

# 2022 Survey Summary

## I-80 Lakes

### Between Lexington & Sutherland

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There are 20 Interstate 80 (I-80) Lake fisheries between Lexington 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 are primarily managed as Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) but some areas are owned and 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 [2023 Fishing Guide](#).

Please don't litter as there is no designated litter control method at many of these I-80 Lakes. Investigate [WMA Regulations](#) as camping has been prohibited or more stringently regulated at many of these locations. Investigate the [2023 Boating Guide](#) for boating restrictions.

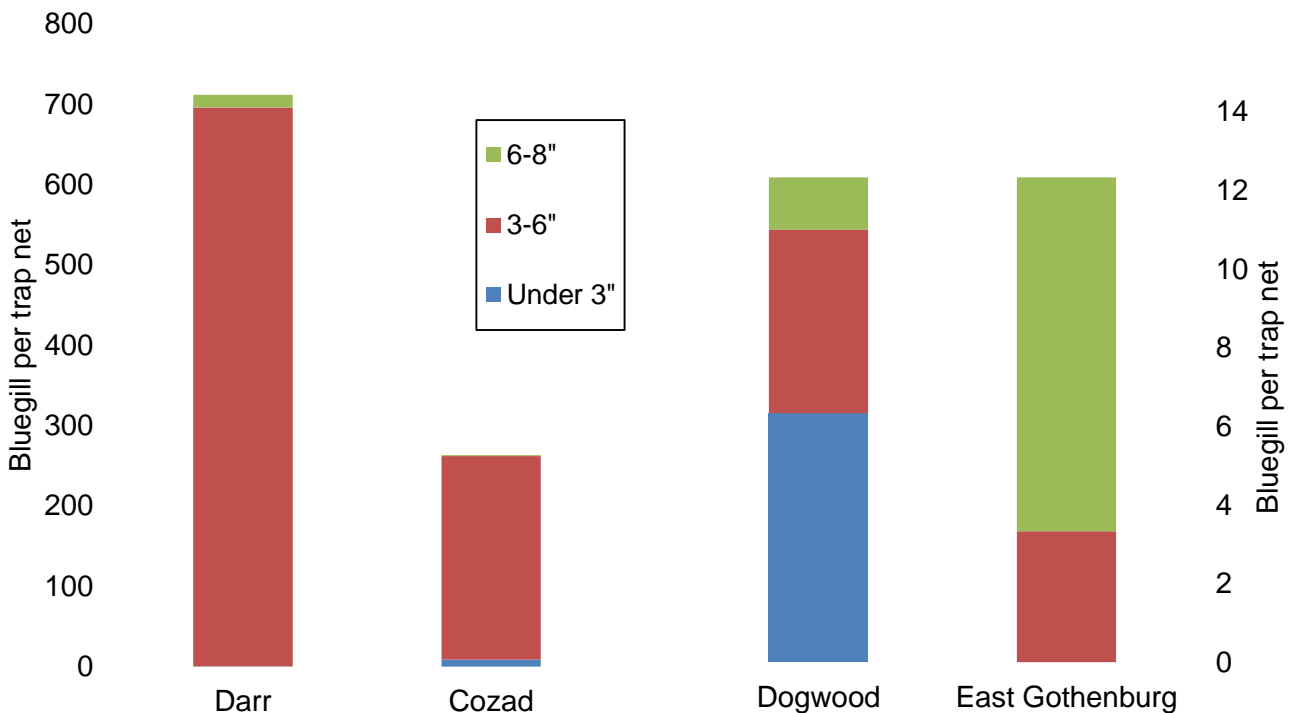
On average, four of these I-80 Lake Fisheries are sampled per year. During the spring, nighttime boat electrofishing is used to sample largemouth bass while trap nets are used to sample other shoreline-oriented species such as bluegill. The following text and graphs depict survey data that was collected during 2022. For historical survey information investigate [Historical Survey Summaries](#) on NGPC's website. For more explanation of what constitutes a fisheries survey read this [article](#).



