

2018 Survey Summary

I-80 Lakes

Lincoln and Dawson Counties

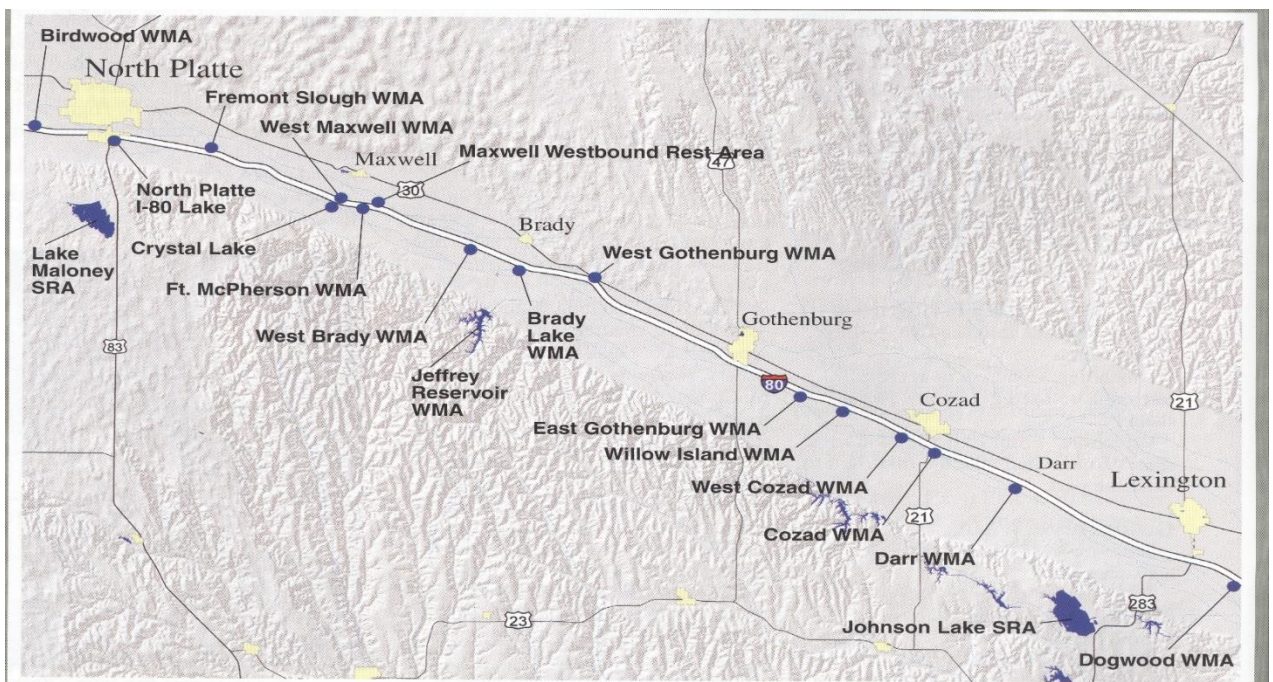


Jared Lorenzen, Fisheries Biologist

There are 20 Interstate 80 (I-80) Lake fisheries in Lincoln and Dawson Counties that are actively managed by fisheries personnel from the North Platte District Office. These lakes range from 6 to 53 surface acres and primarily exist as Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) but some areas are managed by Nebraska Department of Transportation and by local City Governments. For more information concerning I-80 Lakes consult our [Fishing Across Nebraska](#) publication and the [2019 Fishing Guide](#).

On average, five of these I-80 Lake Fisheries are sampled per year. During the spring, boat electrofishing is used to sample largemouth bass while modified fyke nets are used to sample other shoreline-oriented species such as bluegill and redear sunfish. The following text and graphs depict survey data that was collected only during 2018. For historical survey information investigate [Historical Survey Summaries](#) on NGPC's website. For more explanation of what constitutes a fisheries survey read this [article](#).

