

# 2014 Survey Summary I-80 Lakes Lincoln and Dawson Counties



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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). For more information concerning I-80 Lakes consult our [Fishing Across Nebraska I-80 Corridor](#) publication and the [2015 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 2014. Although these lakes are small, the fisheries are dynamic and in many cases heavily influenced by angling pressure. For historical survey information investigate [Historical Survey Summaries](#) on NGPC's website.

## \*Notes

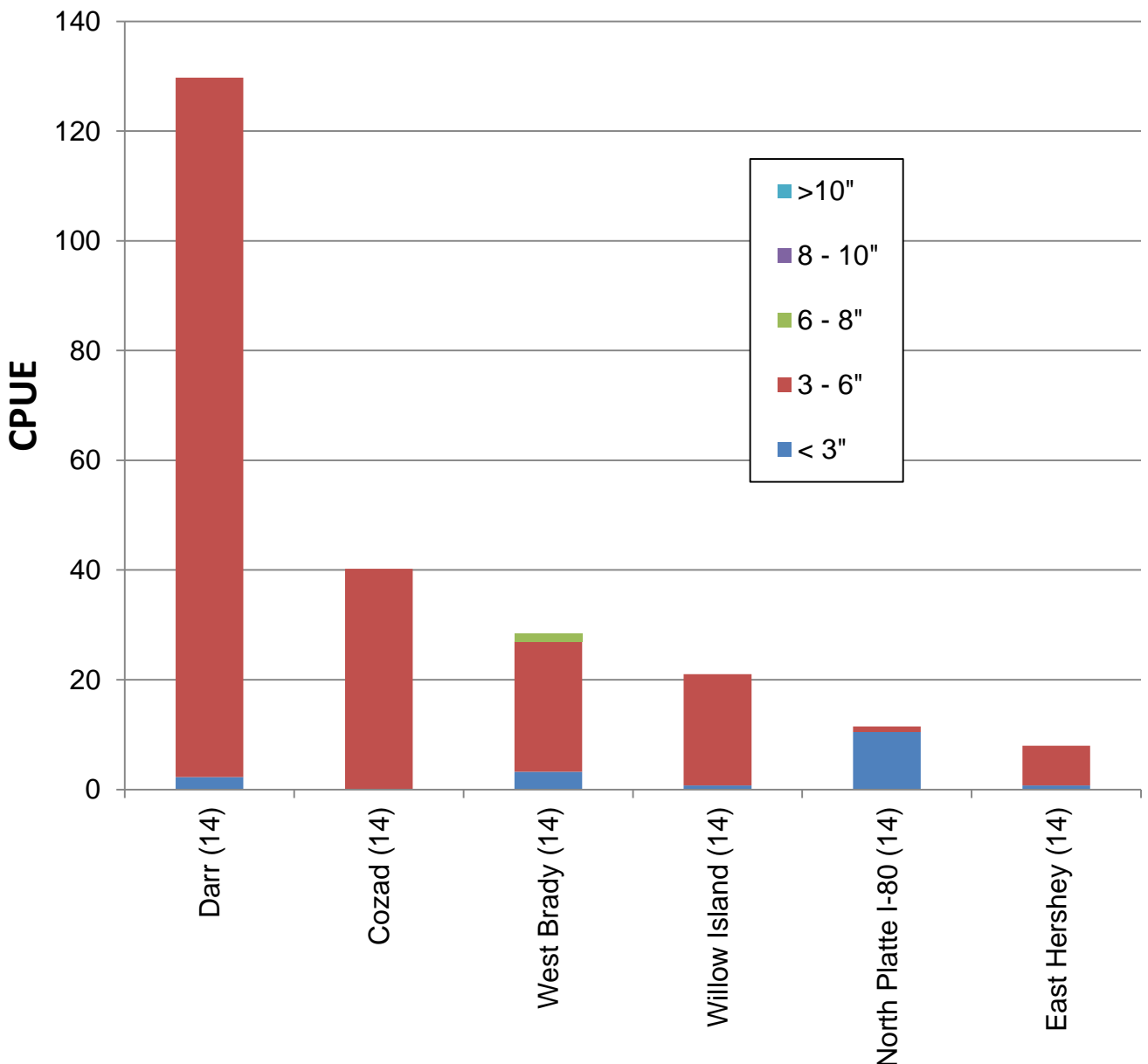
The majority of I-80 Lakes discussed below are WMAs. Please don't litter as there is no designated litter control method in place. Condition of boat ramps and roads vary at these lakes so please use discretion when accessing these WMAs. Investigate the [2014 Hunting Guide](#) for WMA descriptions (p 25) and land based regulations (p 49).



