West Gothenburg's largemouth bass population showed less quality with the majority being less than 12". West Cozad's population was renovated in 2021. The large quantity of small bass is favorable. Abundance of bass at Pawnee Slough has made a return and specimens greater than 15" exist. Brady exhibited the lowest population density.

The graph depicts survey data for largemouth bass dating back to 2020. Statewide harvest regulations apply at many I-80 Lakes but West Brady and East Hershey are Catch & Release Only.



Largemouth bass

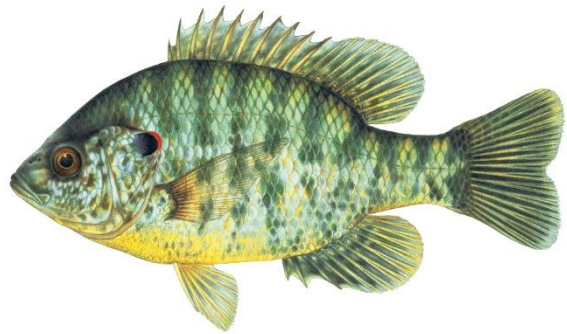


Other species inhabit I-80 Lakes due to flood events, illegal and intentional NGPC stockings. Below are some species maintained by NGPC to provide angling opportunities. To further investigate I-80 Lake stockings utilize [NGPC's Stocking Database](#). Statewide harvest regulations apply at many I-80 Lakes but West Brady and East Hershey are Catch & Release Only for all species.

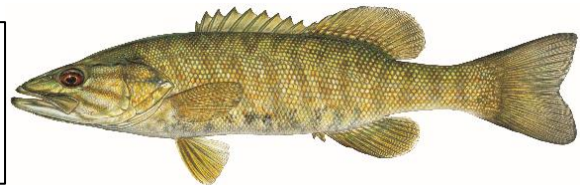
Crappie offer an opportunity at several I-80 Lakes but their populations are typically small. In recent years, hybrid crappie have been stocked into Brady and West Brady.



Redear sunfish were stocked in many I-80 Lakes during 2009. This "Southern" species has found a habitat niche in several I-80 Lakes and provides substantial angling opportunities.



Smallmouth bass were stocked into East Sutherland following the renovation in 2021. Initial survey data indicates that these smallmouth are doing well. In the presence of largemouth bass, smallmouth populations tend to decline.



Channel catfish offer another angling opportunity in many I-80 Lakes. They are raised to 10" before being stocked to limit predation by largemouth bass and are stocked in many I-80 Lakes on a yearly schedule to maintain fishable populations.



Saugeye have recently been stocked into East Sutherland and initial surveys indicate that they may provide a fishery. Further stockings will be made to sustain this species.

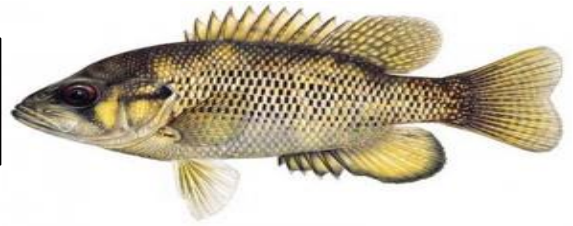


Other species

Rainbow trout are stocked into Birdwood and North Platte I-80 Lake to provide seasonal fishing opportunities.



Rock bass is a unique species that thrives in some I-80 Lakes such as Hershey. Rock bass have recently been stocked into East Sutherland.



Flathead catfish were stocked into Brady to supplement predation. This species exists in low densities at Hershey.



Yellow perch were recently stocked into East Sutherland. Yellow perch also exist in other I-80 Lakes at low densities such as Hershey, Fremont Slough and Birdwood.



Tiger muskellunge were recently stocked into Pawnee Slough and additional advanced fingerling stockings are planned. This species is a relative to northern pike who reside in low densities at some I-80 Lakes such as Hershey, Fremont Slough and East Hershey.



Regulations

During 2021, East Sutherland and West Cozad I-80 Lake Fisheries were renovated using a toxicant that removes all species of fish. Initial observations indicated successful eradications of unwanted species and survival of initial stockings. In effort to protect these fragile populations a **No Live Baitfish** regulation has been placed on each lake. This regulation makes use or possession of live baitfish illegal at these sites and will likely prolong the absence of unwanted species.

In addition, a **21" minimum length limit on black bass** was enacted at East Sutherland and Birdwood I-80 Lakes. This regulation will protect the smallmouth bass population at East Sutherland and the largemouth bass at Birdwood.

East Hershey and West Brady's harvest regulations remain catch and release for all species. These and other regulations are publicized in the [2024 Fishing Guide](#).



Fish Attractors

Cedar trees were sunk in East Sutherland I-80 Lake on April 12, 2023. These trees may congregate game species for anglers to target. When possible, trees are removed from shorelines to improve bank angler access during these projects.



Site Description	Location
12 Trees	N 41°08.460' W 101°03.335'
2 Trees	N 41°08.409' W 101°03.109'
2 Trees	N 41°08.405' W 101°03.093'
2 Trees	N 41°08.478' W 101°03.432'
2 Trees	N 41°08.424 W 101°03.321'
4 Trees	N 41°08.462' W 101°03.099'

Community Fishing Nights

During 2023, Community Fishing Nights were held at Birdwood and North Platte I-80 Lake. These events are great for youth and introducing new anglers to the activity. When attending a Community Fishing Night, look for the Family Fishing Trailer to locate the site. Rods and reels are loaned, bait and fishing instruction is given for free. Please utilize [NGPC's Schedule](#) to learn about 2024's Community Fishing Nights.



Angler Access

Over the last several years, NGPC has improved angler access at several I-80 Lakes in various ways. Many of these sites can be described as “Family Friendly” and/or “Accessible” due to these improvements. Please access the [2024 Fishing Guide](#) to determine these locations.



Angler Access

As of January 25, 2024 a bid has been awarded for clearing Hershey I-80 Lake's shoreline. This site will be cleared of invasive tree species such as cedar and Russian olive. This removal will greatly increase manageability, safety and angler access. Funding for this project is provided by NGPC's Aquatic Habitat Program. Other I-80 Lake WMAs that have recently been cleared include, West Brady, Brady, West Gothenburg and East Sutherland.



During May, two angler access platforms were removed from Hershey's south shoreline. This removal action was completed due to naturally reoccurring damage and prohibitive repair costs. Stairs remain at these sites to retain easier angler access. One ADA approved angler access platform remains along Hershey's north shoreline.



Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)

Eurasian watermilfoil is an invasive aquatic plant and is now found in many waterbodies across Nebraska including **East Hershey, Hershey, Birdwood and Ironhorse City Park Lake (North Platte I-80)**. This plant spreads through tiny fragments and can grow up to 20 feet deep. New infestations are often caused by boaters not following the **Clean, Drain, and Dry** protocol and introducing fragments into new lakes. Make sure you clean all aquatic vegetation from your boat to prevent this invasive aquatic plant from spreading to new waterbodies.

To report AIS utilize 402-471-7602 \ ngpc.ais@nebraska.gov



If you have questions or concerns about I-80 Lakes between Overton and Sutherland
please contact

North Platte Southwest District Office 308-535-8025 / 308-221-6242

OR

Kearney Service Center 308-865-5331