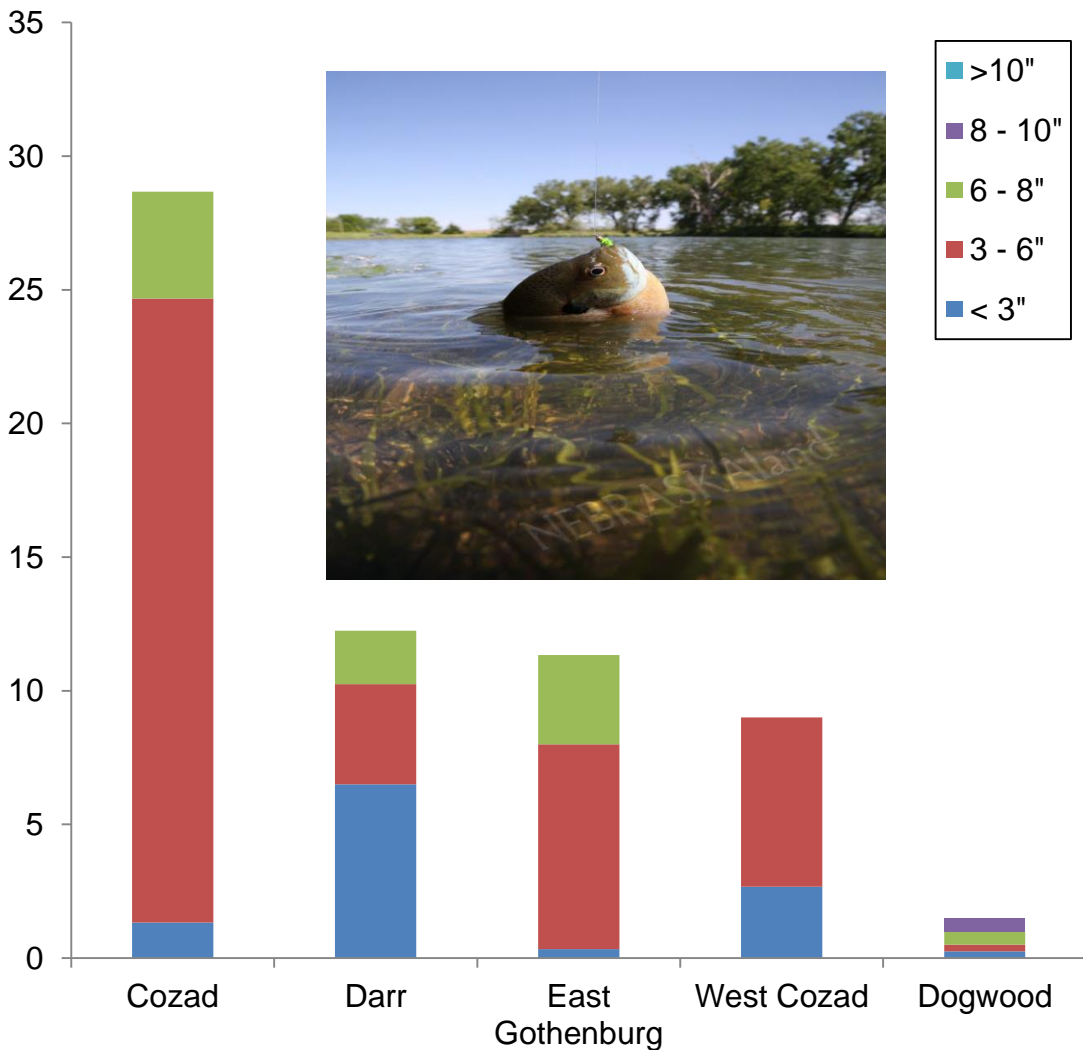
Please don't litter as there is no designated litter control method in place at many of these I-80 Lakes. Investigate [WMA Regulations](#) (Chapter 4) as camping has been prohibited and more stringently limited at many of these locations. Investigate the [2019 Boating Guide](#) for boating restrictions.