**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 good targets for bank anglers. Statewide regulations apply to most I-80 Lakes but West Brady and East Hershey remain catch and release only for all species.

According to the 2014 survey data, Darr and Cozad 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. West Brady (C&R) has many small panfish too but may offer big panfish if an angler is able to target larger sizes. Access the historical I-80 Lake information at [Historical Sampling Surveys](#). Lakes that show low values may be the best option for anglers looking for size over quantity.

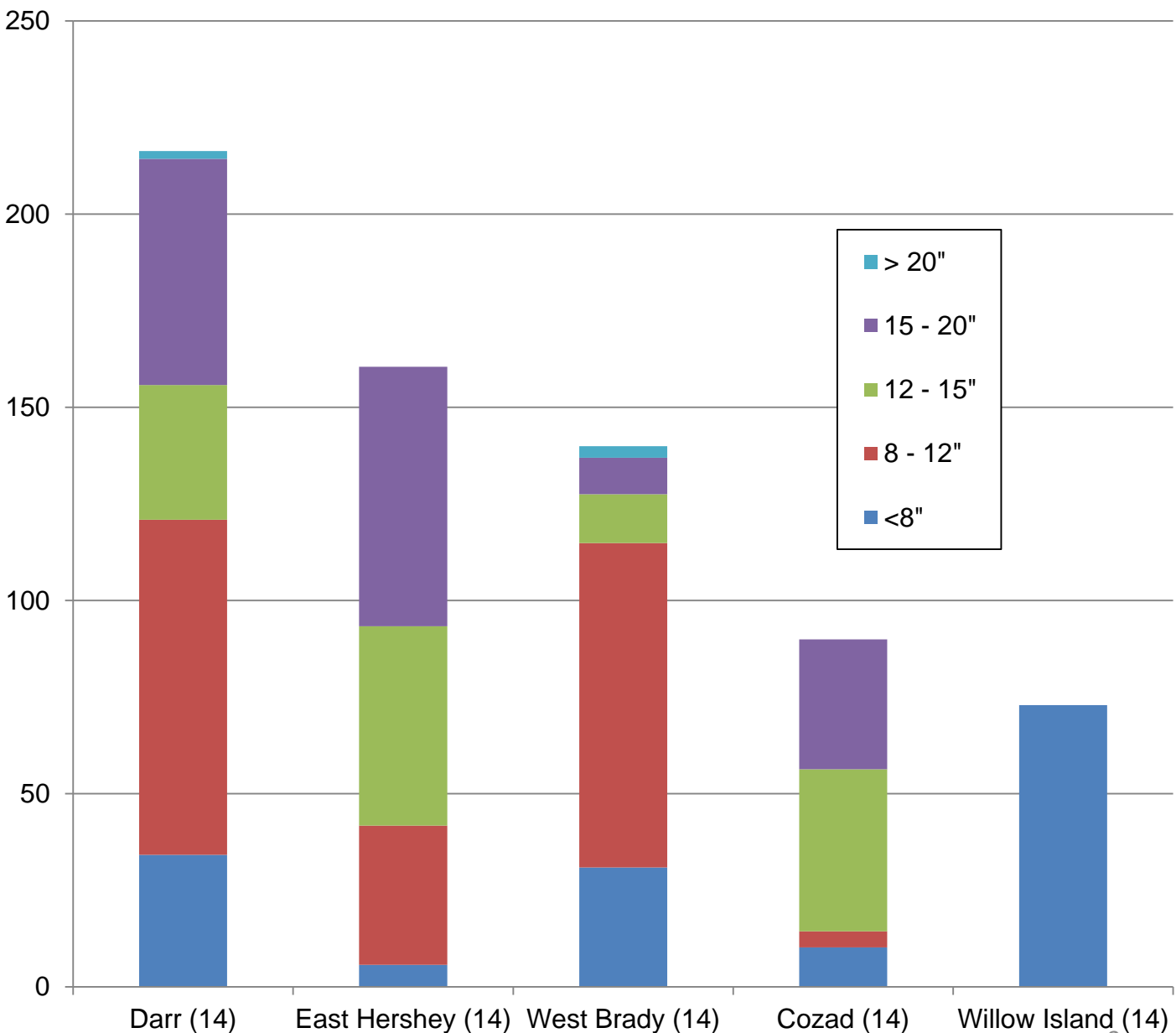
### Bluegill per Net by Length Class



**Largemouth bass** are the main predatory species in most I-80 Lakes. Their aggressive characteristics allow anglers to 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.

