

2025

FISHING FORECAST

INFORMATION FOR:

- Fish Sampling Charts
- Best Waters
to Catch Large Fish

NEBRASKA
- GAME  PARKS -

Box Butte Reservoir
channel catfish sampled
in October 2024.

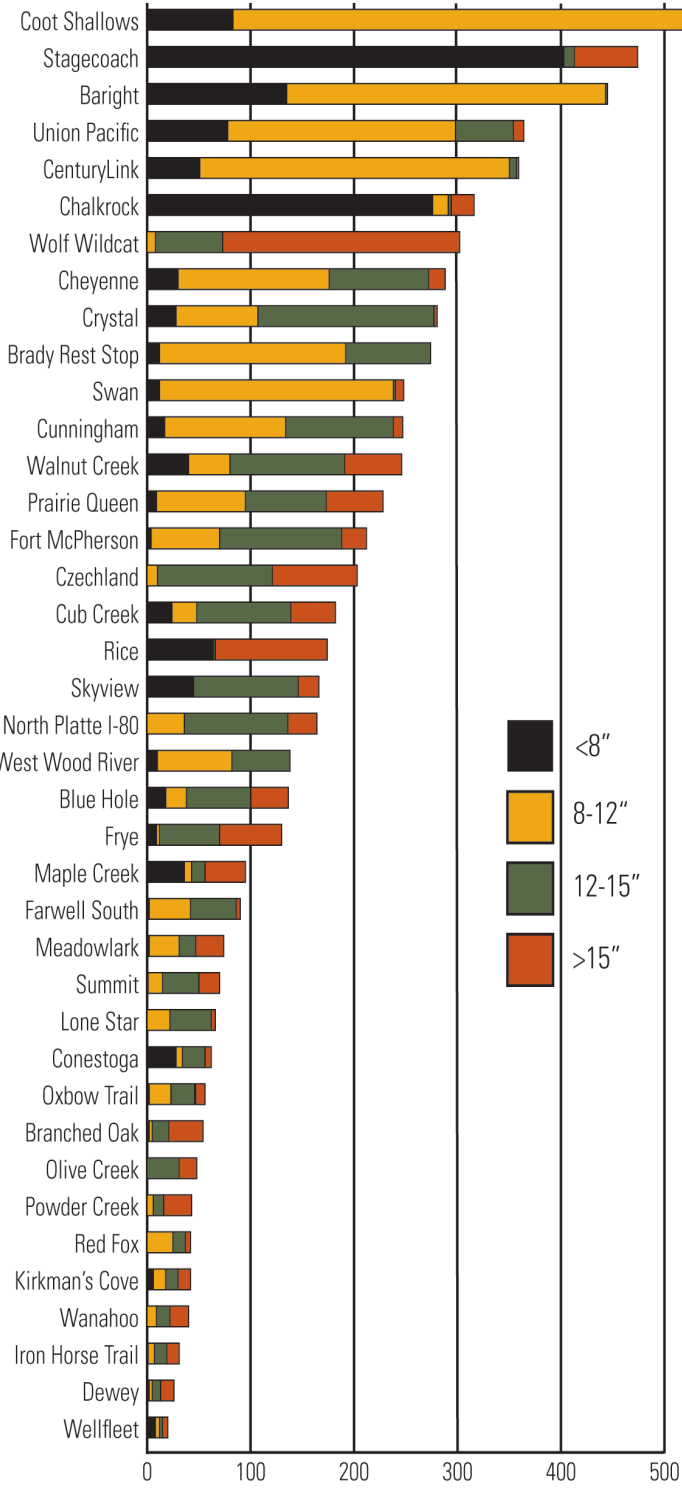


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2024 Sampling Charts

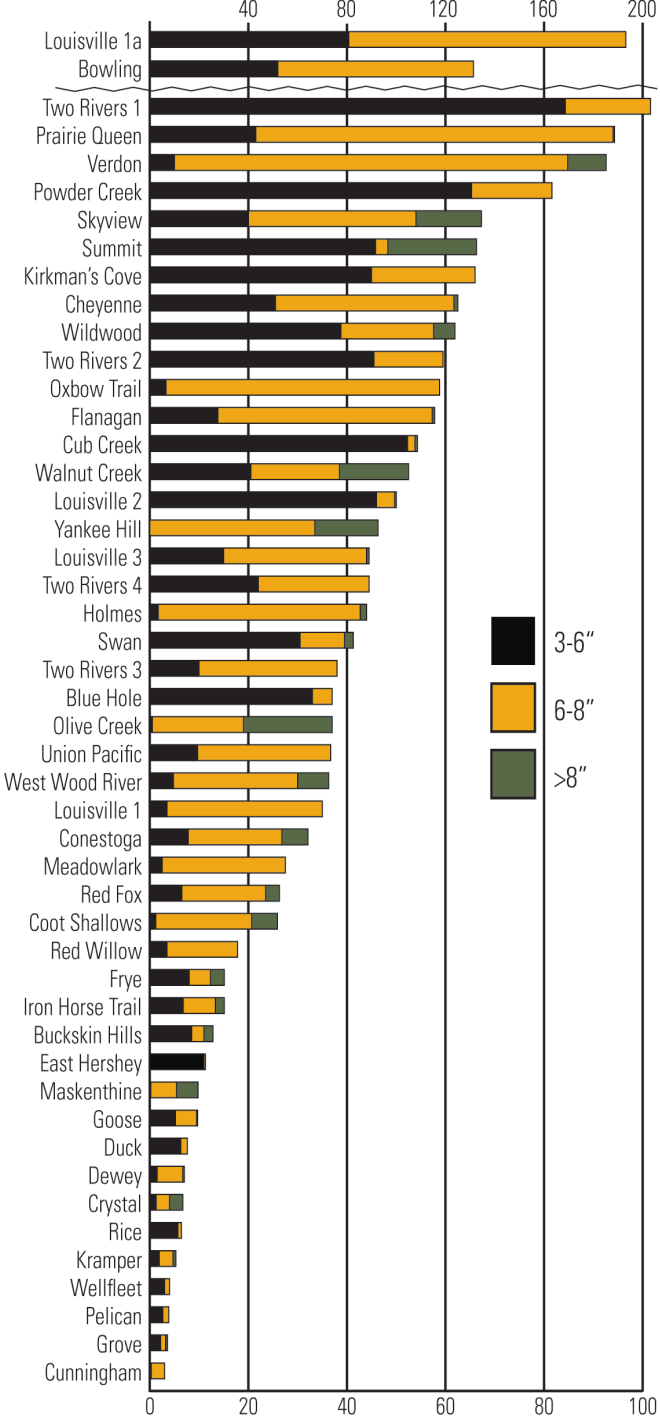
LARGEMOUTH BASS

Per Hour Electrofishing



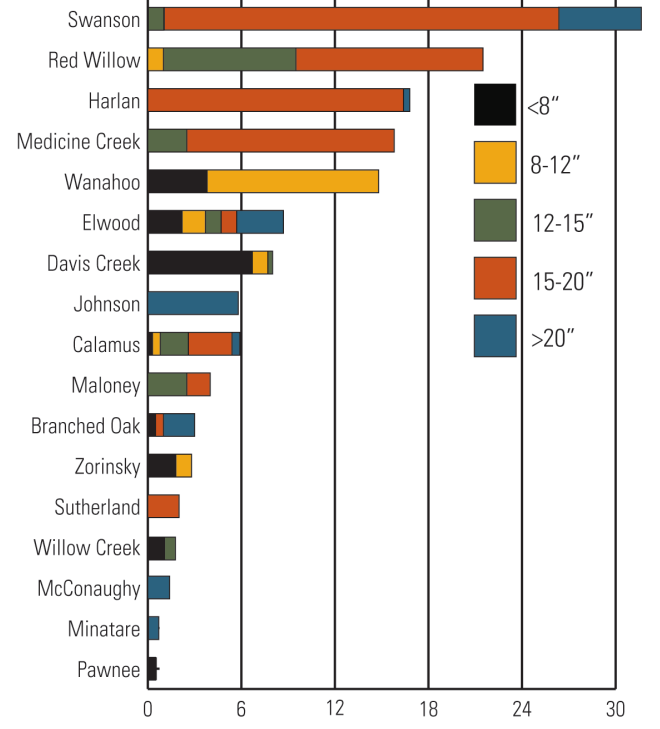
BLUEGILL

Per Trap Net



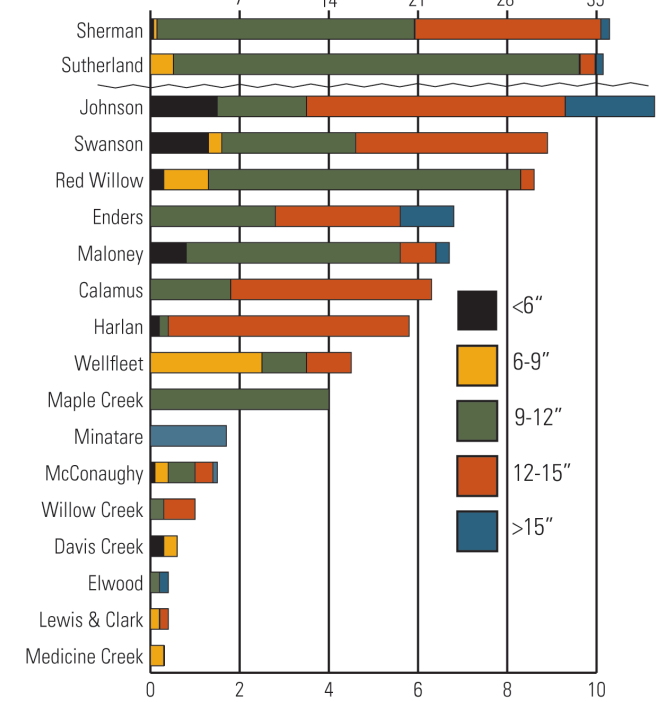
WIPER

Per Gill Net



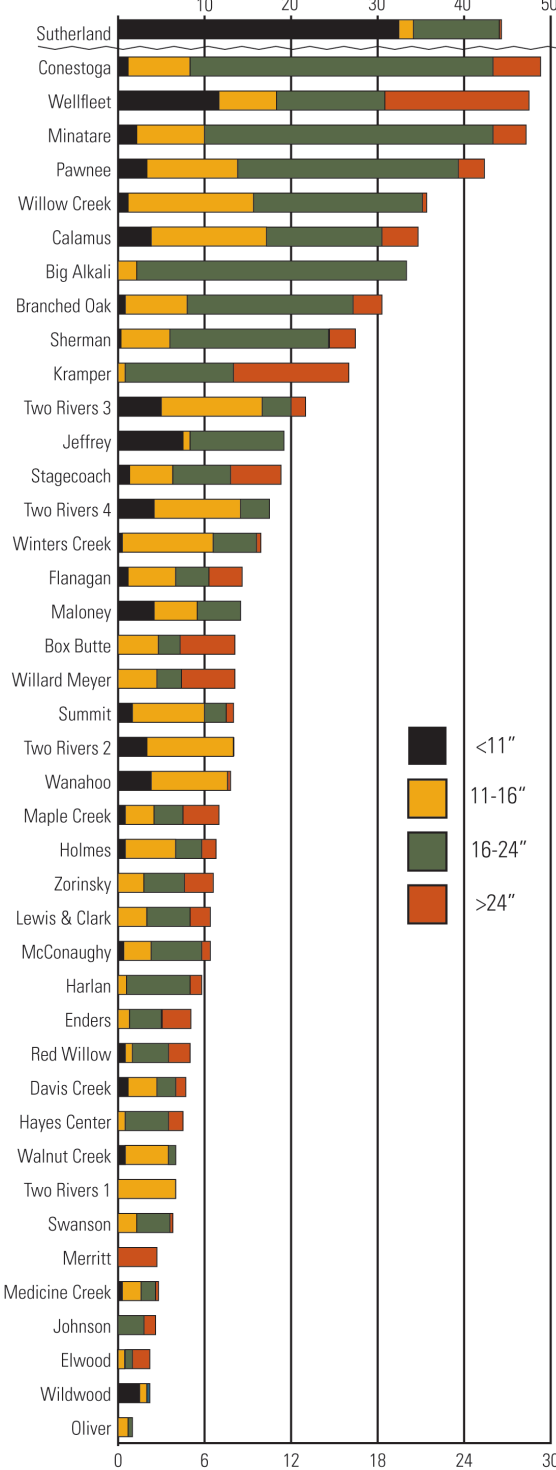
WHITE BASS

Per Gill Net



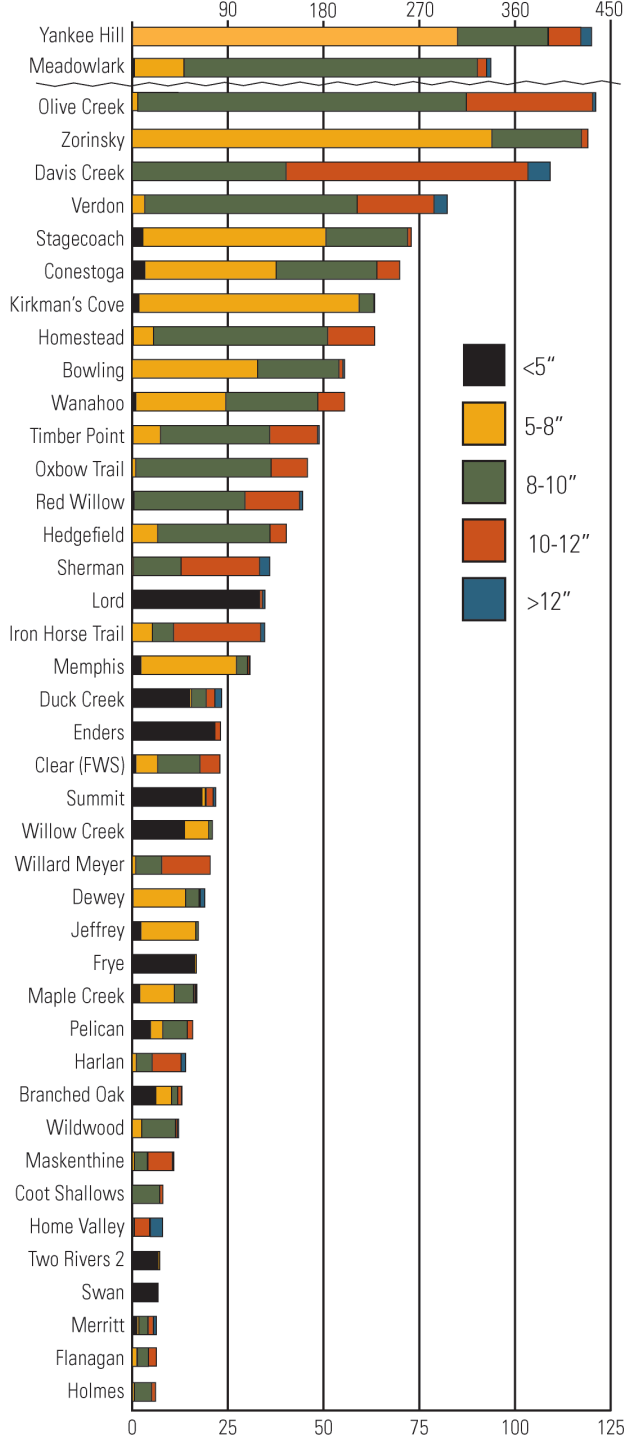
CHANNEL CATFISH

Per Gill Net



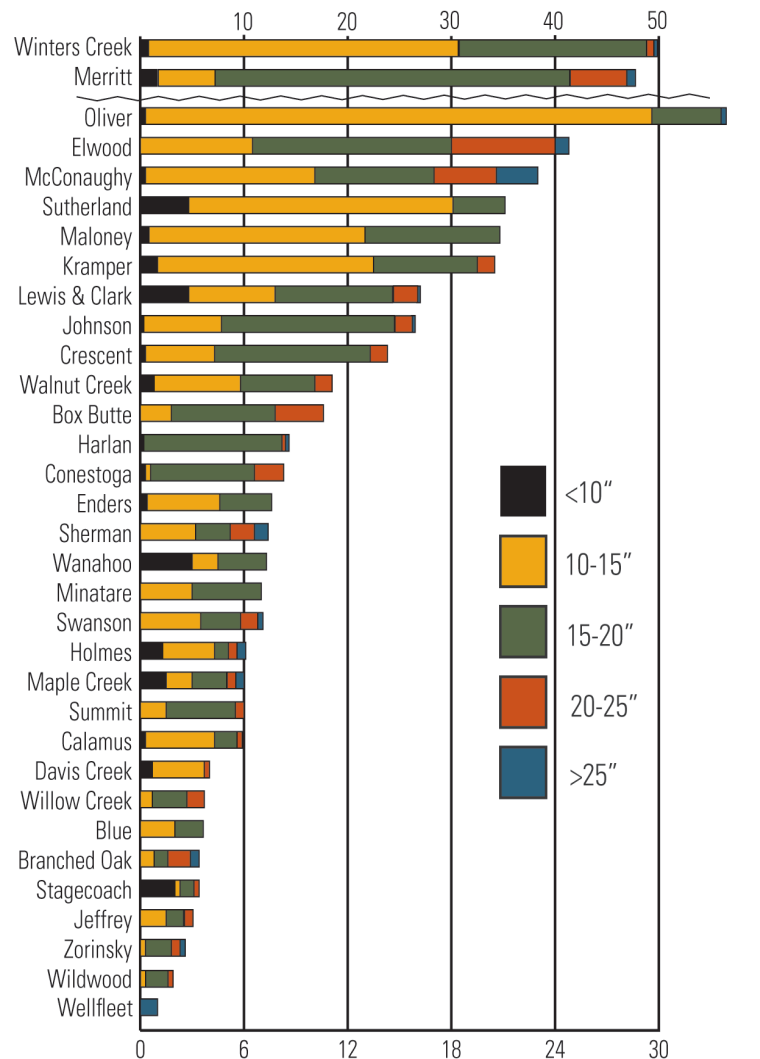
CRAPPIE

Per Frame Net



WALLEYE

Per Gill Net



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A GUIDE TO FISHING NEBRASKA IN 2025

