

# 2012 Survey Summary

## I-80 Lakes

### Lincoln and Dawson Counties

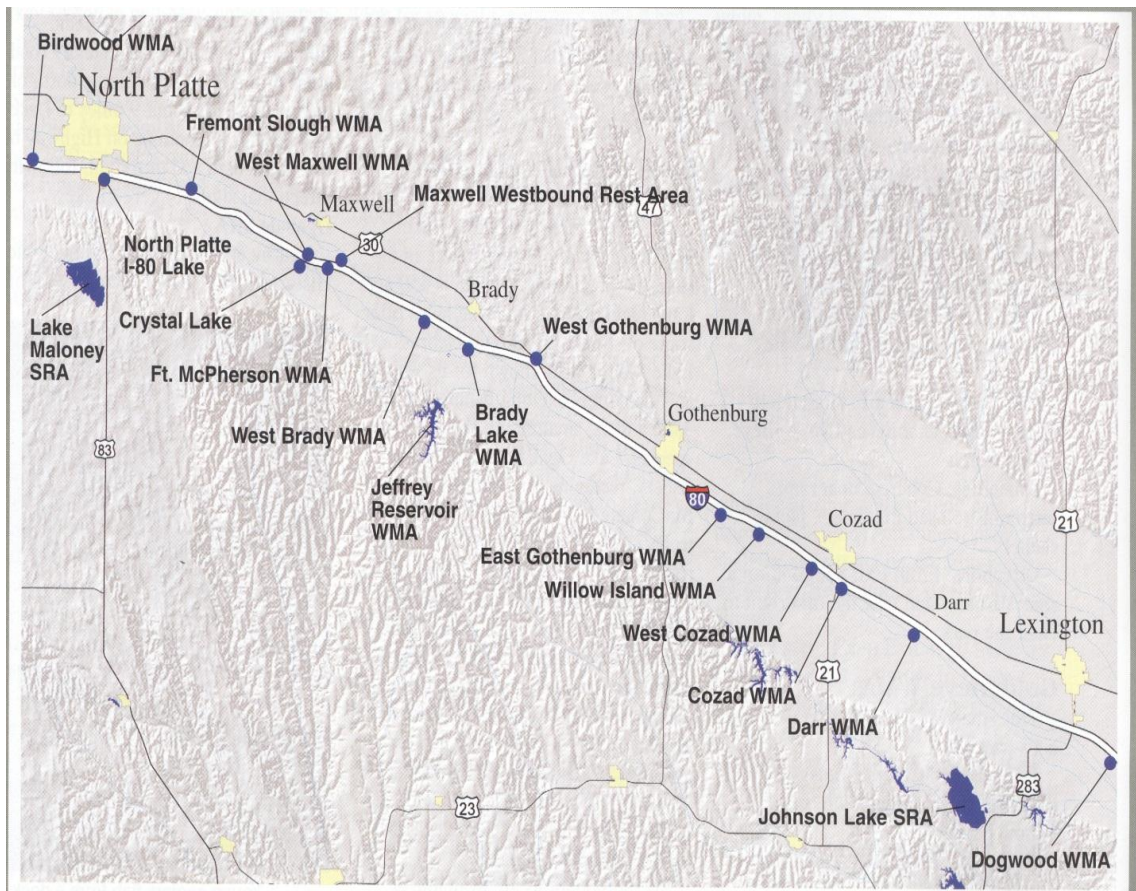


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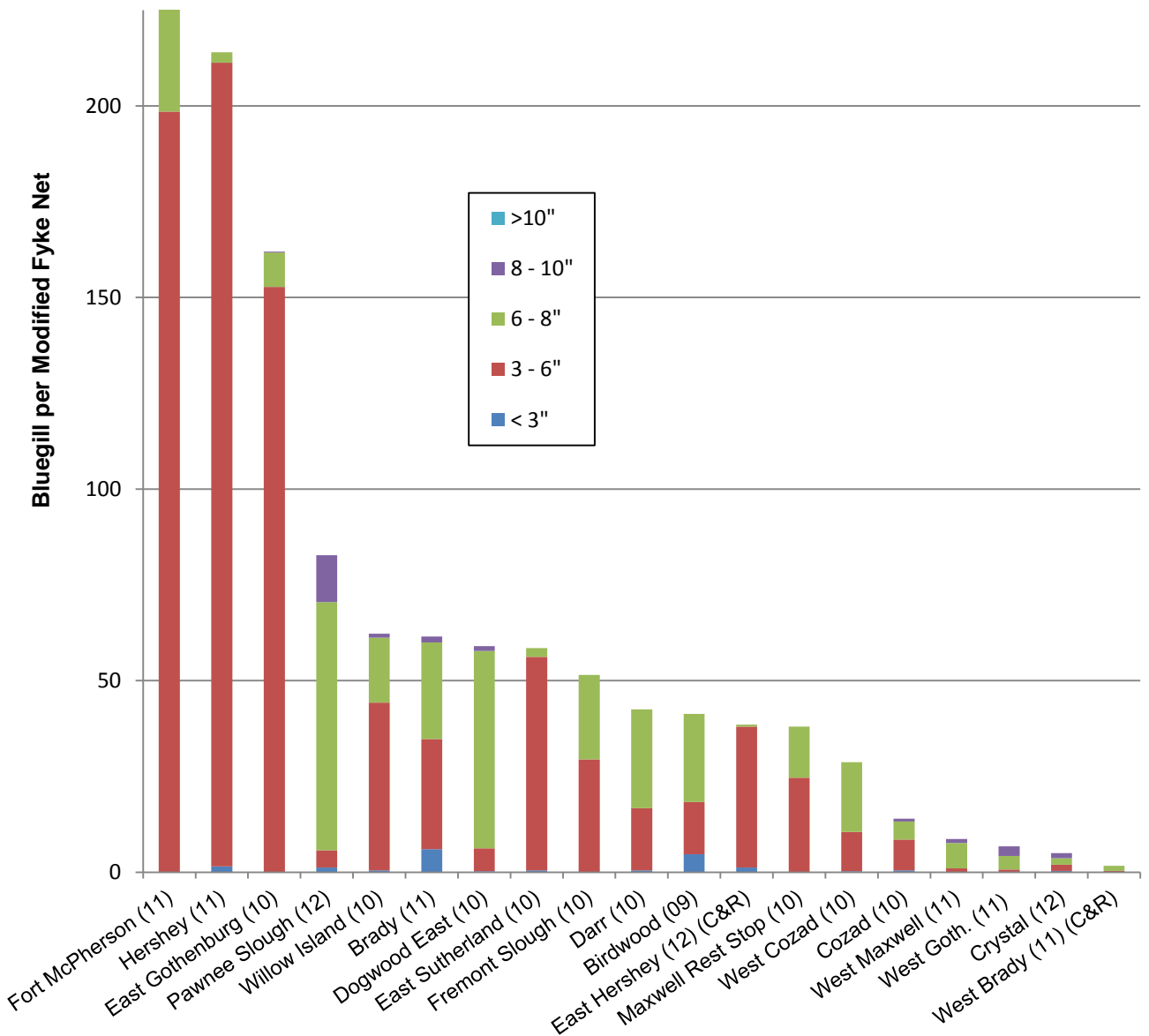
There are 20 Interstate 80 (I-80) lakes between Cozad and Sutherland that are actively managed by fisheries personnel from the North Platte District Office. These lakes range from 6 to 53 surface acres and primarily exist as Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). For more information concerning I-80 Lakes consult <http://outdoornebraska.ne.gov/nebland/articles/fishing/I-80.pdf> and the 2013-14 fishing guide at <http://outdoornebraska.ne.gov/Fishing/guides/fishguide/pdf/FishGuide.pdf>.

On average, five of these I-80 Lakes 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 graphs depict survey data that has been collected during 2009-2012.



**Bluegill** are prevalent in all I-80 Lakes because they are favored by many anglers and serve as the primary prey item for predatory species. Bluegill are multiple spawners and are most easily caught during spawning periods. They tend to school during the winter and favor deeper water or submerged cover. Statewide regulations apply to most I-80 Lakes but West Brady and East Hershey remain catch and release only for all species.