Darr, and East Hershey (C&R) would be good choices for anglers interested in catching large quantities of largemouth bass along with quality size. West Brady offers anglers opportunity to catch larger specimens but the population is primarily composed of smaller (<12") fish. Cozad offers a largemouth population similar to Darr and East Hershey's but at lower density. Largemouth bass are on the rebound in Willow Island and the population is currently composed of small fish. Access the historical I-80 Lake information at [Historical Sampling Surveys](#).

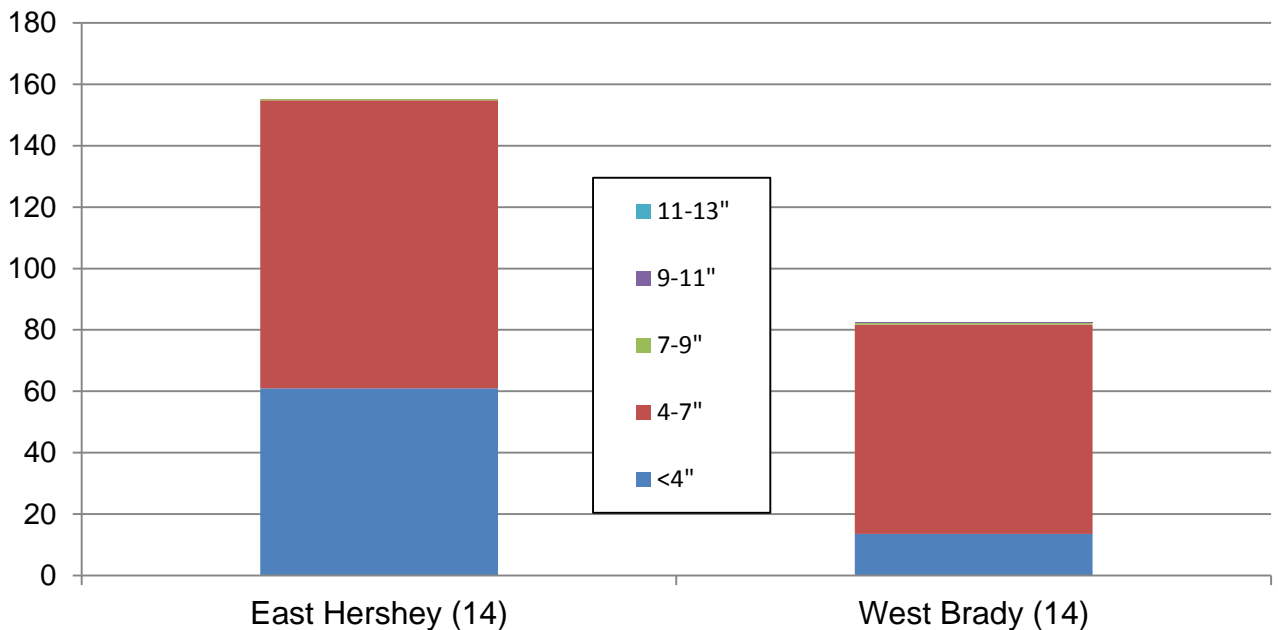
### Largemouth bass catch per Hour by Length Class



**Redear sunfish** is typically a southern species but they have found a niche in several I-80 lakes and Master Angler sizes have been produced. The red or orange margin of their gill cover tab gives this fish its name. The body is olive, with orange or yellow breast. Redear sunfish are typically less aggressive and have smaller mouths than bluegill and as adults their diet consists primarily of snails. 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.

