

# 2019 Survey Summary

## I-80 Lakes

### Lincoln and Dawson Counties



Jared Lorensen, 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 [2020 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 (aka trap 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 during 2019. For historical survey information investigate [Historical Survey Summaries](#) on NGPC's website. For more explanation of what constitutes a fisheries survey read this [article](#).

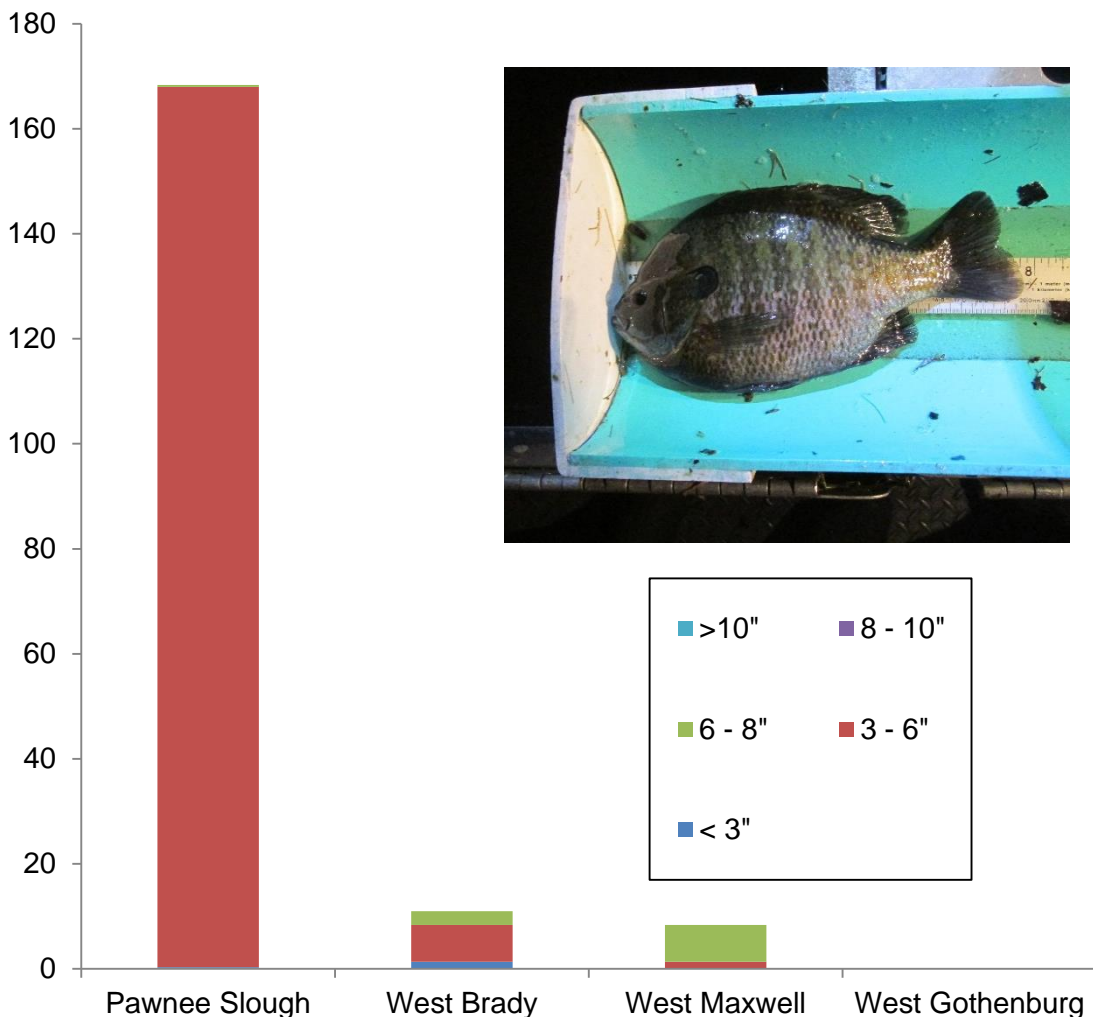
Please don't litter as there is no designated litter control method in place at many of these I-80 Lakes. Investigate [WMA Regulations](#) (Chapter 4) as camping has been prohibited and is more stringently regulated at many of these locations. Investigate the [2020 Destination Guide](#) for boating restrictions.



