

2023

FISHING FORECAST

INFORMATION FOR:

- 2022 Fish Sampling Charts
- Guide to Fishing Nebraska
- Best Waters to Catch Larger Fish
- Forecast for 17 Fish Species

NEBRASKA
— GAME  PARKS —



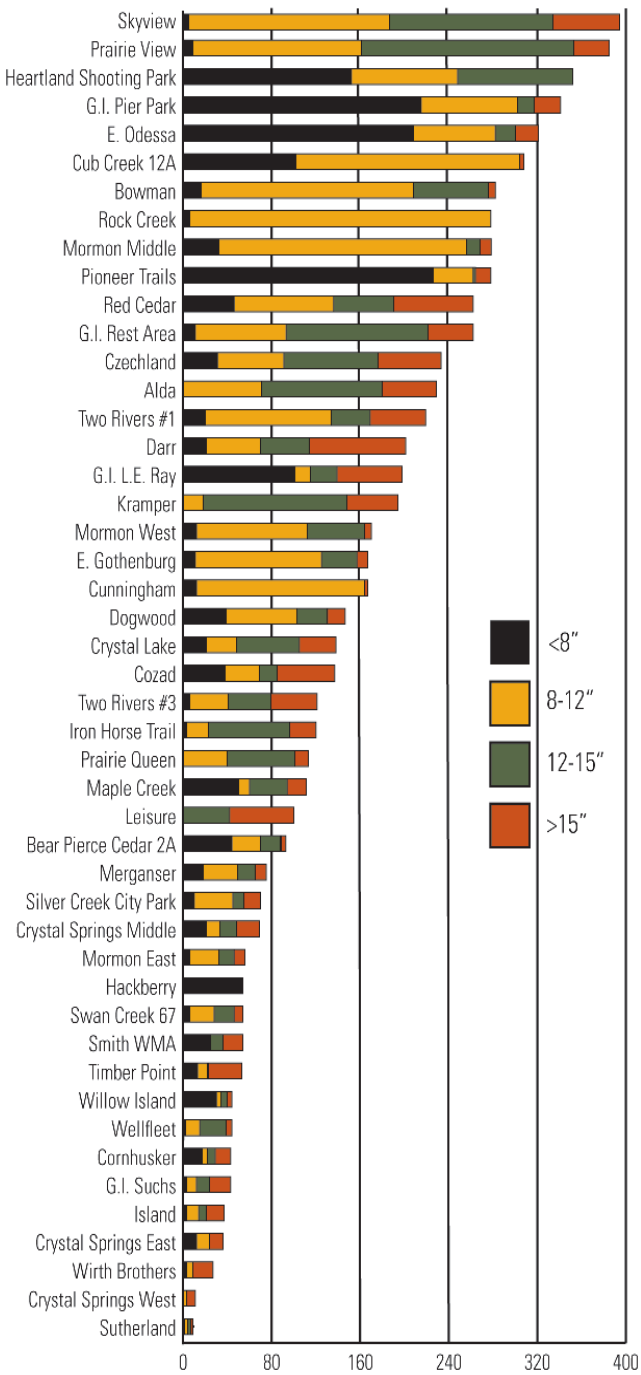
Stagecoach Lake
channel catfish
sampled in 2022.