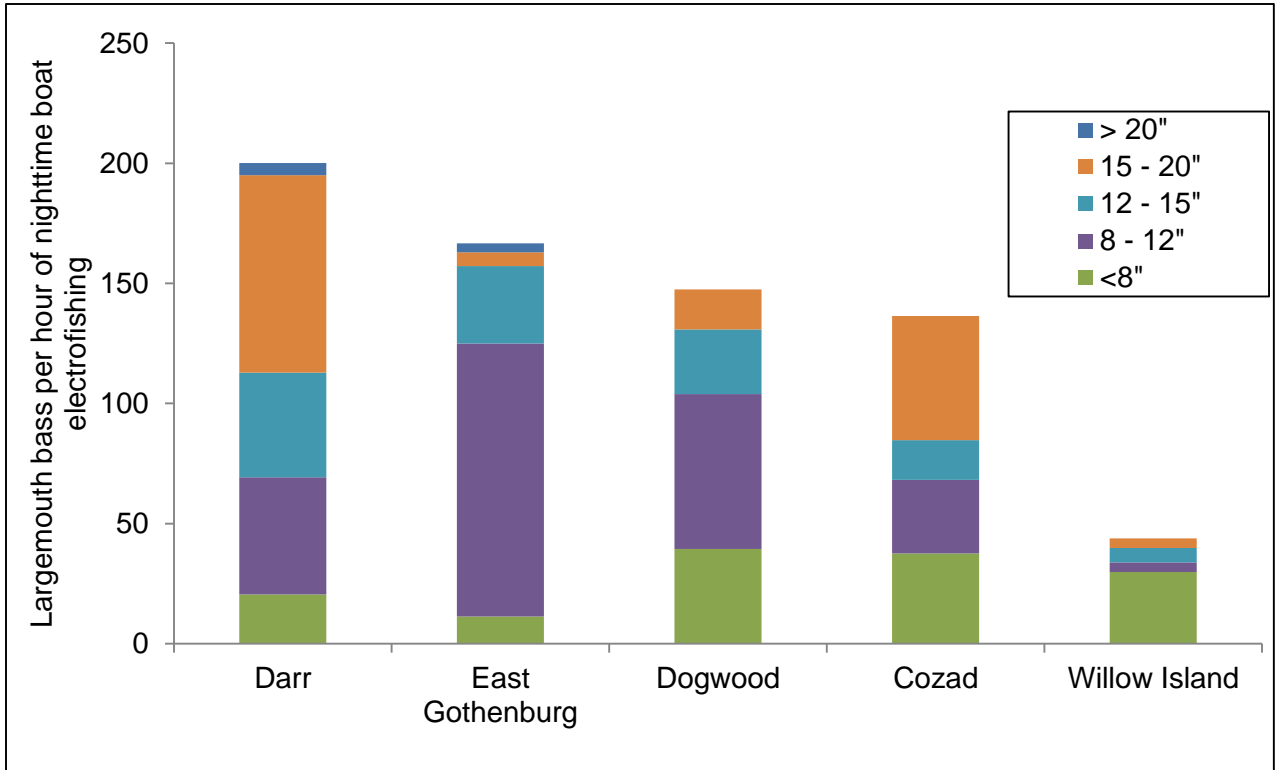
**Birdwood**

**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 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.

According to 2022 survey data, Darr and Cozad have large densities of small bluegill as portrayed by the left vertical axis. Average length of bluegill at Darr was 4.8 inches and 4.2 inches at Cozad. Dogwood and Cozad’s bluegill data is portrayed by the right vertical axis. The abundance of small bluegill at Dogwood is encouraging. East Gothenburg’s survey did indicate some bluegill nearing 8” and bluegill X green sunfish hybrids were sampled up to 8”. Access [Historical I-80 Lake Information](#) to review survey data from other lakes.

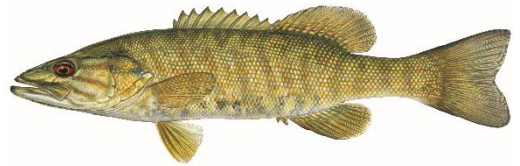


**Largemouth bass** are the main predatory species in most I-80 Lakes. Statewide regulations for largemouth bass apply to most I-80 Lakes but West Brady and East Hershey. Darr had the highest catch with 44% over 15 inches and a few over 20 inches. East Gothenburg's population is strongly dominated by small individuals (8-12") but two were measured over 20 inches. Dogwood's largemouth bass population showed more evenness in size composition and the abundance of small bass is promising. Cozad's population is much improved and the abundance of large and small largemouth bass is favorable.



**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, northern pike, 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. Below are some species [stocked by NGPC](#) to provide angling opportunities.

**Smallmouth bass** were stocked into East Sutherland following the renovation in 2021. Initial survey data indicates that these smallmouth are doing well. In the presence of largemouth bass, smallmouth populations tend to decline. Smallmouth bass also exist at other I-80 Lakes due to illegal stockings.