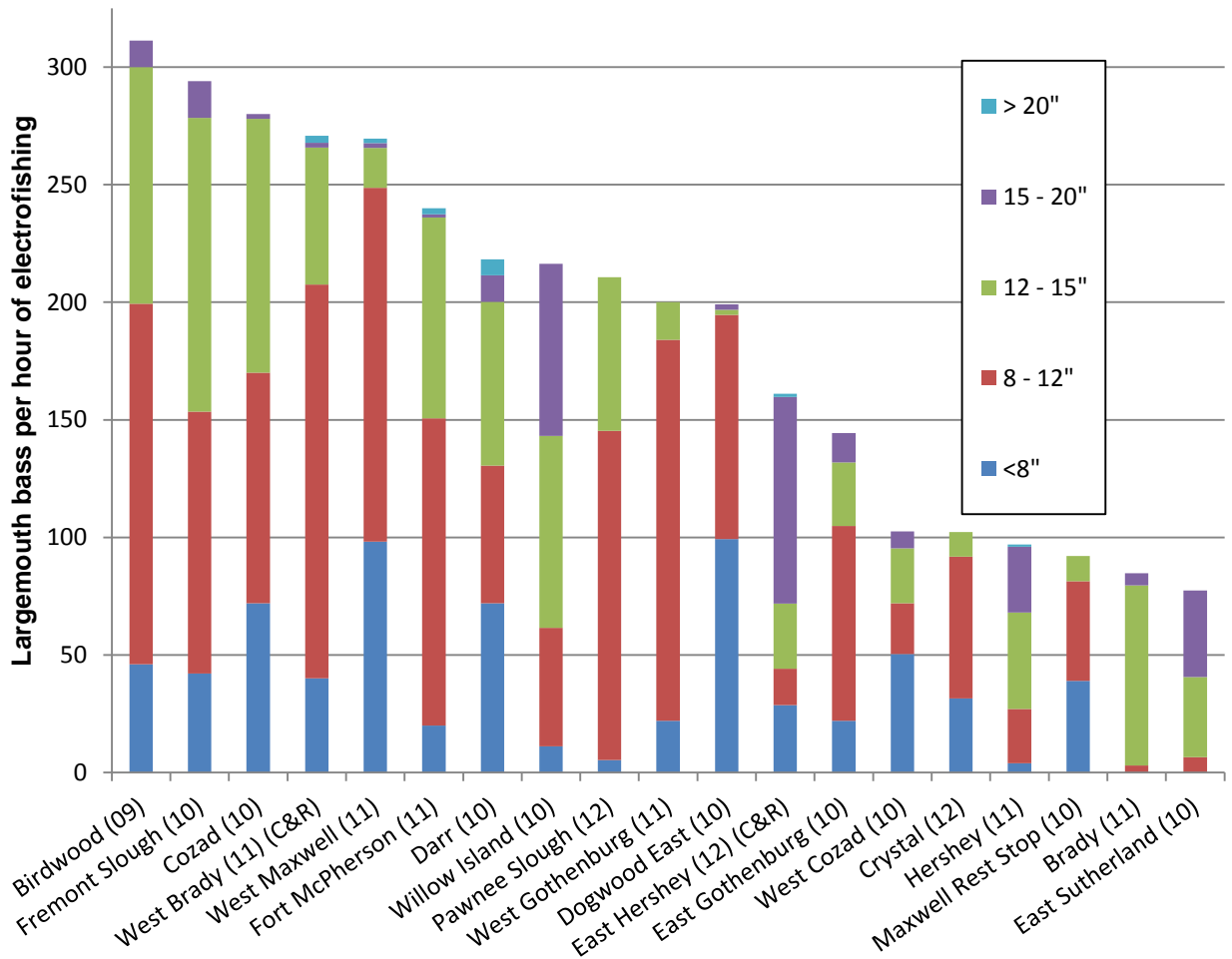
Fort McPherson, Hershey and East Gothenburg I-80 Lakes have bluegill populations that consist primarily of small individuals. An angler could catch many bluegill at these lakes but would be hard pressed to catch any over six inches. Lakes such as Pawnee Slough, Birdwood and Dogwood East may be good choices for those anglers looking for both quality and quantity. Lakes that show even lower values may be the best option for anglers looking for size but not quantity.



**Largemouth bass** are the main predatory species in most I-80 Lakes. They are favored by anglers because of their aggressive characteristics. Anglers have success using a myriad of live and artificial baits that mimic baitfish or crayfish. Statewide regulations for largemouth bass apply to most I-80 Lakes but West Brady and East Hershey remain catch and release only for all species.