» OutdoorNebraska.org

2022 Sampling Charts

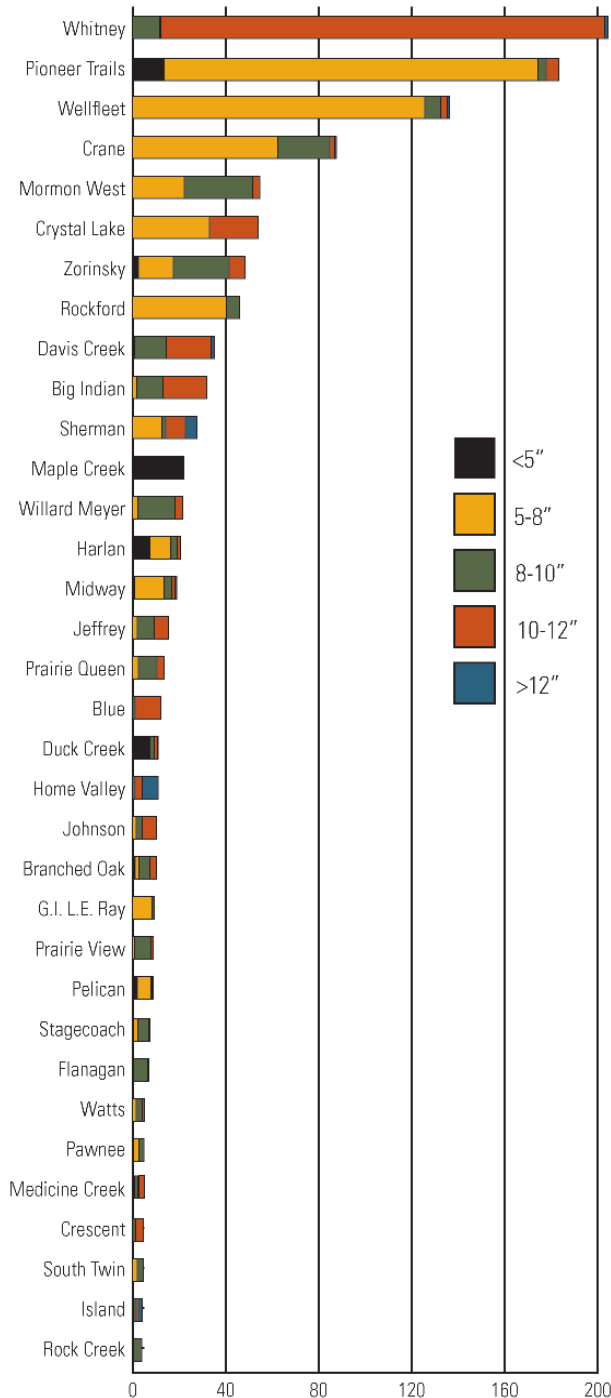
LARGEMOUTH BASS

Per Hour Electrofishing



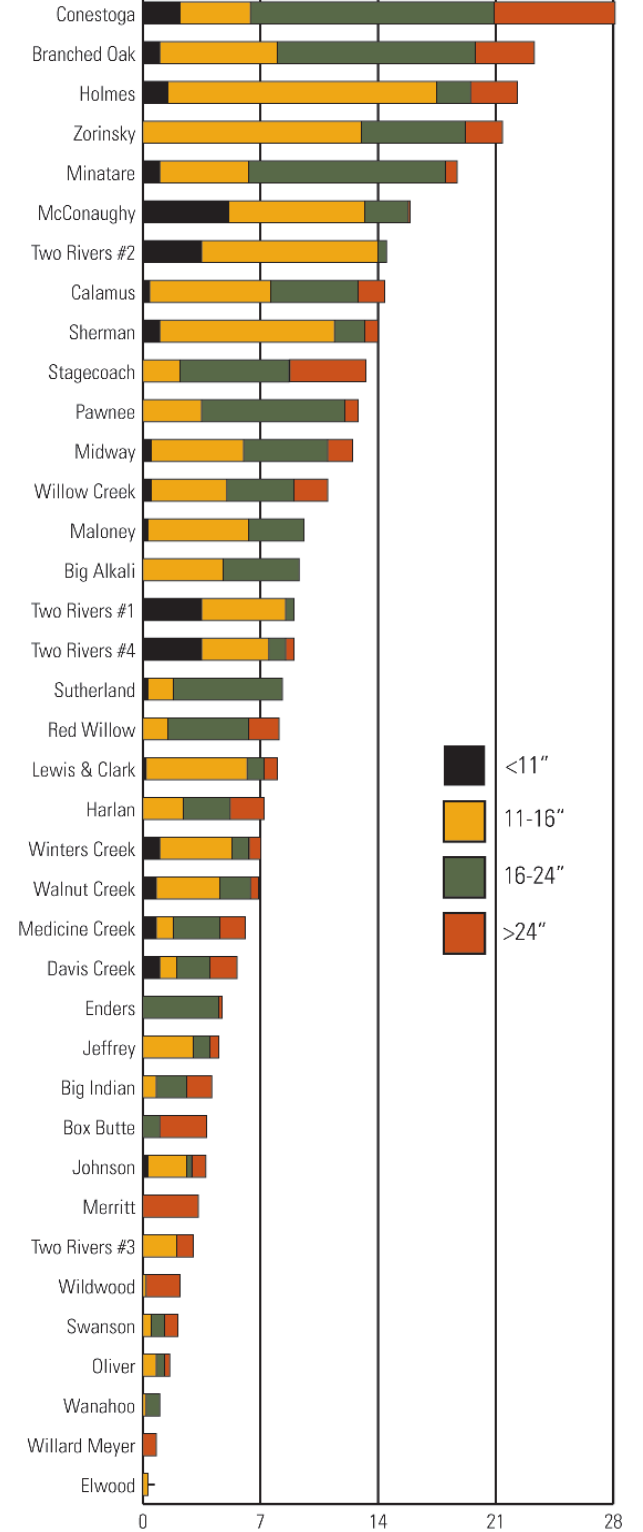
CRAPPIE

Per Trap Net



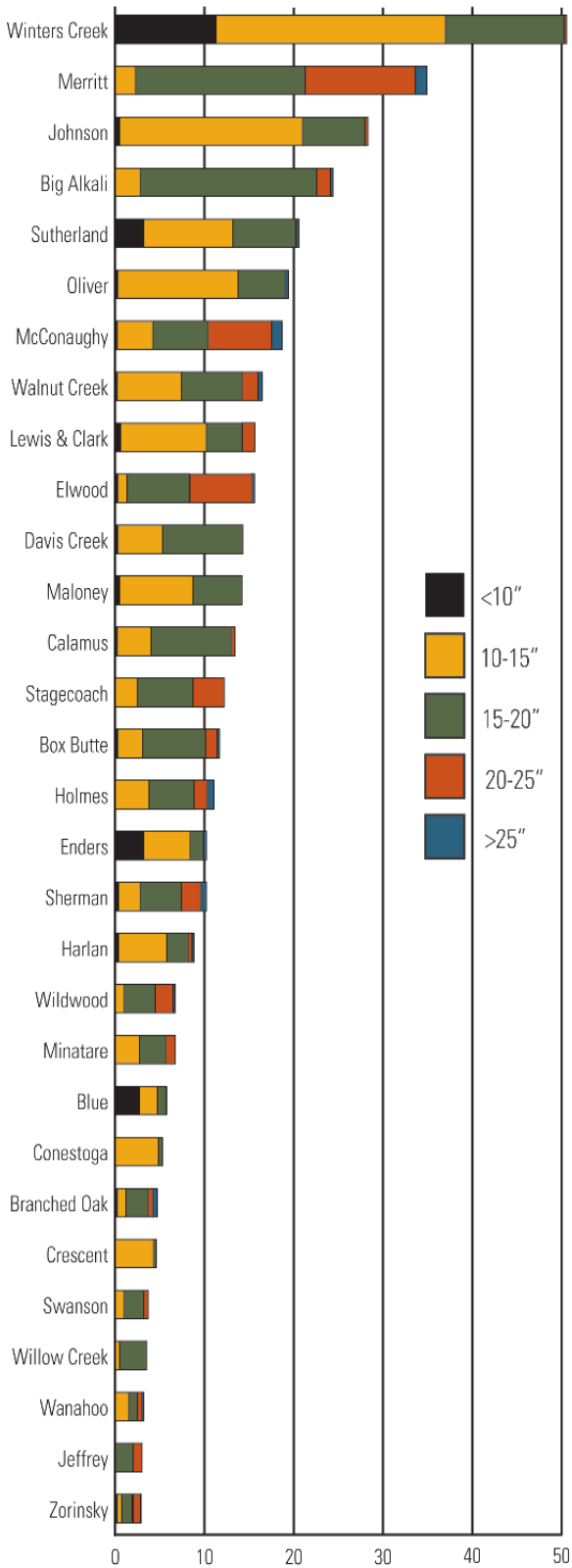
CHANNEL CATFISH

Per Gill Net



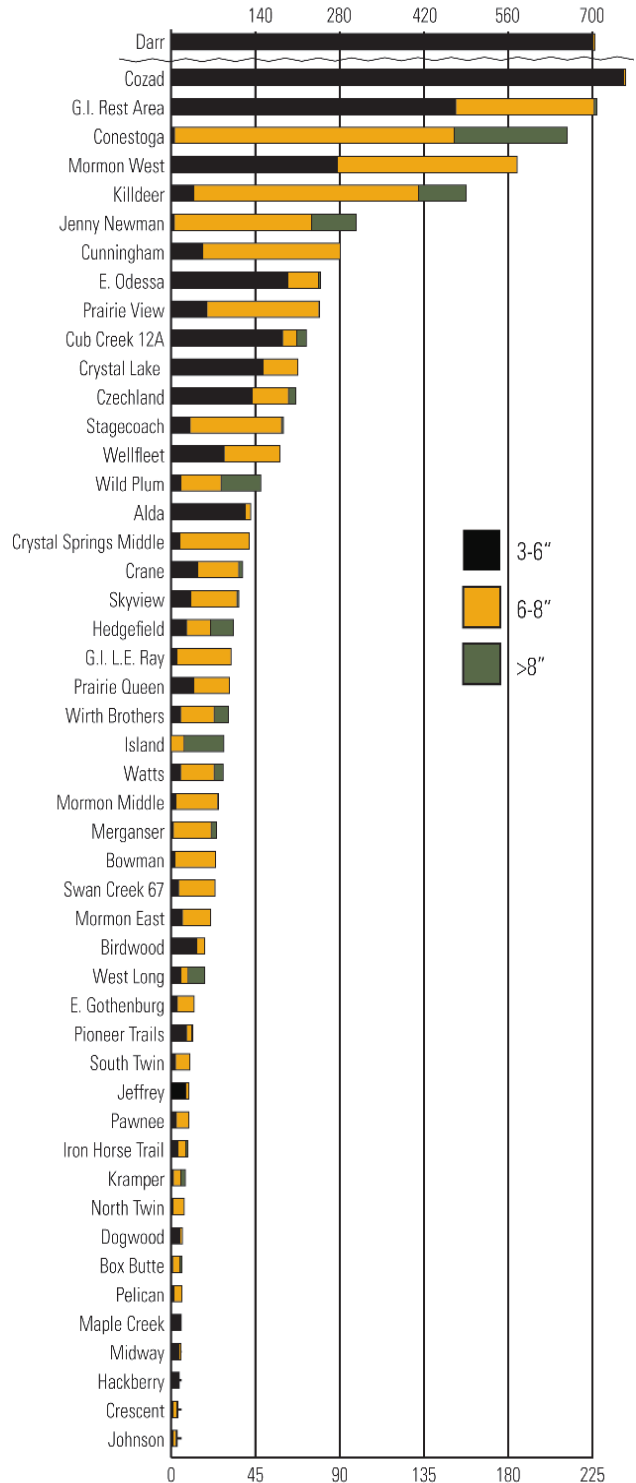
WALLEYE

Per Gill Net



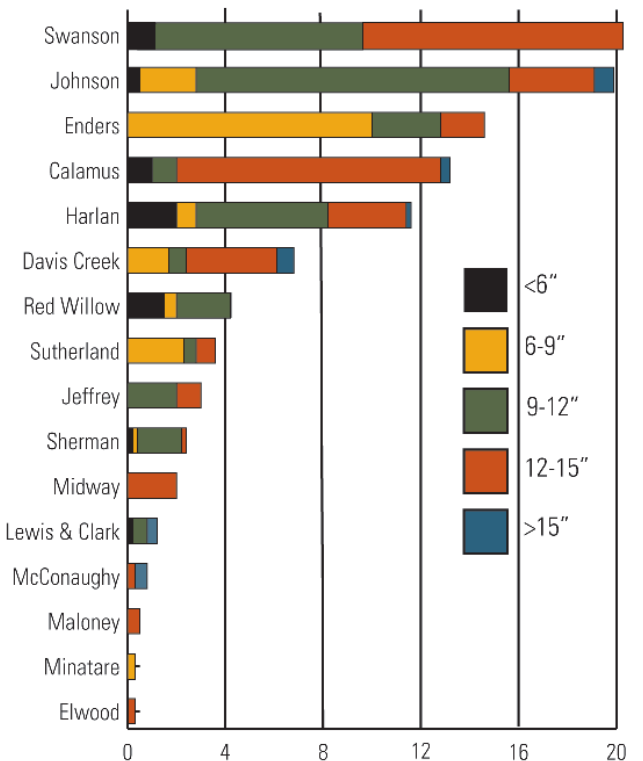
BLUEGILL

Per Trap Net



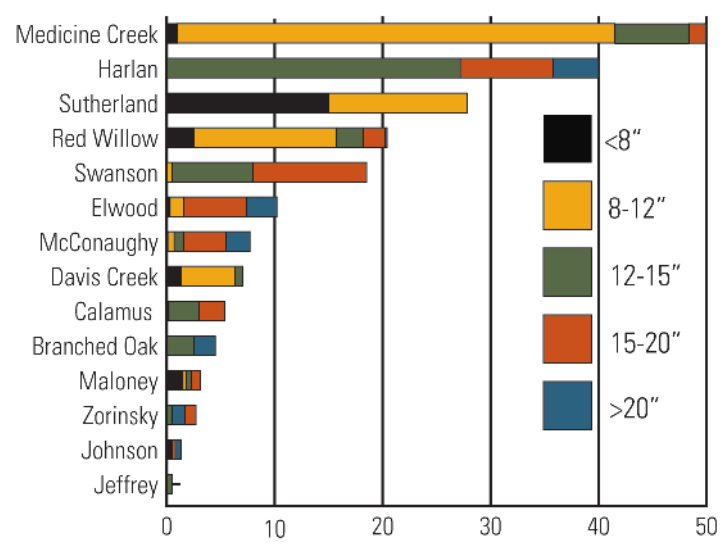
WHITE BASS

Per Gill Net



WIPER

Per Gill Net



A GUIDE TO FISHING NEBRASKA IN 2023

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, always changing, often in response to fluctuating water levels. The highest total sampling rates of walleyes in the fall of 2022 were at Winters Creek, Merritt, Johnson, Big Alkali and Sutherland. Big Alkali, Winters Creek, Calamus and Davis Creek will be very good for 15- to 20-inch walleyes in 2023.