**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 especially 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 2019 survey data, Pawnee Slough has a large bluegill population that consists of small individuals. West Brady and West Maxwell have much smaller populations but offer a few individuals nearing 8”. West Gothenburg did not produce any bluegill in the survey but historically it has been good. Access [Historical I-80 Lake Information](#) to review survey data from other lakes.

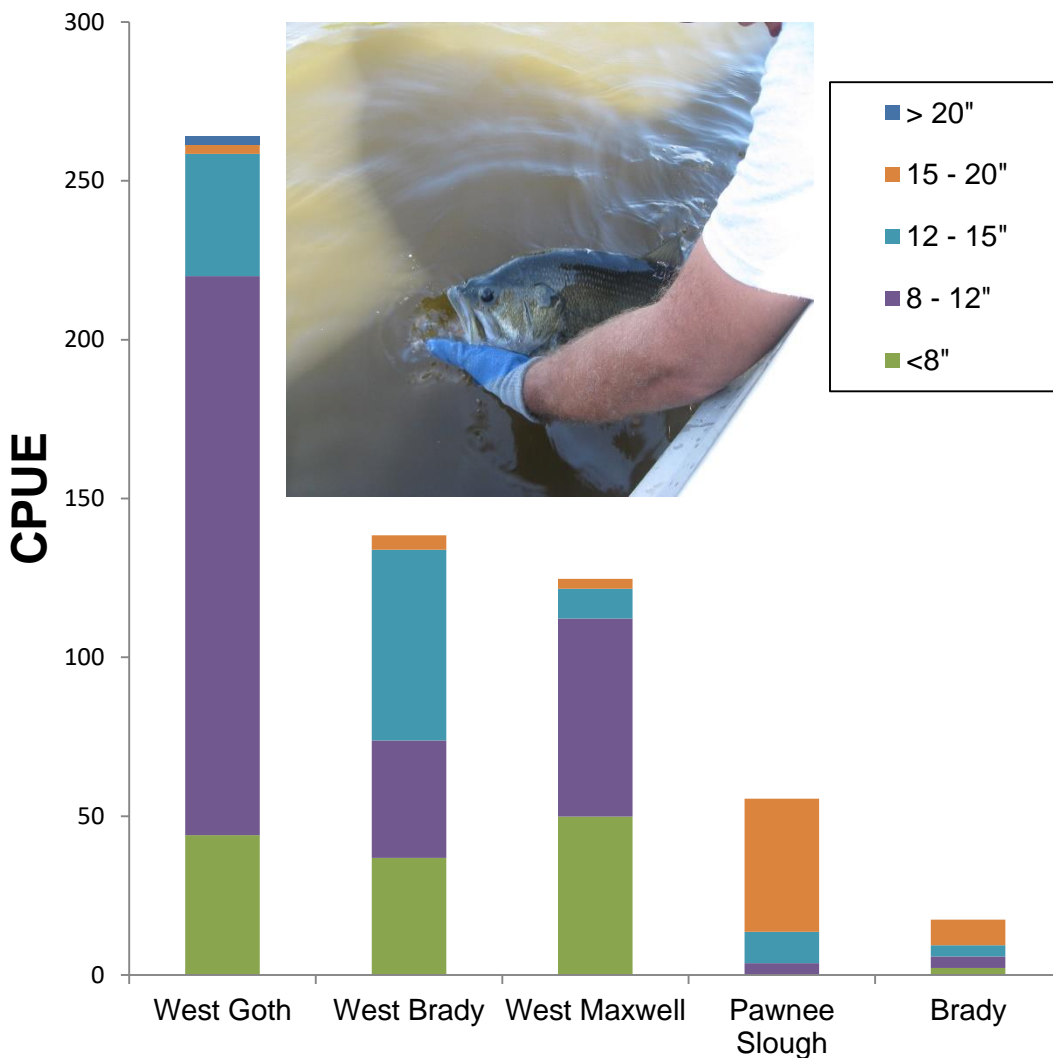
### Bluegill per Net by Length Class



**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.

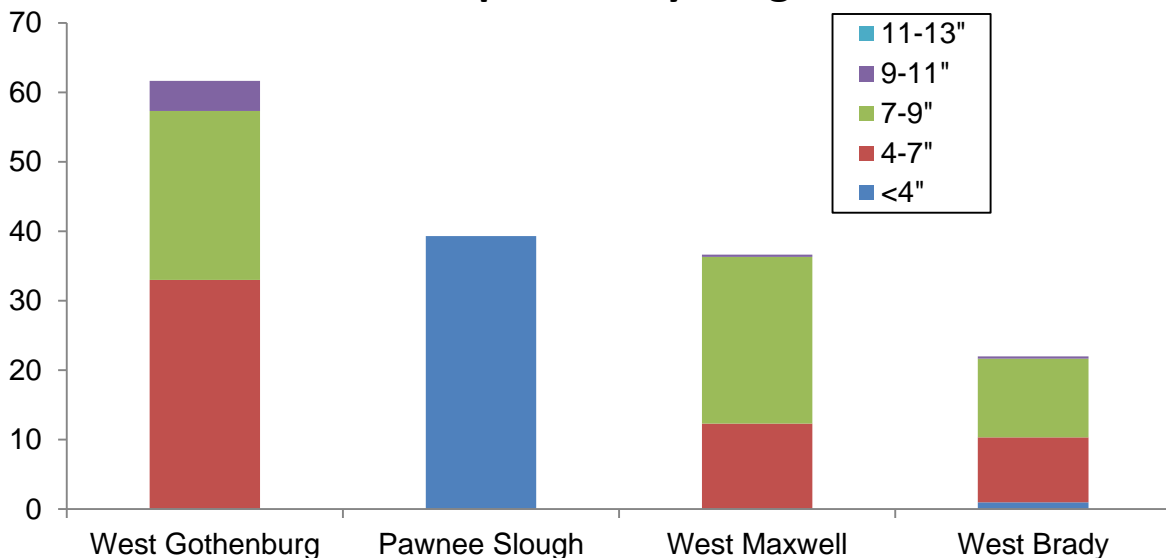
West Gothenburg had the highest density population of 2019's surveyed I-80 Lakes. West Gothenburg's largemouth population is dominated by smaller 8-12" bass but it was the only to indicate largemouth bass longer than 20". West Brady and West Maxwell surveys portrayed smaller populations with both producing a few bass over 15". West Brady experienced a significant fish kill event during 2015 but it has rebounded well. Pawnee Slough and Brady exhibited the smallest populations. Although these populations are small, they do offer largemouth over 15". Access [Historical Sampling Surveys](#) to view other largemouth bass survey reports.