Birdwood, Fremont Slough, Cozad, West Brady and West Maxwell I-80 Lakes would be good choices for anglers interested in catching large quantities of largemouth bass but not large sizes. Lakes that may offer a larger proportion greater than 15 inches and quantity of bass include Willow Island and East Hershey (C&R). Lakes such as Hershey and East Sutherland may offer a large proportion over 15 inches but not overall quantity.

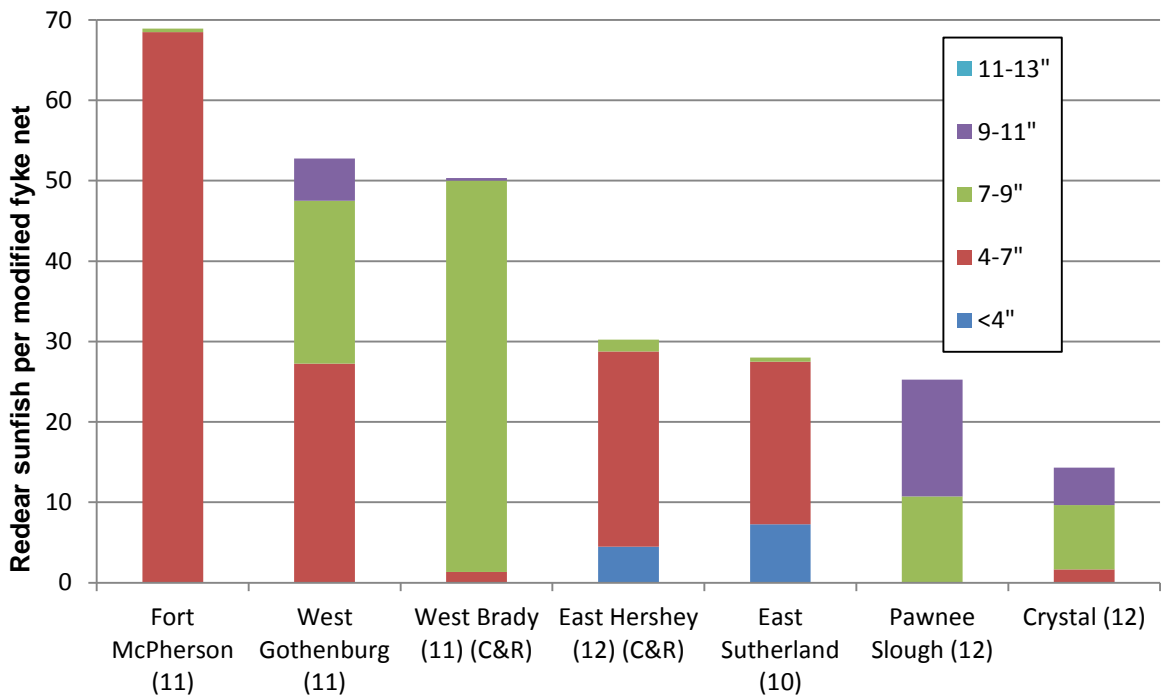
In an effort to increase largemouth bass density, stocking requests have been put in place for 2013 for several I-80 Lakes including Brady, Hershey, East Sutherland and North Platte I-80 Lake.



**Redear sunfish** are typically a southern species but they have found a niche in several I-80 lakes and Master Angler sizes have been produced. They differ from bluegill in several ways. Redear sunfish are typically less aggressive, have smaller mouths and as adults their diet consists primarily of snails. These attributes make them more difficult to catch especially in lakes that contain bluegill. Using visibility as an advantage along with small tackle an angler can be successful though. Statewide regulations for redear sunfish apply to most I-80 Lakes but West Brady and East Hershey remain catch and release only for all species.

West Gothenburg, West Brady (C&R), Pawnee Slough and Crystal are the best lakes to target redear sunfish greater than seven inches.

To sustain redear sunfish populations a stocking request is in place for West Gothenburg during 2013. A request for initial introduction into West Maxwell is also planned for 2013.





Pictured: Redear sunfish



Pictured: Rock bass

**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 every other year in many I-80 Lakes to maintain fishable populations. The statewide daily bag limit is five channel catfish.