Anglers targeting big walleyes should plan trips to Merritt, McConaughy, Sherman and Elwood reservoirs. Smaller waters are less ideal walleye habitats, but several of those will offer some walleye opportunities this year. Walnut Creek, Stagecoach and Holmes will give anglers a chance to catch walleyes in eastern Nebraska. Oliver Reservoir in the Panhandle had a lot of walleyes sampled last fall, but most of them need some time to grow yet.

WHITE BASS

White bass also thrive in Nebraska's largest reservoirs. Water-level fluctuations also drive reservoir white bass population dynamics. The most white bass in 2023 will be found at Swanson, Johnson, Enders, Calamus and Harlan. Calamus and Swanson will be particularly good for white bass larger than 12 inches. For white bass larger than 15 inches, anglers also should target Johnson, Davis Creek, McConaughy, Calamus and Lewis and Clark.

WIPERS

Wipers are white bass X striped bass hybrids and, like their parent species, they also are most successful in open-water habitats – Nebraska's largest reservoirs. Southwest reservoirs Medicine Creek, Red Willow and Swanson will offer high numbers of wipers in 2023. However, most of those fish at Medicine Creek will be smaller than 12 inches. Harlan and Sutherland also will offer some good wiper fishing this year, but again most of the fish at Sutherland will be small. Anglers looking for trophy wipers will find some in Harlan, Elwood, McConaughy, Branched Oak and Zorinsky. 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 the ones that produce numbers of 8-inch and larger bluegills. Small- to medium-size reservoirs offer some of the best bluegill fishing every year, with Conestoga, Killdeer, Hedgefield, Wirth Brothers and Kramper topping the list in 2023.

Sandhills lakes offer lower densities of bluegills but can produce some trophy 'gills, with the biggest fish exceeding one pound. The best Sandhills lakes this year will be Island, West Long and Watts. Anglers should remember bluegills that big are rare fish and worthy of having a picture taken and then returned to the water. Pits, ponds and oxbows like Jenny Newman, Wild Plum and East Odessa will also 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. Whitney Reservoir is a perennial favorite and again will be in a class by itself in 2023. Other reservoirs that will be good for crappies this year will be Davis Creek, Big Indian, Sherman, Zorinsky, Jeffrey, Johnson and Pioneer Trails. Crystal Lake, a small oxbow lake near Ayr, also will provide anglers with some nice crappies this year.

