

FALL 2007 FISH SAMPLING

By Daryl Bauer

Here's a look at the 2008 Nebraska fishing outlook, based on fall 2007 sampling, for several species.

Walleye -- Sampling showed there was an exceptional population of walleyes, including lots of fish over 20 inches long, in Merritt Reservoir. Johnson, Maloney, Minatare and Oliver reservoirs will be excellent waters to catch numbers of "eating-size" walleyes, while Lake McConaughy and Merritt will be the best waters to pursue big walleyes. There were an exceptional number of walleyes collected at Willow Creek Reservoir in the fall of 2007, but most of those fish were less than 15 inches long. Try Stagecoach, Lewis and Clark or Sutherland reservoirs.

White bass -- The white bass fishery at Harlan County Reservoir looks particularly good, while Medicine Creek, Swanson, and Enders will also offer anglers some excellent fishing. Reservoirs on the canal system in west-central and central Nebraska also can offer great fishing. Anglers should try Maloney, Sutherland and Jeffrey reservoirs on that system. Sherman and McConaughy reservoirs also will offer some excellent fishing.

Wiper -- Enders, Red Willow, Maloney,

Medicine Creek, and Sutherland reservoirs should offer anglers some of the best action for wipers. There are a number of waters around the state that will offer anglers an excellent chance at a wiper longer than 20 inches, including Minatare out west, Stagecoach in the east and Calamus in the middle of the state. Try Jeffrey, Elwood, McConaughy or Swanson reservoirs.

Bluegill -- Anglers can find good bluegill fishing in a variety of waters across the state, ranging from small reservoirs in the east like Olive Creek, Summit and Wildwood, to urban waters like Grand Island's Such's Lake, and Burchard Reservoir in the southeast. Smith Lake Wildlife Management Area south of Rushville and Smith Lake on the Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge will not produce lots of bluegills but could give a persistent angler a fish as big as his/her face.

Crappie -- Small- to medium-sized reservoirs in eastern Nebraska commonly have abundant populations. The challenge is finding quality-size crappies in these waters. Czechland, Branched Oak, Stagecoach and Zorinsky will be the best of those reservoirs. Whitney and Oliver reservoirs in the west and Sherman and Johnson reservoirs in the

central part also have nice crappies.

Largemouth bass -- Although a number of waters have high densities of small largemouth bass, which is desirable because lots of small bass regulate panfish, preyfish and rough fish numbers, anglers can fish other waters that have higher abundances of bass larger than 15 inches. The best of those waters will be pits like Grand Island's Pier Park, and Two Rivers SRA pits Nos. 2 and 3. Sandhills lakes produce some of the fattest, most beautiful largemouth bass and Smith Lake WMA should be one of the best. Of the small reservoirs, try Grove and Walnut Creek, and of the Interstate 80 lakes, fish East Sutherland and Fremont Slough.

Channel catfish -- Reservoirs are hard to beat for catfishing. Branched Oak is one of the best catfish fisheries in the state, offering anglers the chance to catch channel, flathead and blue catfish. Wagon Train also will be particularly good for channel catfish. Other reservoirs that will be good for channel catfish include Maloney, Swanson, Sherman, Red Willow and Jeffrey. Anglers looking for a shot at a big channel catfish should keep Lake Ogallala in mind.

