

North West District Sandhills Lakes

2012 Fall Survey Summary

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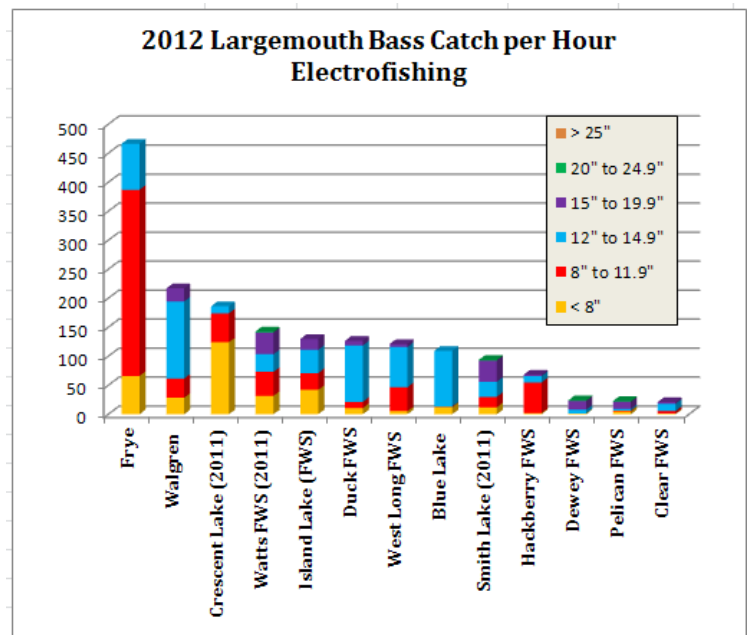


INTRODUCTION:

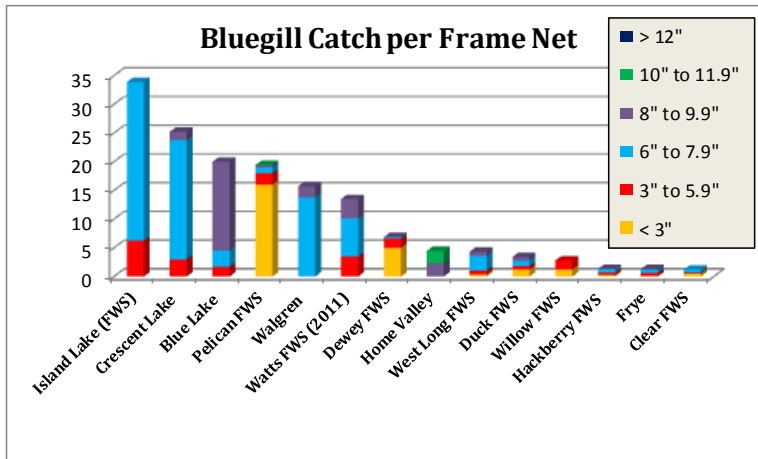
The sandhills region of Nebraska is a unique geographical region comprised of stabilized sand dunes, exposed groundwater lakes in the valleys, and perched mineralized lakes on poorly drained soils. A few lakes are watered by artesian wells and springs while the majority of lakes depend on the water table and fluctuate with its seasonal levels. Most lakes in the sandhills region are either too shallow or too alkaline to support a long-term fishery. Sandhills lakes are typically shallow, vegetated, highly productive systems with fisheries that usually consist of yellow perch, bluegill, black crappie, largemouth bass, northern pike, black bullhead, and green sunfish. The following summary is for sandhills lakes with public access that were surveyed in 2012 or 2011 if not surveyed in 2012. Most sandhills lakes get surveyed at least every third year. An interactive map of lake locations and species composition can be found at www.outdoornebraska.ne.gov/gisapps/fishing.asp.

Largemouth Bass:

Frye Lake had the highest abundance of largemouth bass in 2012 with 467 bass per hour of electrofishing. The average size bass sampled at Frye Lake was 10.1 inches with a few fish approaching legal length (15 inch minimum length). Anglers looking for quality fish should consider Smith Lake in Sheridan County. Smith Lake was last surveyed in 2011. Nearly 40 % of the bass in Smith Lake were greater than 15 inches total length.