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 dynamic, often changing in response to fluctuating water levels. The highest total sampling rates of walleyes in the fall of 2024 were at **Winters Creek, Merritt, Oliver, Elwood, and McConaughy**. **Merritt, Winters Creek, Elwood, and Johnson** will be particularly good for 15- to 20-inch walleyes in 2025. Anglers targeting big walleyes should plan trips to **McConaughy, Merritt, Elwood, and Sherman** reservoirs. Smaller waters are less ideal as walleye habitats, but several of those will offer some walleye opportunities this year. **Kramper** and **Conestoga** 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, most of them less than 15 inches long.

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 populations. The most white bass in 2025 will be found at **Sherman, Sutherland, Johnson, Swanson, and Red Willow**. **Sherman, Johnson, Harlan, Calamus** and **Swanson** reservoirs will be particularly good for white bass larger than 12 inches this year. For white bass larger than 15 inches, anglers should target **Johnson, Minatare** and **Enders**.

WIPERS

Wipers are white bass x striped bass hybrids, and, like their parent species, also are most successful in open-water habitats – Nebraska's largest reservoirs. **Swanson, Red Willow** and **Medicine Creek** will offer high numbers of wipers in 2025. **Harlan** also will have numbers of wipers this year, as well **Elwood** and **Davis Creek**. Anglers looking for trophy wipers should spend time on **Johnson, Swanson, Elwood, Branched Oak** and **McConaughy**. In eastern Nebraska, **Branched Oak** and **Zorinsky** will provide anglers opportunities to catch wipers while recently stocked **Wanahoo** already has good numbers of small wipers. All wipers caught at Branched Oak and Zorinsky 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 those that produce numbers of 8-inch and larger bluegills. Small- to medium-size reservoirs offer some of the best bluegill fishing every year, with **Summit, Walnut Creek, Skyview** and **Yankee Hill** topping the list in 2025. Nebraska's Sandhills lakes offer lower densities of bluegills but can produce some trophy 'gills, with the biggest exceeding one pound. The best Sandhills lakes this year will be **Frye** and **Swan**. Anglers should remember bluegills that big are rare fish and worthy of having a picture taken and then returned to the water. Pits and ponds like **Verdon, West Wood River, and Coot Shallows** also will 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. **Davis Creek, Olive Creek, Yankee Hill, Iron Horse Trail, Sherman, and Verdon** will be some of the state's best crappie waters in 2025. Other waters that will be good for crappies this year will be **Red Willow, Willard Meyer, Timber Point, Homestead, and Meadowlark**. 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. **Home Valley** and **Big Alkali** 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, Sandhills lakes, pits, and ponds tend to provide the best of that habitat. Some of those waters can have high densities of bass, which favors 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 the best chances to