Bluegill are prevalent in all I-80 Lakes and serve as the primary prey item for predatory species. For their size, bluegill are “scrappy” fighters on light tackle. Their tendency to inhabit near shoreline habitats make them a good target for bank anglers. Statewide regulations for bluegill apply to most I-80 Lakes but West Brady and East Hershey remain Catch and Release Only (C&R) for all species.

According to the 2018 survey data, Cozad has a large bluegill population that consists primarily of small individuals but offers some reaching 7”. Darr and East Gothenburg have much smaller populations but offer a few individuals reaching 7”. West Cozad did not exhibit bluegill >5”. Dogwood had the lowest survey values but bluegill over 8” were observed. Access [Historical I-80 Lake Information](#) to review survey data from other lakes.

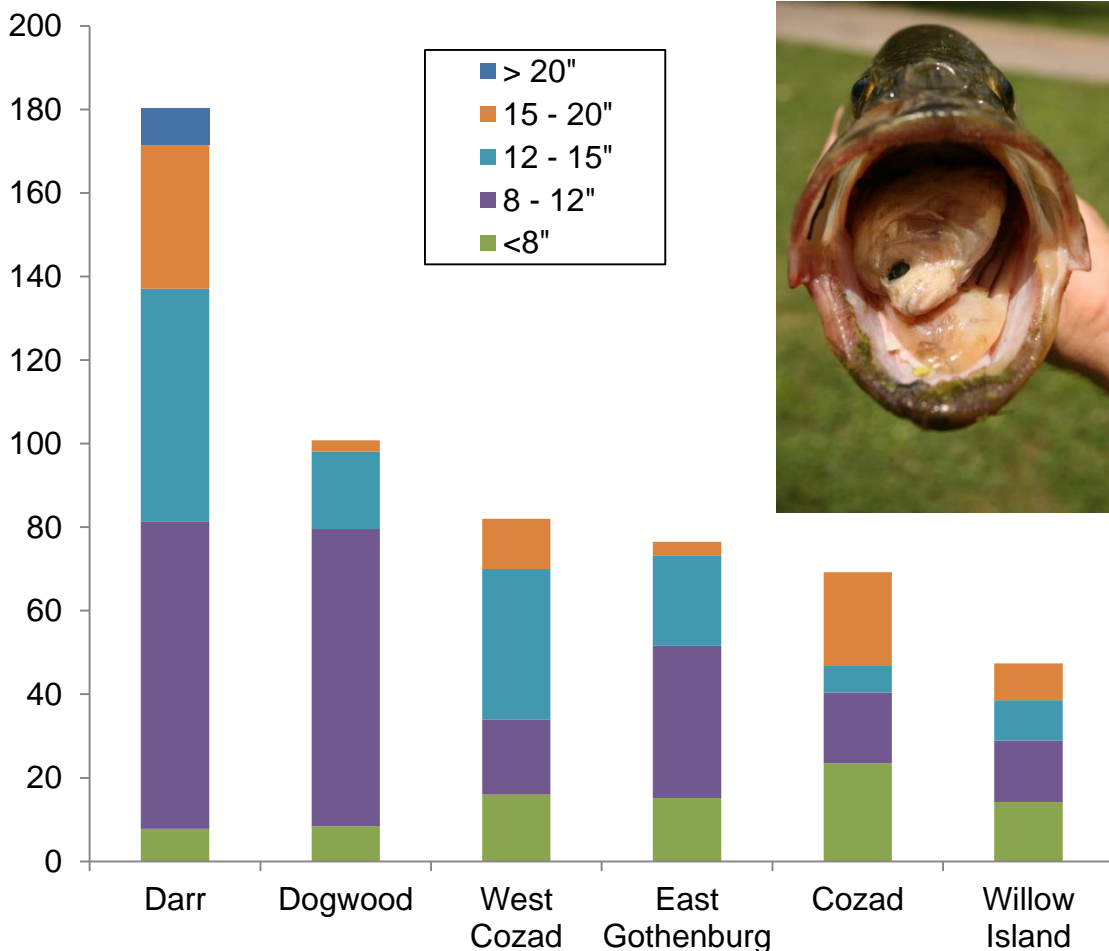
Bluegill per Net by Length Class



Largemouth bass are the main predatory species in most I-80 Lakes. Statewide regulations for largemouth bass apply to most I-80 Lakes but West Brady and East Hershey remain catch and release (C&R) only for all species.