The 2014 surveys at East Hershey (C&R) and West Brady (C&R) indicated that both fisheries are dominated by small redear with very few over 7". Access the historical I-80 Lake information at [Historical Sampling Surveys](#) to investigate other redear sunfish fisheries.

### Redear sunfish per Net by Length Class



# Angler Access Projects

During 2012, plans were made for access improvements at seven I-80 Lakes. These lakes include Hershey, Birdwood, Fremont Slough, West Maxwell, West Brady, Brady and West Gothenburg. Construction of angler access pads and piers are planned 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 angler access improvements, Motorboat Access funds will be used to improve boat ramps at many of the sites. Funding for this project has been allocated and a contractor has been hired to complete these projects during 2015. Signs like those pictured below can be seen at each I-80 Lake construction site. An [online news](#) article about this project was published on October 15<sup>th</sup>. Construction activities will travel from one lake to another and only partially restrict access to the WMAs when necessary to complete projects.



**Crappie** offer another fishery in several I-80 Lakes but exist in low densities. Some of these lakes include North Platte City I-80 Lake, Hershey, Fremont Slough, Brady, Willow Island and West Cozad. The statewide daily bag limit for panfish (all species in conjunction) is 15.

**Yellow perch** inhabit many I-80 Lakes in low density quantities. Catchable yellow perch exist in Fremont Slough and Pawnee Slough I-80 Lakes. Research through the University of Kearney is helping to determine possibilities for yellow perch fisheries in the I-80 Lakes. The statewide daily bag limit for panfish (all species in conjunction) is 15.

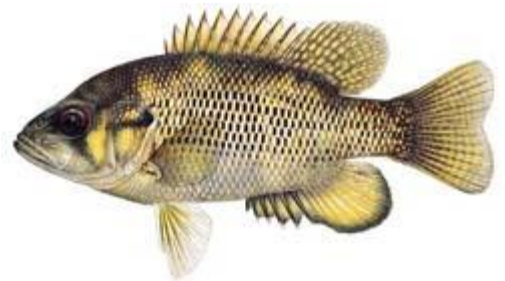
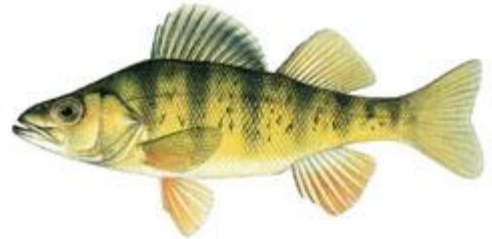
**Channel catfish** offer another angling opportunity in many I-80 Lakes. They are raised to 10" before being stocked to limit predation by largemouth bass and are stocked every other year in many I-80 Lakes to maintain fishable populations. The statewide daily bag limit is five channel catfish.

**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.

**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.

**Northern pike** are stocked into Hershey I-80 Lake intermittently to provide additional predation on abundant panfish populations and offer another angling opportunity. Northern pike 12" in length were stocked in 2012 and 2013. These fish grow quickly and will provide anglers another species to target. Northern pike must be greater than 30" to be harvested from Hershey I-80 Lake.

**Smallmouth bass** are infrequently stocked into Fort McPherson I-80 Lake as following its 2006 fishery renovation a smallmouth bass fishery was intended. Stocked fish are typically adults greater than 12".



The table below illustrates the locations, species, number and average length of fish that were stocked during 2014. For more details and previous year's stockings visit the [NGPC Fish Stockings Website](#).