### Largemouth per Hour by Length Class



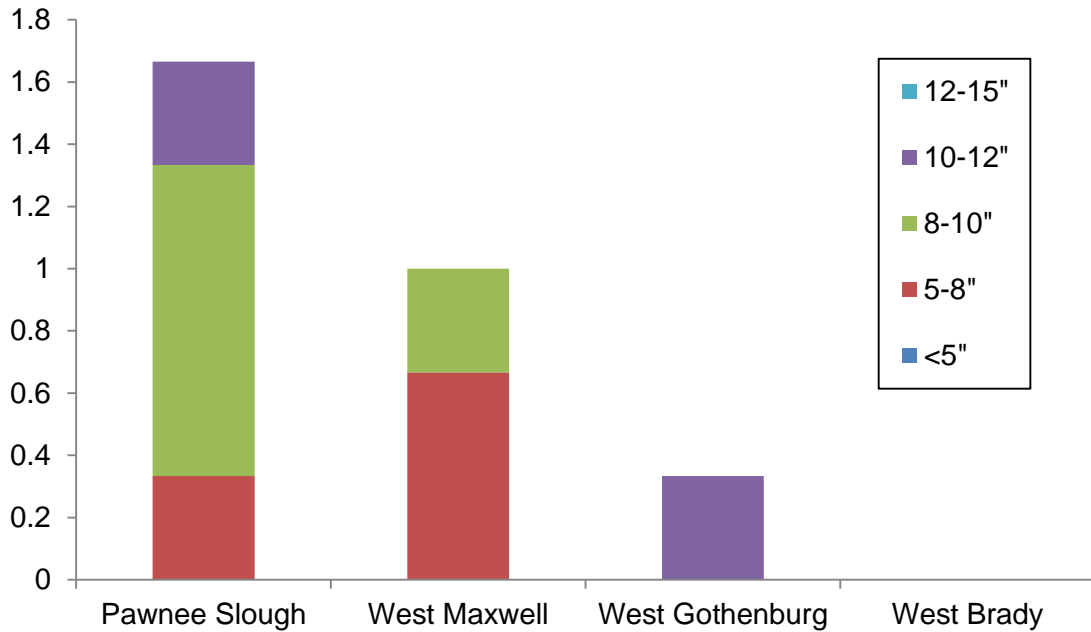
**Redear sunfish** offer another option for panfish anglers to pursue in many I-80 Lakes. They are a southern species that have found a niche in SW Nebraska. In several I-80 lakes like Pawnee Slough they are quite numerous but don't currently reach quality lengths unfortunately. In other lakes such as West Gothenburg, West Maxwell and West Brady they do quite well.

**Redear sunfish per Net by Length Class**



**Crappie** (species combined) offer a much less abundant target for anglers to pursue. Many of these fish are present due to illegal stocking activity but others are due to NGPC's efforts. There are two species that include the white crappie (best suited to large reservoir & gizzard shad prey) and black crappie (better suited to small lake and invertebrate prey). Another experimental variety (hybrid) has been stocked in two I-80 Lakes in Lincoln and Dawson Counties. These include East Gothenburg (2008) and Brady (2011).

**Crappie per Net 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.



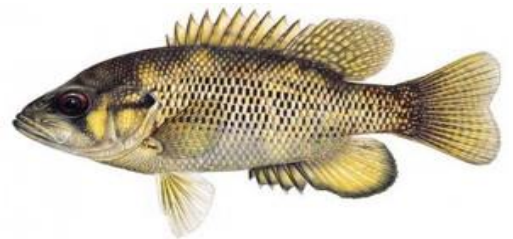
**Smallmouth bass** exist in low densities in many I-80 Lakes including Hershey, Brady and North Platte City I-80 Lake.



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



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



**Other species** inhabit I-80 Lakes due to historical stockings, illegal stockings and flood events. These species include (but not limited to) flathead catfish, walleye, goldfish, gizzard shad, alewife, yellow perch, hybrid sunfish, green sunfish, 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 2019. For more details and previous year's stockings visit the [NGPC Fish Stockings](#) website.

	Channel catfish	Rainbow trout	Grass carp
East Sutherland			
West Hershey			
Hershey			
East Hershey			
Birdwood		4000-10"	
North Platte I-80 City Lake			
Fremont Slough			
Pawnee Slough			
West Maxwell			
Crystal			
Maxwell Rest Stop			
Fort McPherson	1500-10"		
West Brady			
Brady	625-10"		
West Gothenburg			30-8"
East Gothenburg			
Willow Island			
West Cozad	500-10"		
Cozad	450-10"		
Dogwood East			

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

Jared Lorensen, Biologist 308-535-8025, [jared.lorensen@nebraska.gov](mailto:jared.lorensen@nebraska.gov)  
 Brad Newcomb, District Mgr. 308-865-5330, [brad.newcomb@nebraska.gov](mailto:brad.newcomb@nebraska.gov)

# 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 February 13, 2019, twelve cedar trees were placed on the ice at West Maxwell. These trees were positioned at the below coordinates.