Darr had the highest density population of 2018's surveyed I-80 Lakes. It also was the only to indicate largemouth bass longer than 20". Dogwood experienced a severe fish kill in 2014 and the large existing 8-12" size class is indication that the population is rebounding. West Cozad, East Gothenburg and Cozad survey's indicated rather small populations. Although these populations are small, they do offer largemouth over 15". Willow Island had the lowest quantity sampled but four size classes were represented. Willow Island's fishery suffers from frequent fish kill events and another occurred during 2018. Access [Historical Sampling Surveys](#) to view other largemouth bass survey reports.

Largemouth per Hour by Length Class



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 to maintain fishable populations. The statewide daily bag limit is five channel catfish.



Rainbow trout are stocked into Birdwood I-80 Lake each year to provide a unique winter fishery. Trout are stocked during October and December each year. A total of 8,000 are stocked annually. There is no minimum length limit and the daily bag limit is five with only one fish 16" or longer. The possession limit is 12.



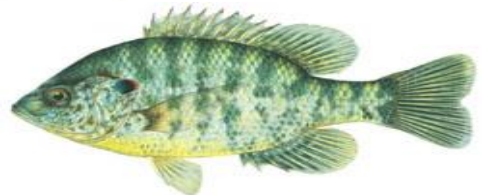
Smallmouth bass exist in low densities in many I-80 Lakes including Hershey, Brady and North Platte City I-80 Lake. They are infrequently stocked into Brady and Fort McPherson I-80 Lakes.



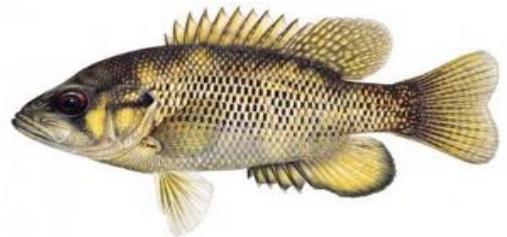
Northern pike were stocked frequently into I-80 Lakes prior to 2002. Some residual populations subsist at East Sutherland and East Hershey.



Redear sunfish is a southern species but have found a niche in some I-80 Lakes including West Gothenburg, West Maxwell, Crystal, East Hershey and East Sutherland.



Rock bass is another unique species that thrives in some I-80 Lakes such as Hershey and East Hershey.



Crappie exist in low densities in many I-80 Lakes. A total of four, were sampled in Cozad. The largest was nearly 12".



Other species inhabit I-80 Lakes due to historical stockings, illegal stockings and flood events. These species include (but not limited to) flathead catfish, goldfish, gizzard shad, alewife, yellow perch, hybrid sunfish, green sunfish, hybrid crappie, brook silverside, white sucker, common carp, grass carp, and western mosquitofish. Too many species within one I-80 Lake generally decreases the fisheries potential.

Stockings

The table below illustrates the locations, species, number and average length of fish that were stocked during 2018. For more details and previous year's stockings visit the [NGPC Fish Stockings](#) website.

	Channel catfish	Rainbow trout	Largemouth bass	Hybrid sunfish
East Sutherland	675-11"			
West Hershey				
Hershey	1175-11"			
East Hershey	500-11"		805-3"	
Birdwood	500-11"	3746-10		
North Platte I-80 City Lake				
Fremont Slough	750-10.5"			
Pawnee Slough	750-10.5"			
West Maxwell	175-11.25"			
Crystal	150-10.5"			
Maxwell Rest Stop				
Fort McPherson				
West Brady				
Brady				
West Gothenburg				
East Gothenburg				5,250-2"
Willow Island				
West Cozad				
Cozad				
Dogwood East				

If you have questions or concerns about the I-80 Lakes in Dawson or Lincoln Counties please contact