	Channel catfish	Redear sunfish	Rainbow trout	Largemouth bass
East Sutherland	540-10.5"			
West Hershey				
Hershey	1,060-9.7"			
East Hershey				
Birdwood	600-10.5"		7,795-10-12"	
North Platte I-80 City Lake	780-10.5"			
Fremont Slough	600-10"			
Pawnee Slough	600-10"	8,875-1"		
West Maxwell		2,125-1"		
Crystal		2,125-1"		
Maxwell Rest Stop	100-10"			
Fort McPherson				
West Brady				
Brady	1,250-10"			500-3.5"
West Gothenburg		4,625-1"		
East Gothenburg	300-10"			
Willow Island				"
West Cozad	400-10.5"			
Cozad	540-10.5"			
Dogwood East	350-10.5"			





Several of the I-80 Lakes in the Southwest District 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. This is done to improve habitat and concentrate fish for anglers. These brush piles congregate game species such as bluegill, crappie and largemouth bass. Since January 1, 2014 brushing projects have occurred at Cozad and West Gothenburg.

**\*NOTE**

The following five pages will include lake by lake descriptions for six I-80 Lakes sampled during 2014. These lakes are open for public fishing and are all Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). They do not have amenities such as restrooms, trash cans etc. Details will include route directions, GPS coordinates, existing fishery and boating regulations. For more information about boating regulations please consult the [2015 Boating Guide](#)..



**Darr WMA**– From the center of the Darr Interchange, Travel ½ Mile N on Rd 428, ¼ W on Rd 756 and turn left into the WMA entrance  
Latitude: 40°47'06.54"N Longitude: 99°50'57.94"W (boat ramp)

**Darr I-80 Lake** is 13 surface acres and has a maximum depth of approximately 15 feet. The southeast shoreline is lined with concrete rip rap and water clarity is quite clear. The 2014 survey data indicates a relatively dense largemouth bass population consisting of a large percent of fish greater than 15". Bluegill abundance is high with the vast majority being between 3-6". Channel catfish are typically stocked every other year and survive in large numbers. Cedar tree and russian olive brush piles were placed in the northeast and southeast portions of this lake in 2013.

Vehicular traffic is limited to the east shoreline. All shorelines are routinely treated to control Phragmites. This activity allows good bank angler access especially along the east shoreline. The boat ramp surface is rock and four wheel 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.



**Cozad WMA-** This area is located in the SE quadrant of the Cozad interchange – Latitude: 40°50'26.39"N Longitude: 99°59'05.66"W (boat ramp)

**Cozad I-80 Lake** is 18 surface acres and has an approximate maximum depth of 10'.. This fishery appears to receive heavy angler pressure. According to the 2014 survey data the bluegill population is comprised primarily of small 3-6" fish and the largemouth bass population's density is lower than some neighboring I-80 Lakes but it's size structure is desirable. Yellow perch have been stocked in Cozad I-80 Lake several times over the last decade. In an effort to evaluate this population survey netting was conducted earlier during 2014. Only small yellow perch were sampled possibly indicating that these perch are experiencing mortality before reaching desirable lengths. Several other species inhabit this lake but likely exist in low numbers. Vehicular travel is restricted to the west, north and east shorelines on established roads. This lake is routinely treated for Phragmite invasion to improve accessibility for bank anglers. Russian olive brush was placed in the SW corner of the lake during 2014. The current boating regulation allows vessels powered by internal combustion engines but prohibits production of wake. 5 mph is the maximum speed allowed.



**West Brady (C&R)** – From the center of the Brady Interchange – travel just less than 1 mile North on Banner Rd, turn left on E Island Rd and travel just over 2 miles west and across an interstate overpass and turn right into the WMA entrance – West Brady is on the south side of the interstate

Latitude: 41°00'58.67"N Longitude: 100°25'02.88"W (boat ramp)

**West Brady I-80 Lake (C&R)** is 5 surface acres, is typically quite clear and has an approximate maximum depth of 12 feet. Since 2011 this fishery has been catch and release only for all species. Abundance of bluegill and redear sunfish has increased dramatically with very few sizable specimens seen in the 2014 survey. Largemouth bass density has declined as well with very few over 12" sampled in 2014. Channel catfish were observed during the survey in relatively high abundance and size. Cedar tree brush piles were placed during 2010 in the NE section of the lake.

This area is slated to receive Angler Access improvements including a paved boat ramp and two fishing nodes. Vehicle traffic is restricted to the boat ramp area on the South shoreline. The current boating regulation allows nonpowered and electric motor powered vessels only.