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, Island and Blue 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 tend to produce excellent panfish fishing as largemouth bass keep panfish numbers in check. However, waters with lots of bass may not necessarily be the best for producing 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 anglers the best opportunities to catch bass larger than 15 inches.

Some small- to medium-size reservoirs that will be particularly good this year include Red Cedar, Skyview, Leisure, Czechland and Kramper. Pits are some of the best bass fisheries in the state, Darr, G.I. L.E. Ray, Cozad, Two Rivers No. 1 and Alda will offer some excellent bass fishing in 2023. Sandhills lakes Smith WMA and Island also will be good bets for some 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. In addition, some private pits and ponds have been enrolled in the Open Fields and Waters program and are open to the public. Refer to the Public Access Atlas at Outdoornebraska.gov/publicaccessatlas for those waters.

CHANNEL CATFISH

Conestoga, Branched Oak, Minatare, Pawnee, Stagecoach, Sutherland and Zorinsky reservoirs will offer good numbers of 16-inch and larger channel catfish in 2023. For fish longer than 24 inches, anglers should plan to fish Merritt, Holmes, Box Butte, Willow Creek, Harlan and Wildwood 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, do not overlook 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

Besides the species highlighted in the fish-sampling graphs, there are a variety of other fish that can be pursued.

Nebraska offers opportunities to catch other sunfish species like **REDEAR SUNFISH** at Jenny Newman, Duck Creek and

Willard Meyer.

SMALLMOUTH BASS can be caught at Sutherland, Johnson and McConaughy, as well as the Missouri River in northeast Nebraska.

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

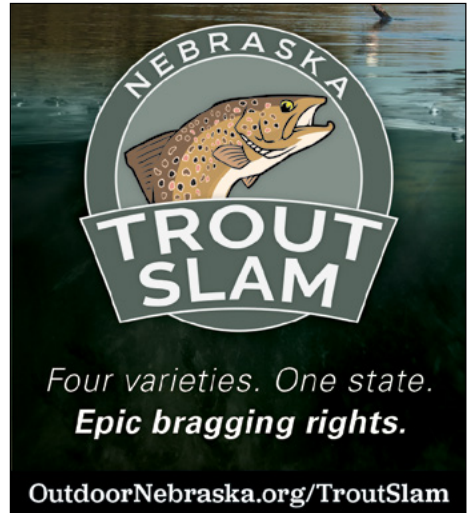
FLATHEAD CATFISH are another species of large catfish that can be found in the Missouri River, as well as in reservoirs like Harlan, Sherman, Branched Oak and the Tri-County canal system. All flatheads at Branched Oak must be released immediately after capture and anglers should consider releasing big 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 in Big Indian, Blue, Red Willow, Willard Meyer and Crescent.

YELLOW PERCH always are a tasty and popular panfish; in 2023 some of the best yellow perch fishing will be found at Island, West Long, Pelican and Crane lakes in the Sandhills.

Sandhills lakes are some of the best **NORTHERN PIKE** habitats in the state as well; Crescent Lake will be one of the best along with Box Butte Reservoir. Reservoirs in southern and eastern Nebraska typically are too warm for cool-water northern pike,



but Wanahoo and Flanagan are relatively new and have some pike habitat and pike fishing right now. All pike are required to be released at Wanahoo and Flanagan.

MUSKELLUNGE can also be found in Nebraska waters. To catch this trophy, toothy predator, anglers should target Merritt, Calamus and Zorinsky reservoirs, as well as Mormon Island West and Grand Island's L.E. Ray Lake. Cottonwood-Steverson 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 and tigers (brown trout X brook trout hybrids). Most of the cold-water trout streams are in western and northern parts of the state; the East Branch of Verdigre Creek, Long Pine, Soldier and Ninemile creeks are favorites among trout anglers. This year, the rainbow trout fishing at Lake Ogallala will continue to be good, and anglers might even catch some cutties from the White River and Soldier Creek.

Photo: Eric Fowler/Nebraskaland Magazine/NGPC