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Fish Attractors



Several I-80 Lakes have been enhanced with fish attracting structure. Trees along shorelines have been hinge cut and dropped into the water to provide shallow cover while cedar trees are cut from surrounding WMAs and positioned on the ice or sunk using a large boat. Artificial structures are constructed and placed for the same reasoning. Artificial structures should be more snag proof and provide longer lasting structure. These projects are done to improve habitat and concentrate fish for anglers. These brush piles congregate game species such as bluegill, crappie and largemouth bass. On January 9, 2018, seven cedar trees were placed on the ice at West Brady. These trees were strategically cleared to allow shoreline angler access. This pile was positioned at the below coordinates.
41.017441° -100.419024°

Darr WMA – This lake is located near the NW quadrant of the Darr Interchange (Exit 231), - just 1/3 mile N and 1/3 W.

Latitude: 40.78592° Longitude: -99.849696° (boat ramp)

Darr I-80 Lake is 13 surface acres, is typically quite clear and has an approximate maximum depth of 12 feet. This lake's fishery is dominated by largemouth bass. This largemouth bass population expresses both quality and quantity traits. During 2014, a large quantity of small bluegill were observed but 2018's survey revealed a much smaller population with some indication of larger sizes. This lake has dense aquatic vegetation during summer months. Two cedar tree brush piles were placed in the eastern portion of this lake during 2013. Access to the shoreline at this lake has been improved by annual chemical treatments and tree clearing by NGPC's Wildlife Division. Vehicle traffic is restricted to the east shoreline. The current boating regulation allows nonpowered and electric motor powered vessels only.



Dogwood WMA– From Lexington Interchange – North approximately ¼ mile, 5½ mile east on Rd 753, 3 miles south Rd 439 across interstate overpass and 1 1/4 miles east on Dogwood WMA trail road. Latitude: 40.697859⁰ Longitude: -99.613200⁰

There is a second lake on Dogwood WMA whose fishery was not surveyed. It is to the west and is approximately 5 acres. This lake experiences frequent flooding and requires foot travel to access.

Dogwood I-80 Lake (East Lake) is seven surface acres, has a maximum depth of approximately nine feet. A [bathymetric map](#) available on NGPC's website details the lake's contours. This lake experienced a significant fish kill during 2014 that drastically reduced the density of all species. Since then, largemouth bass and bluegill populations have rebounded. Unfortunately, common carp seem to be rebounding too as a CPUE value of 25 was observed during the 2018 survey. Although Dogwood's bluegill were portrayed by very few individuals, those over 8" were represented. The abundance of 8-12" largemouth bass composing Dogwood's population bodes well for future growth of bluegill and the containment of common carp. A maintenance stocking of channel catfish is scheduled during 2019. Vehicle traffic is confined to the parking areas along the north shoreline and east end. The boat ramp surface is articulated mat concrete. The current boating regulation allows vessels powered by internal combustion engines but prohibits production of wake. 5 mph is the maximum speed allowed.



West Cozad WMA– From the Cozad Interchange – ½ North, ¼ West, ¼ North, 1 West, 1 South over an interstate overpass and then East on a WMA trail a short distance.

West Cozad I-80 Lake was renovated in 2003. Prior to this renovation a flood prevention dike was constructed on the east end. Unfortunately, by 2010 the fishery was again invaded by undesirable species due to flooding. Although this fishery is on a downhill trend it still offers the opportunity for largemouth bass >15". A maintenance stocking of channel catfish is scheduled during 2019. This I-80 Lake is relatively shallow compared to others with much area only 6' deep. In 2013, 60 cedars were sunk to attract and congregate fish species for anglers. Vehicular traffic is limited to the north shoreline. The boat ramp is unimproved and 4 drive is recommended for trailering boats. The current boating regulation allows vessels powered by internal combustion engines but prohibits production of wake. 5 mph is the maximum speed allowed. NGPC's Wildlife Division is working to clear the northern shoreline of overabundant cedar trees.



East Gothenburg WMA I-80 Lake (aka Bud Lake) – From Gothenburg Interchange, ½ mile south, 3 ¾ mile east on Willow Island Rd and WMA is on the north side of the road.