**Willow Island WMA** – From Willow Island (unincorporated town on Hwy 30 between Cozad and Gothenburg) travel ¾ miles S and across an interstate overpass on Rd 416 and turn E into WMA entrance.

Latitude: 40°52'36.46"N Longitude: 100°04'13.24"W.

**Willow Island I-80 Lake** is 24 surface acres and has a maximum depth of approximately 12 feet. Willow Island's fishery has experienced several fish kills over the last several years due to low oxygen levels. This lake receives influence from the Platte River quite often and had a dense gizzard shad population prior to the fish kill events. During 2014's survey efforts very few gizzard shad were observed and improved water clarity was noted during the spring. Many young-of-year largemouth bass, black crappie and bluegill were present. This fishery is in a state of "restart". Largemouth bass stockings are requested for 2015 to aide in rebounding the fishery.

Vehicle traffic is limited to the west and north shorelines. The boat ramp's surface is gravel and sand. Four wheel drive is recommended for trailering boats. The current boating regulation allows vessels powered by internal combustion engines but prohibits production of wake and five (5) mph is the maximum speed allowed.



**North Platte I-80 City Lake (Iron Horse Park)**– This lake is located in the SE quadrant of the west North Platte Interchange (Exit 177)

Latitude: 41°06'27.18"N Longitude: 100°45'31.75"W.

**North Platte I-80 City Lake** is 27 surface acres and has a maximum depth of approximately 12 feet. This fishery was renovated during August 2012 and has been restocked with largemouth bass, bluegill and channel catfish. Yellow perch, white crappie, smallmouth bass and rock bass have been identified in the waterbody as well since the renovation. This fishery was only partially surveyed during 2014 to evaluate the abundance of stocked species. During the first several years after a renovation is complete, growth rates are quite rapid. This rapid growth is expected for this fishery but may not be as significant with the additional species already inhabiting the lake. Existing game species observed during 2014 were primarily all below desired angling sizes. Cedar tree brush piles were placed during 2012.

Vehicle traffic is limited to the west and south shorelines and an angler pier is located along the SE shoreline. The boat ramp's surface is gravel. Four wheel drive is recommended for trailering boats. The Nebraska Game & Parks Commission has contracted with the City of North Platte to improve the boat ramp site during 2015. The current boating regulation allows vessels powered by internal combustion engines but prohibits production of wake and five (5) mph is the maximum speed allowed.



**East Hershey** – From North Platte Interchange – ½ mile south on Hwy 83, 7 ¾ miles west on W Walker Rd and 1 ½ N on Lamont Rd across overpass. OR from Hershey Interchange – ¼ mile north on Hershey Dickens Rd and 5 ½ mile west on South River Rd. Latitude: 41°07'33.16"N Longitude: 100°54'09.63"W

**East Hershey I-80 Lake** is 20 surface acres, has a maximum depth of approximately 12 feet, is shallow and vegetated on the west end and has broken concrete rip rap along the eastern shorelines. A special fishing regulation is currently in place for this lake. Catch and release of ALL species is required.

Largemouth bass angling is popular at this lake due to its' large proportion of fish greater than 15" and this has not changed since the special regulation was put in place. According to the 2014 survey data the number of 15-20" bass is the most numerous size class. This fishery also offers large rock bass for anglers to pursue. The panfish population is comprised of bluegill and redear sunfish with redear being the predominate species. Their size structure is dominated by small fish (3-6"). Channel catfish have been stocked on an every other year basis at a rate of 50 per acre during the last decade and offer larger sizes than many I-80 Lakes. Northern pike were stocked in this lake prior to 2000 and a small amount still exist. Vehicle traffic is confined to the parking areas along the south shoreline on the west and east ends. The boat ramp surface is rock and currently is unstable. Four wheel drive is recommended for trailering boats. The current boating regulation allows vessels powered by internal combustion engines but prohibits production of wake and five (5) mph is the maximum speed allowed.