catch bass larger than 15 inches. Some small- to medium-size reservoirs that will be particularly good this year include **Wolf Wildcat, Czechland, Stagecoach, Walnut Creek, and Prairie Queen**. Pits are some of the best bass fisheries in the state, **Blue Hole, North Platte I-80, and Fort McPherson** will offer some excellent bass fishing in 2025. In the Sandhills, **Rice Lake** will 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. Some private pits and ponds have been enrolled in the Open Fields and Waters program and are open to public walk-in access. Refer to the Public Access Atlas at OutdoorNebraska.gov.

CHANNEL CATFISH

Channel catfish are a popular fish in Nebraska and are found widely across the state. **Conestoga, Minatare, Big Alkali, Pawnee, and Willow Creek** will offer good numbers of 16-inch and larger channel cats in 2025. For cats longer than 24 inches, anglers should plan to fish **Wellfleet, Kramper, Box Butte, and Willard Meyer** this year. Voluntary 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. Special regulations apply to channel catfish caught at **Merritt** and **Box Butte**. 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

Nebraska is still the "mixed bag capital of the world" offering a diversity of fishing opportunities. 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 **Louisville #3, Prairie Queen** and **Bowling**.

SMALLMOUTH BASS can be caught at **Maloney, Big**

Elk and McConaughy, as well as the **Missouri River** in northeast Nebraska.

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

FLATHEAD CATFISH are another species of large catfish that can be found in the **Missouri River**, as well as in reservoirs like **Pawnee, Swanson, Medicine Creek, Branched Oak**, and the **Tri-County canal system**. All flatheads at Branched Oak must be released immediately after capture and 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** also have good numbers of sauger.

SAUGEYE are a walleye x sauger hybrid and stocking is producing some excellent opportunities for anglers to catch those fish at **Willow (WMA), Big Alkali, Wellfleet** and **Pawnee**.

YELLOW PERCH always are a tasty and popular panfish. Good yellow perch fishing will be found at **Dewey Lake** in the Nebraska Sandhills. **Big Elk** also will offer anglers some yellow perch this year.

Sandhills lakes are some of the best **NORTHERN PIKE** habitats in the state as well; **Clear (FWS)** and **Peterson** lakes will provide some pike fishing in 2025, along with **Grove Reservoir**. Reservoirs in southern and eastern Nebraska are typically too warm for cool-water northern pike, but **Flanagan** is relatively new and has some pike habitat and pike fishing right



now. All pike are required to be released at Flanagan.

MUSKELLUNGE also can be found in Nebraska waters. To catch this trophy, anglers should target **Merritt, Calamus** and **Zorinsky** reservoirs, as well as **Mormon Island West**, and **Grand Island's L.E. Ray Lake**. **Cottonwood-Steverson** deep in the Nebraska 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, tigers (brown trout x brook trout hybrids), and cutbows (cutthroat x rainbow hybrids). Most of the cold-water trout streams are in western and northern parts of the state; the **East Branch Verdigre Creek, Long Pine, Soldier**, and **Ninemile** creeks are favorites among trout anglers. In 2025, the rainbow trout fishing at **Lake Ogallala** will be excellent. Anglers might even catch some cutties from the **White River** and the **Wood Reserve Ponds** in the Pine Ridge.

Photo: Al Hanson/NGPC