Latitude: 40.888536⁰ Longitude: -100.105974⁰

East Gothenburg I-80 Lake is 15 surface acres and has a maximum depth of approximately 12 feet. A [bathymetric map](#) available on NGPC's website details the lake's contours. This fishery was renovated in 2005. Much like West Cozad, it too was invaded by undesirable species by 2010 due to flooding. This lake was stocked with hybrid sunfish during 2018 in attempt to bolster the panfish fishery. Although the largemouth bass survey indicated only 76 per hour in 2018, previous survey's indicated much higher values.

In 2013, 22 cedar trees were sunk and four cottonwood trees were hinge cut along the north shoreline. This structure was placed in the water to congregate fish for angling. Vehicular traffic is limited to the west half of the southern shoreline. This boat ramp is articulated mat concrete. The current boating regulation allows vessels powered by internal combustion engines but prohibits production of wake. 5 mph is the maximum speed allowed.



Cozad WMA– This WMA is located in the SE quadrant of the Cozad Interchange (Exit 222)

Latitude: 40.840598⁰ Longitude: -99.984698⁰

Cozad I-80 Lake is 18 surface acres and has a maximum depth of approximately 12 feet. During 2018's panfish survey a trap net was stolen from this lake. Even though effort was reduced, Cozad produced the largest density of bluegill observed. The longest bluegills were just over 6" though. Although the largemouth bass population appears to be small a large proportion is >15". A maintenance stocking of channel catfish is scheduled during 2019.

During 2013, 26 Russian Olives were sunk to improve shoreline access and congregate fish for anglers. In 2014, 14 more Russian Olives were sunk in the SW corner to improve shoreline access. In recent years, NGPC's Wildlife Division mechanically cleared the vast majority of Russian Olive and cedar trees making shoreline access to this lake much better.

Vehicle traffic is limited to the west, north and east shorelines. The boat ramp has ADA approved parking and consists of flat concrete and articulated mat. The current boating regulation allows vessels powered by internal combustion engines but prohibits production of wake. 5 mph is the maximum speed allowed.



Willow Island WMA – 5 ¼ W of Cozad on Hwy 30, ¾ across overpass (at Willow Island – unincorporated community) and lake is on the east side of the road.
Latitude: 40.876941⁰ Longitude: -100.069987⁰

Willow Island I-80 Lake is 24 surface acres and has a maximum depth of approximately 11 feet. This fishery is frequently influenced by river flooding and fish kill events. During 2018, daytime electrofishing was the only survey completed. This survey produced what was expected. A low density of largemouth bass along with bluegill nearing 7” in length along with other species such as black bullhead and shortnose gar were observed. In the past, this lake was favored by largemouth bass anglers seeking large fish.