**Rock bass** is a unique and rare species throughout most of the state but some I-80 Lakes have fishable populations and produce Master Angler sizes. Rock bass are located in Hershey, East Sutherland, and East Hershey. (Pictured top – right)

**Rainbow trout** are stocked into Birdwood I-80 Lake each year to provide a unique winter fishery. Trout are stocked twice each year for a total of 8,000 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 ten.



# Angler Access Projects

In 2009, the Nebraska Unicameral passed legislation that expanded the Aquatic Habitat Rehabilitation Program so that 30% of the funds would be dedicated to improving angler access at public waters not necessarily involved in aquatic habitat rehabilitation. Projects have been evaluated within each NGPC District with the primary purpose of improving access for bank anglers.

Shorelines of many I-80 lakes are currently inaccessible due to encroachment of Eastern Red Cedar, Russian Olive, *Phragmites spp.* and cattails. Other shorelines are sloped steeply or distant from productive angling depths. These factors make bank angling difficult.

During 2012, plans were made for access improvements at seven I-80 Lakes. These proposed lakes include Hershey, Birdwood, Fremont Slough, West Maxwell, West Brady, Brady and West Gothenburg. Angler access pads and piers are being designed to provide level and undeterred access for bank anglers. Other facets of the overall project include tree removal, fenceline construction and parking expansion. In conjunction with bank access improvements, Motorboat Access funds will be used to improve boat ramps at many of the sites. Construction of these projects is planned to begin during 2013.



# North Platte I-80 City Lake

On August 21, 2012 the North Platte I-80 City Lake's (located within Iron Horse City Park) fishery was renovated with assistance from North Platte City Parks Division. Using the chemical rotenone, NGPC fisheries personnel from Kearney, North Platte and Ogallala successfully killed the entire fish population.

In September, restocking began with fingerling and adult largemouth bass, adult bluegill and adult channel catfish. Details of these stockings and other statewide stockings can be researched at <http://outdoornebraska.ne.gov/fishing/guides/fishguide/FGstocking.asp>.

The renovation was successful in eliminating undesirable species. This result will allow newly stocked species to flourish and provide a much more desirable fishery.

Following the renovation, approximately two tons of fish carcasses were disposed of by NGPC and North Platte's City Parks Division. Prior to the renovation, boat electrofishing and modified fyke net gears were used by NGPC personnel to remove many desirable fish. These fish were primarily relocated to Fremont Slough I-80 Lake.





Several of the I-80 Lakes in the Southwest District have been enhanced with additional structure. Trees along shorelines have been hinge cut and dropped into the water to provide shallow cover while cedar trees are usually cut from surrounding WMAs and positioned on the ice or sunk using a large boat. This is done to improve habitat and concentrate fish for anglers. These brush piles congregate game species such as bluegill and largemouth bass. Since January 1, 2012 brushing projects have occurred at Cozad, West Cozad, Darr, East Hershey, Birdwood, North Platte I-80 City Lake, Hershey, and East Sutherland.

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

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# Zebra and Quagga Mussels

Anglers and boaters need to be aware of zebra and quagga mussels while using Nebraska Lakes and continue to **Clean, Drain and Dry** their equipment and boats prior to launching at a new waterbody. While no mussels have been identified at any of the I-80 Lakes, zebra mussels have been found at Zorinsky Lake in Omaha and are present in several reservoirs in neighboring states. Monitoring was completed at several Nebraska reservoirs during 2011 and 2012. No evidence of zebra or quagga mussels was found.

Anglers and boaters using Nebraska waters this season need to be aware of **new regulations** dealing with aquatic invasive species. Starting January 1, 2013 the following regulations went into effect to help prevent the spread of unwanted species.

- Any watercraft that has been on a Nebraska waterbody must drain the lake water from their compartments, equipment or containers before leaving the launch area. It is illegal to dump baitfish into a Nebraska waterbody.
- Livewells need to be drained prior to leaving a launch area: plan ahead and bring a cooler for harvested fish.
- All aquatic vegetation from that waterbody attached to the watercraft and/or trailer must be removed before leaving the launch area.

For more information regarding these new regulations consult the 2013-2014 Fishing Guide at <http://outdoornebraska.ne.gov/Fishing/guides/fishguide/pdf/FishGuide.pdf>.

Find more information concerning zebra and quagga mussels at <http://snr.unl.edu/invasives/> and <http://100thmeridian.org/zebras.asp>.