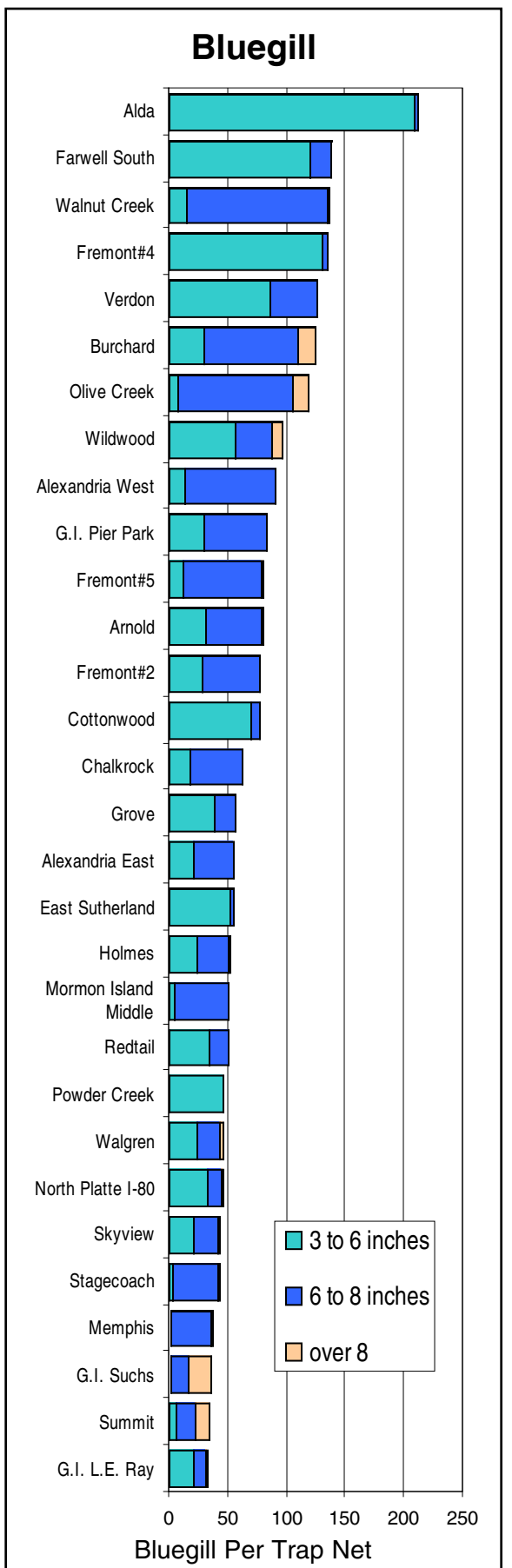
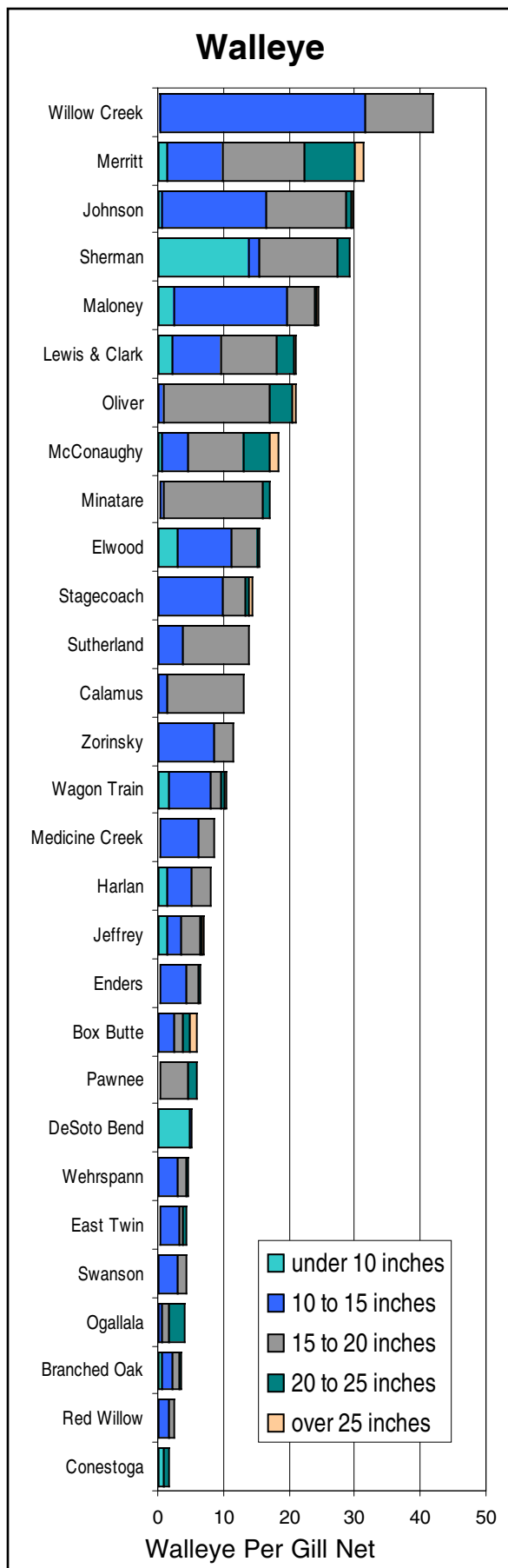
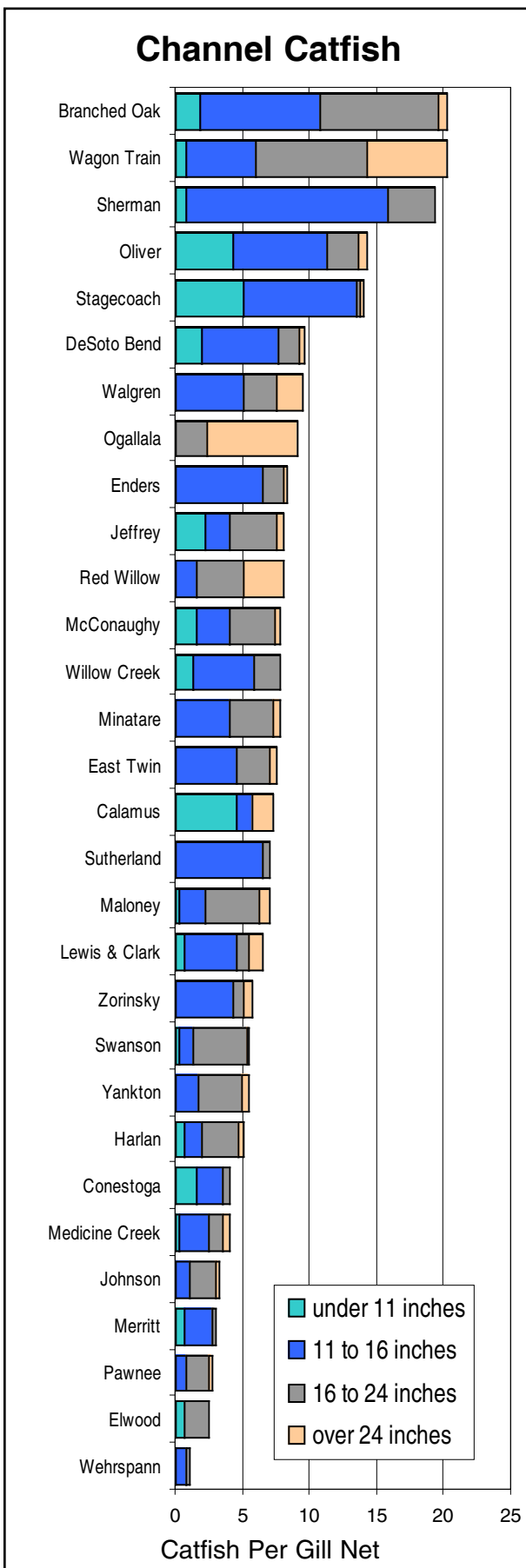
Other species -- Nebraska has develop-