Bluegill:



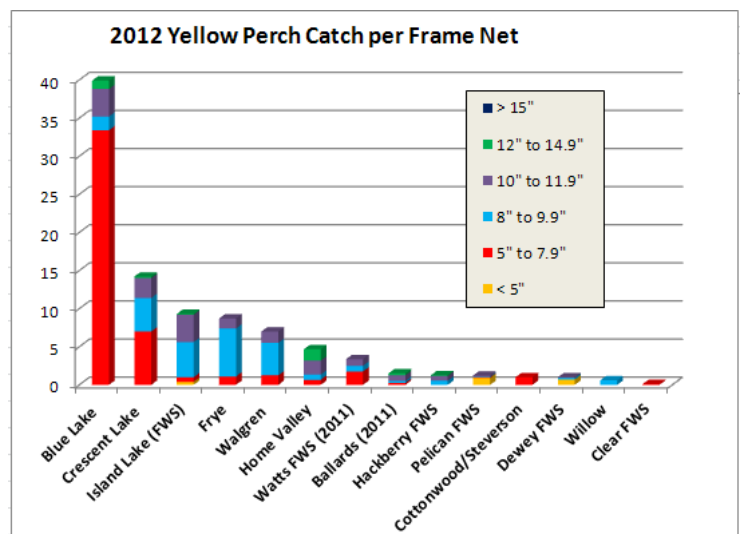
Sandhills lakes are historically known for producing trophy bluegill. These highly productive systems can produce an 8 inch bluegill in as little as 5 years where it may take up to 10 years to produce an 8 inch “gill” in Nebraska’s reservoirs or small ponds. The 2012 surveys suggest that anglers looking for the biggest bluegill should try Home Valley Lake or Pelican Lake. Blue Lake had the highest abundance of quality bluegill and had nearly 16 bluegill per frame net greater than 8 inches. The top three lakes for both abundance and size structure are located within five miles of each other near the Crescent Lake Refuge giving anglers several options if the bluegill are not biting on a specific lake.

Yellow Perch

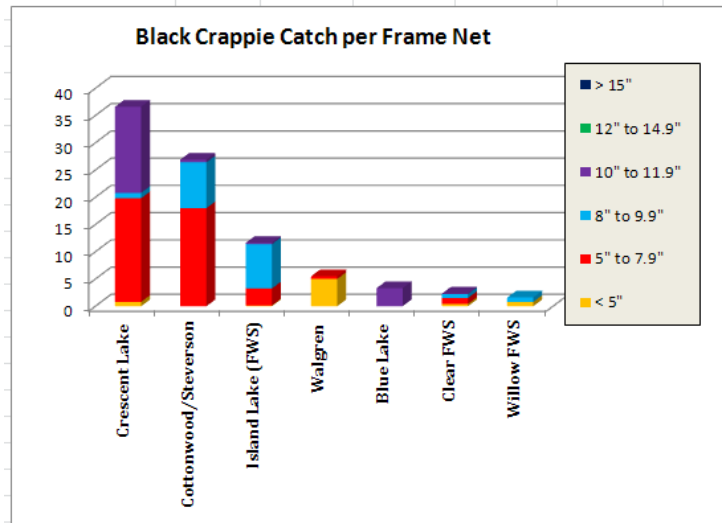
Blue Lake had the highest abundance of yellow perch in 2012 with 39 perch per frame net. Both Blue Lake and Crescent Lake were renovated in 2008 and the initial stocking of perch following the renovation have grown to over 12 inches. Blue Lake has special regulations that can be found in the 2013—2014 fishing guide for access that anglers should be aware of prior to planning a trip.

Island Lake has a tremendous perch fishery with fish over 13 inches. However, common carp are starting to take their toll on perch resulting in limited resources and skinny fish. Anglers looking to harvest perch are encouraged to take their limit from Island Lake and practice selective harvest on Blue and Crescent allowing the fish to reach trophy size.