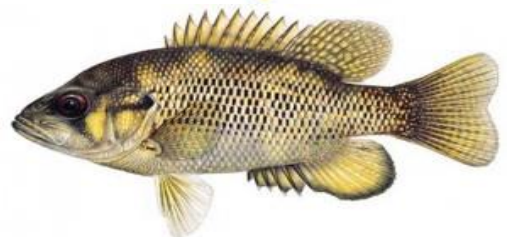
**Channel catfish** offer another angling opportunity in many I-80 Lakes. They are raised to 10" before being stocked to limit predation by largemouth bass and are stocked in many I-80 Lakes to maintain fishable populations. The statewide daily bag limit is five channel catfish.



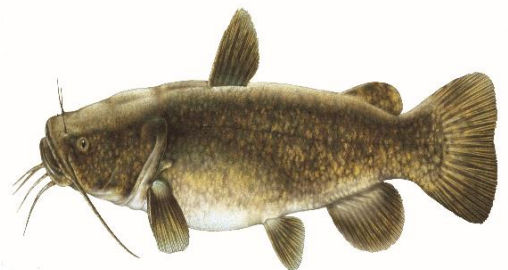
**Rainbow trout** are stocked into Birdwood I-80 Lake each year to provide a unique winter fishery. Trout are stocked during October and December each year. A total of approximately 8,000 are stocked annually.



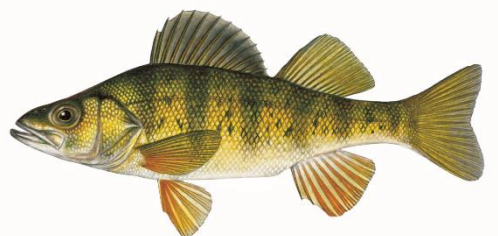
**Rock bass** is a unique species that thrives in some I-80 Lakes such as Hershey and East Hershey. They have recently been stocked into East Sutherland.



**Flathead catfish** were stocked into Brady during 2020. This species was stocked to supplement predation.



**Yellow perch** were stocked into East Sutherland following the renovation in 2021. Yellow perch also exist in other I-80 Lakes at low densities such as Hershey, Fremont Slough and Birdwood.



# Fish Attractors

Birdwood I-80 Lake  
Feb 18, 2022



Cedar trees were cut on site and sunk in Birdwood I-80 Lake on February 18, 2022. These trees will congregate game species for anglers to target. When possible, trees are removed from shorelines to improve bank angler access during these projects.

Site Description	Coordinates
Birdwood (1 Tree)	N 41°06.945' W 100°49.973'
Birdwood (3 Trees)	N 41°06.927' W 100°49.857'
Birdwood (3 Trees)	N 41°06.992' W 100°50.195'
Birdwood (5 Trees)	N 40°59.917' W 100°22.465'

# Regulations

During August and September 2021, East Sutherland and West Cozad I-80 Lake Fisheries were renovated using a toxicant that removes all species of fish. Initial observations indicate successful eradications of unwanted species and survival of initial stockings. In effort to protect these fragile populations a **No Live Baitfish** regulation has been placed on each lake. This regulation makes use or possession of live baitfish illegal at these sites and will likely prolong the absence of unwanted species. In addition, a **21” minimum length limit on black bass** is enacted at East Sutherland and Birdwood I-80 Lakes. This regulation will protect the smallmouth bass population at East Sutherland and the largemouth bass at Birdwood. These and other regulations are publicized in the [2023 Fishing Guide](#).



# Angler Access Projects

During 2022, five wooden fishing piers, multiple vegetation barriers, three electric security lights, a boat dock and a kayak launch site were constructed at North Platte City I-80 Lake. The project was funded through NGPC's Angler Access program and will be maintained by the City of North Platte as this I-80 Lake is part of the City of North Platte's Iron Horse Park.



# Angler Access Projects

During 2022, clearing of invasive trees was conducted at several I-80 Lakes including West Brady, West Cozad, West Gothenburg and East Sutherland. These projects were funded through Aquatic Habitat Program's Angler Access Program and Wildlife Division's WMA maintenance funding.





# Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)



**Eurasian watermilfoil** is an invasive aquatic plant and is now found in 25 waterbodies across Nebraska including East Hershey I-80 Lake and Ironhorse City Park Lake (North Platte I-80). This plant spreads through tiny fragments of leaves and can grow up to 20 feet deep. New infestations are often caused by boaters not following the **Clean, Drain, and Dry** protocol and introducing fragments into new lakes. Make sure you clean all aquatic vegetation from your boat to prevent this invasive aquatic plant from spreading to new waterbodies.

**To report AIS utilize 402-471-7602\ngpc.ais@nebraska.gov**

If you have questions or concerns about I-80 Lakes between Lexington and Sutherland please contact

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