ing blue catfish fisheries at Conestoga, Wehrspann, and Zorinsky reservoirs. Excellent flathead catfish fishing also can be found at Branched Oak, Harlan County and Sherman reservoirs. Anglers who pursue bullheads should check out Powder Creek Reservoir and special bullhead fishing opportunities on some state recreation area lakes.

Northern and western parts of Nebraska, especially the Sandhills, offer opportunities to catch cool-water species like northern pike and yellow perch. Try Big Alkali, the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge lakes, Goose Lake, and Willow Lake.

Johnson and Lewis and Clark reservoirs offer excellent smallmouth bass numbers. Also at Lewis and Clark, do not overlook the sauger. Sauger can also be found in the small reservoirs and canal system above and including Johnson. There are muskellunge opportunities at Merritt, Calamus and Wagon Train reservoirs, and Cottonwood-Steverson lakes.

There are cold-water opportunities on streams and rivers, mostly in the western and northern parts of the state, where anglers can fish for rainbow, brown and brook trout, many of them wild fish.



2008 NEBRASKA REGIONAL FISHING FORECAST

By Rocky Hoffmann

Southeast

Anglers will benefit from above-average rainfall in 2007. Refilling reservoirs benefits the fishery by flooding vegetation, which provides a nutrient boost to the lake, while providing food, cover and spawning habitat. Among other impoundments getting a boost, rainfall filled **Merganser, Timber Point, Walnut Creek 2A, Yankee Hill, Swan Creek 67** and **Cottontail** reservoirs.

Wildwood, Holmes Lake, Olive Creek and **Wagon Train** have been improved and anglers in the Lincoln area will find they provide good catch rates.

Omaha-area anglers have some excellent fisheries at **Walnut Creek, Memphis, Wehrspann** and **Jenny Newman Lake**.

Anglers looking for the best largemouth bass fishing should try **Burchard** and **Iron Horse Trail** lakes. **Branched Oak Reservoir** is a top producer of Master Angler awards, especially for flathead catfish and wipers.

Northeast

Willow Creek and **Lewis and Clark Lake** should offer good walleye fishing.

The 2007 fall sampling showed a high number of walleye at Willow Creek and about 40 percent of that population should be legal. Fishing pressure has been intense and most of the fish will be under 16-17 inches, with a few up to 22 inches.

Lewis and Clark continues to have strong walleye and sauger populations, many longer than 20 inches. White bass numbers in Lewis and Clark were above average and

should provide good fishing. Smallmouth bass continue to provide good fishing at Lewis and Clark and the **Missouri River** above the lake.

Goose Lake should provide good to excellent fishing for bluegill, yellow perch, northern pike and largemouth bass. Water levels increased more than three feet in 2007, and fish habitat and food organisms are excellent. Look for good bass and pike fishing in April and May and panfish from late April through August.

Other bluegill spots to try are **Summit** and **Skyview** lakes. **Summit, Maskenthine Lake, Buckskin Hills** and **Grove Lake** have abundant bass with good size structure.