Other top perch lakes worth trying this year include Frye Lake, Home Valley, and Hackberry Lake.



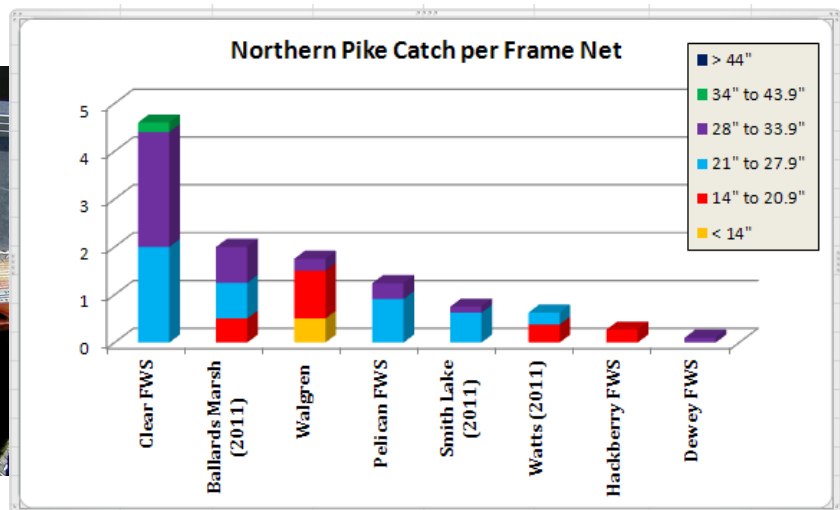
Black Crappie:



Crappie anglers should expect another great season in the Sandhills. Crescent Lake has the highest density of crappie in 2012 with 36 crappie per frame net. Anglers can expect to see two strong year-classes in Crescent with one year-class averaging 6.5 inches and one averaging 10.8 inches. Cottonwood and Steverson Lakes had a good abundance in 2012 but most fish were under 8 inches. Island Lake, Blue Lake, Clear Lake, Frye Lake and Smith Lake should also be quality destinations for a crappie fishing in 2013.

Northern Pike:

Several sandhills lakes have quality northern pike populations. Clear Lake on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) had the highest abundance in 2012 with nearly 56% of the population over 28 inches. The Valentine NWR has a special pike regulation with a daily bag limit of 3 pike under 28 inches making it a catch and release trophy fishery. Anglers looking to harvest some larger pike should consider Ballards Marsh or Smith Lake. Top fishing tactics for pike include spinner baits, spoons, jerk baits, and plastic swimbaits. Chubs or live minnows on a slip bobber can produce fast pike action in lakes where live baitfish are legal.



Other Species



State Record Bow fishing Carp from Dewey Lake on the Valentine NWR

Green sunfish and black bullheads are two native species to the sandhills of Nebraska and several lakes provide fishing opportunities. Common carp are plentiful in many sandhills lakes and can cause undesirable impacts to the fisheries. Anglers are encouraged to fish for and keep carp from sandhills lakes. Contact the local fisheries offices for tips on where to look for these species.



Trophy yellow perch collected in a sandhills lake.

Fishing Regulations:

Panfish: The daily Bag limit for panfish (bluegill, crappie, yellow perch, rock bass, all sunfish and hybrids) is 15 in combination with a possession limit of 30.

Largemouth Bass: The daily bag limit for black bass (largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass) is 5 in combination with a possession limit of 10. Bass must be at least 15 inches total length and only one bass may be 21 inches or longer.

Northern Pike: The daily bag limit for northern pike is 3 fish with a possession limit of 10. On the Valentine NWR, northern pike must be under 28 inches total length.

***Several lakes have special bait restrictions, access restrictions, hours of operation, and boating regulations. Read the current boating and fishing guides prior to fishing sandhills lakes.**

For additional information about fisheries management in the sandhills please contact the following personnel by phone or email address listed below.

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