## **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.

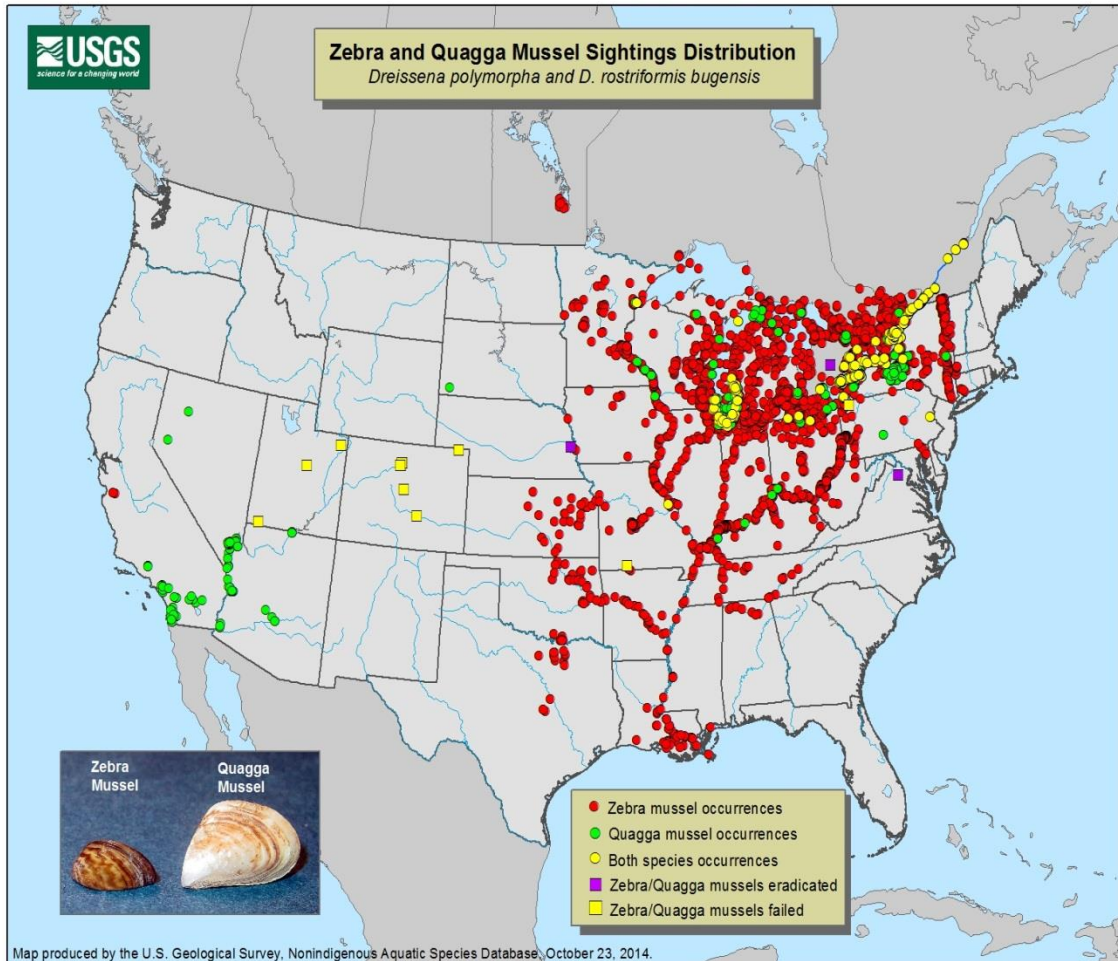
**AND**

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

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

**New in 2015** - In addition to and to clarify the above regulation concerning Aquatic Hitchhikers - it is unlawful to arrive at or leave any waterbody in Nebraska with water other than from a domestic source (such as a water supply system, well, or bottled), except for fire-fighting purposes. This applies especially to boats, their compartments, equipment or containers that may hold water **but also** applies to bank anglers if using water holding devices to transport harvested fish.

Distribution of zebra and quagga mussels is getting nearer to SW Nebraska. The most recent finding in Nebraska was at Louis and Clark Reservoir during the fall of 2014. [USGS's Zebra and Quagga Mussel Sightings Distribution Map](#) is updated frequently.



If you have questions or concerns about I-80 Lake Fisheries please contact

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