Catfish may be found in public lakes as well as the **Elkhorn, Missouri** and **Niobrara** rivers. Good catfish lakes include **Maskenthine, Buckskin Hills, Skyview, Willow Creek** and **Summit**.

Trout fishing is good in the **East Branch of Verdigre Creek** above Grove Lake. Two hundred catchable rainbows are stocked each week and nearly a mile and a half of the stream is open to the public. Catchable bullheads are stocked at **Fremont State Recreation Area Lake No. 3** and **Powder Creek Reservoir** has excellent numbers of bullheads.

South-central

A dramatic increase in water levels at **Harlan County Reservoir** in 2007 resulted in excellent fish survivability that will improve future fishing for walleye, white bass, crappie and channel catfish. The reservoir has a great white bass population with a good size

distribution. More than 11 million walleye fry and advanced fingerling channel catfish were stocked to improve fish survivability.

Crappie fishing at **Sherman Reservoir** should peak in May in coves and bays. There should be another good walleye spawning run in March and April, with better fishing in May and June. Sherman has trophy-sized northern pike.

Walleye numbers at **Johnson Lake** should remain high, with good numbers of fish over the 15-inch length limit. Anglers also may catch sauger. There are good numbers of white bass, wiper, channel and flat-head catfish at the inlet.

Elwood Reservoir has trophy-size muskellunge and channel catfish, while the lake's best fishing is for walleye and white bass.

More than 20 lakes along the central Interstate 80 corridor provide good angling for largemouth bass, bluegill and channel catfish. Several lakes have had special stockings of northern pike, walleye, rock bass, redear sunfish and smallmouth bass.

Catchable-size rainbow trout are stocked in winter months at **Hartwell Park** in Hastings, **Lexington City Lake, North Park Lake** in Holdrege, **Such's Lake** in Grand Island and **Windmill State Recreation Area**. Trout are in **Elm Creek** near Red Cloud.

North-central

Walleye anglers should look to **Merritt** and **Calamus** reservoirs. Survey numbers at Merritt continue to show a strong walleye population, with an excellent size structure,

good fishing for northern pike, bass, catfish and panfish, and maybe trophy or state record muskie. Calamus should have a good population of 15- to 20-inch walleye and a good chance to take a trophy muskellunge. Look to Calamus for catfish, white bass and wiper action.

The **Valentine National Wildlife Refuge** has some of the state's best fishing for northern pike, largemouth bass, bluegill and yellow perch. Also check **Big Alkali Lake** for pike, crappie and channel catfish. The lake has many improvements.

There is good fishing at **Shell** or **Cottonwood** lakes for bass and panfish.

Long Pine and **Plum** creeks offer stream fishing for naturally produced brown and rainbow trout. Public access is available at Long Pine SRA, Long Pine Wildlife Management Area, Pine Glen WMA, Bobcat WMA, and Plum Creek Valley WMA.

Southwest

Lake McConaughy will continue to be a good choice to catch quality walleye. Fall surveys showed a decrease in overall walleye numbers, but there is a good population of 20-inch and larger fish. Also, many white bass are entering the 12- to 15-inch range.

Low water at McConaughy resulted in a movement of fish into **Lake Ogallala**, improving opportunity for walleye, white bass, wipers and channel catfish.

Heavy rains improved water levels and opportunity for fish and recreation at **Enders, Swanson, Medicine Creek** and **Red Willow** reservoirs. There should be an improvement in white bass and wiper num-

bers.

Enders had the highest fall survey catch rate of wipers and channel catfish in the southwest and showed a strong improvement in white bass numbers.

Maloney and **Sutherland** reservoirs are good bets for walleye. Because of heavy fishing pressure in 2007, numbers of large walleye are down, but there should be plenty of legal-sized fish.

Arnold Lake SRA is developing a good population of bass and bluegill. Fall stocked rainbow trout provide a popular winter fishery, along with North Platte's **Birdwood Lake** and McCook's **Barnett Park**. I-80 lakes continue to produce good fishing for largemouth bass, bluegill and channel catfish.

Panhandle

Lake Minatare anglers should find most walleye above the legal size limit. Fall surveys have shown a decline in the number of wipers, but individual fish have increased in size to about five pounds. Minatare has an excellent population of channel catfish, and anglers may see some blue catfish.

Oliver Reservoir has an excellent walleye population, most of legal size. Oliver also has an excellent fishery for channel catfish. **Box Butte Reservoir** should produce larger catfish, northern pike and walleye. Blue catfish have been stocked at Box Butte.

Smith Lake WMA has Master Angler-size largemouth bass and large bluegill.

Fort Robinson State Park offers catchable-size rainbow trout. The park also has good channel catfish and largemouth bass fishing.