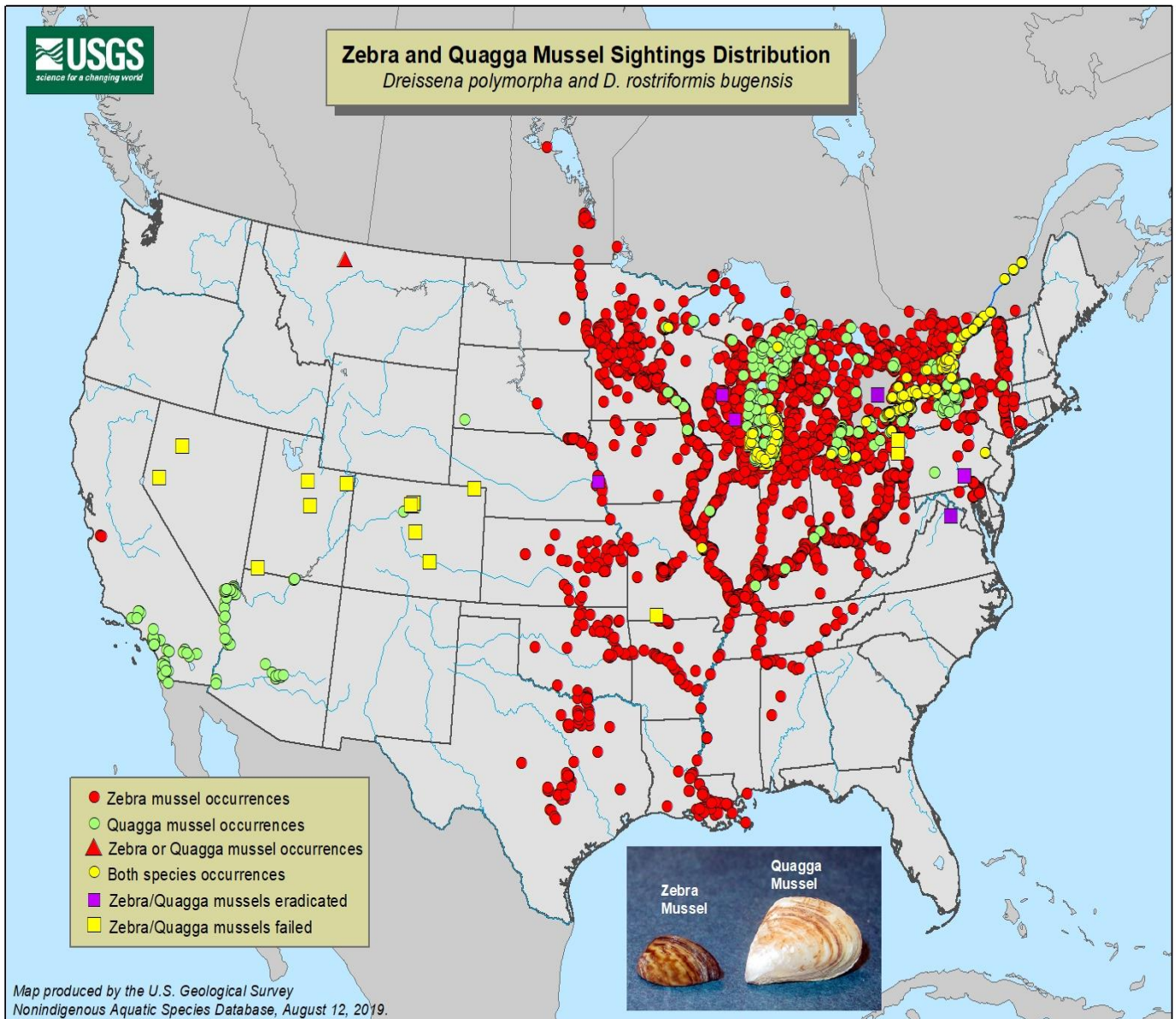
N 41°03'22.2"W 100°32'33.6"  
N 41°03'24.1" W 100°32'32.5"  
N 41°03'23.4" W 100°32'33.0"  
N 41°03'22.8" W 100°32'33.5"  
N 41°03'22.3" W 100°32'32.7"  
N 41°03'21.0" W 100°32'32.8"



# Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)

Distribution of zebra and quagga mussels is growing. The most recent finding in Nebraska was Glen Cunningham Lake in Omaha during 2018. The below map portrays the spread of these invasive mussels. Access [U.S. Geological Society's Site](#) for more information.

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!**