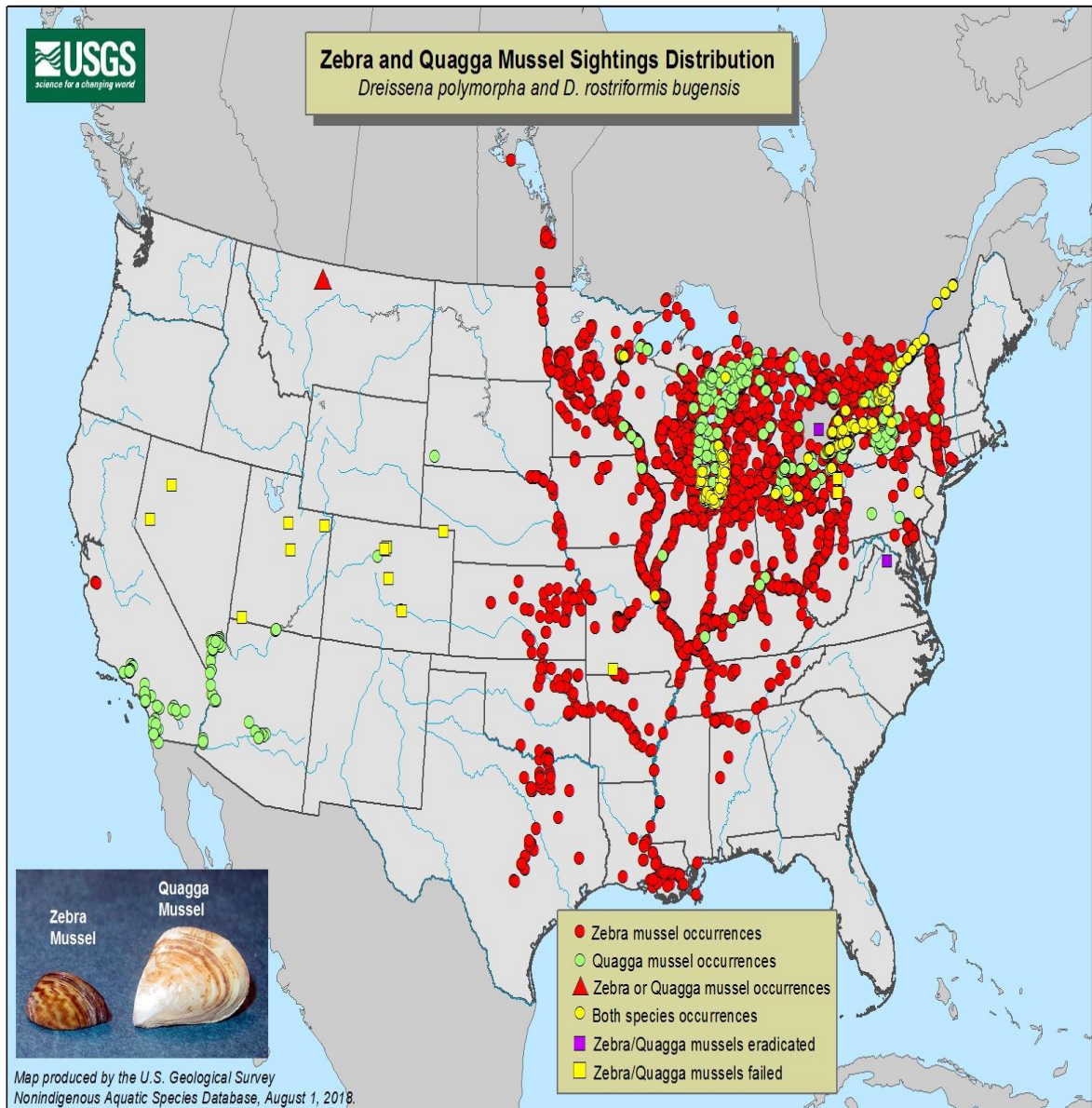
During 2015, 14 cedars were sunk in this lake to congregate fish for angling opportunities. Annual phragmite treatments have vastly improved shoreline access at this lake. Vehicle traffic around this lake is limited to the east shoreline and a large portion of the north shoreline. The boat ramp at this lake is unimproved. The current boating regulation allows vessels powered by internal combustion engines but prohibits production of wake. 5 mph is the maximum speed allowed.



Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)

Distribution of zebra and quagga mussels is getting closer and closer to SW Nebraska. The most recent finding in Nebraska was Glen Cunningham Lake in Omaha during 2018. This [map](#) portrays the spread of these invasive mussels and is updated often.

In 2016, Nebraska boaters became required to possess a [Aquatic Invasive Species \(AIS\) Stamp](#). Residents acquire the stamp when registering their watercraft. Nonresidents have to purchase a physical sticker that must be displayed on their watercraft.



Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)



**STOP AQUATIC
HITCHHIKERS!™**

According to Nebraska State Law, **it is illegal for watercraft to enter a Nebraska waterbody or leave a launch area while containing water.** This includes all containers, compartments, and equipment that are permanently attached to the watercraft.

AND

All aquatic vegetation must be removed from watercraft and trailers before leaving a launch area.

Protect Your Waters—Remember to **CLEAN, DRAIN, and DRY!**