Fishing Across Nebraska

A Guide to Public Fishing Lakes in the I-80 Corridor

By Rick Eades, Urban Fisheries Specialist

The I-80 Lakes System

It's 455 miles across Nebraska on Interstate 80 – about seven hours if you obey the speed limit and don't make any stops. But that's a long time to sit in a car, so you might want to stop to stretch your legs, let the kids play for a while and get something to eat. Or, you might want to do some fishing.

If the latter is for you, there are plenty of opportunities to wet a line along Interstate 80 (I-80). Dozens of lakes are within casting distance or a few minutes drive of the interstate. In central Nebraska, they seem to be at every exit. Most of those waters, and many others, are yours to fish, and they are the reason for this guide.

The lakes are perfect places for weary cross-country travelers to stop and fish for a while. You may not even need your own fishing tackle – it can be borrowed, free of charge, at several state parks and recreation areas along the way.

The lakes are no secret to many Nebraskans – those making short trips across the state sometimes pack their rod and reel and a lunch, hoping to get a bite or two while having one. Also, the thousands of anglers who live in the many towns along I-80 have found that the freeway makes it easy for them to hop from one lake to another in search of the hot bite, and they can often be fishing only minutes after leaving home or work.

Nebraska offers fishing permits for one day, three days or all year, so it doesn't cost travelers much to stop and fish for a few hours. Children less than 16 years old can fish for free, including nonresidents accompanied by an adult with a Nebraska permit. Permits can be purchased on the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission web site at www.outdoornebraska.org, from Commission offices and at many tackle shops and stores that sell fishing equipment.

All of the lakes listed in this guide have fishing regulations governing the number and/or sizes of fish that may be kept. Some may also restrict the use of live bait or allow only catch and release fishing. Boating regulations also vary from lake to lake. On most smaller waters, speed is restricted to 5 mph, no wake. Other waters allow only electric motors.

Regulations can change from year to year, so you should pick up a copy of the current Nebraska Fishing Guide and Nebraska Boating Guide before hitting the water. They are available at Commission offices and wherever fishing permits are sold. Guides are also available on the Commission's web site.

Types of Lakes

Most lakes along I-80 are borrow pits, especially from North Platte to Grand Island where the interstate runs parallel to the Platte River.

When I-80 was built, the easiest and cheapest route was the flat, wide-open Platte River Valley. Building the highway along the river was a challenge because of high groundwater levels and because there were no hills to provide fill material. Wherever road builders needed fill for an overpass or roadbed, they took it from the valley floor. Groundwater soon seeped into the borrow pits.

Knowing this would happen, engineers and fisheries biologists collaborated to ensure that the pits were dug with fish and anglers in mind. The result was the creation of more than 50 clear, deep and productive fishing waters now known as the "I-80 lakes." Forty of them are open to the public.

While the I-80 lakes are the most visible to travelers, there are plenty of other waters within a short drive of the interstate. In eastern Nebraska, flood-control reservoirs built to protect towns, cities and the interstate provide tremendous fishing opportunities and also support boating, jet skiing and other water sports. In western and central Nebraska, large irrigation reservoirs built to provide water for crops, generate hydropower and to cool coal-fired power plants also provide excellent fishing and boating. Other waters near I-80 include farm ponds, park ponds, oxbows and sand pits. The park ponds located in state or city parks and used solely for recreation will be of special interest, so several are included in this guide.

JON FARRAR

Lakes along the interstate provide excellent fishing for a variety of species.

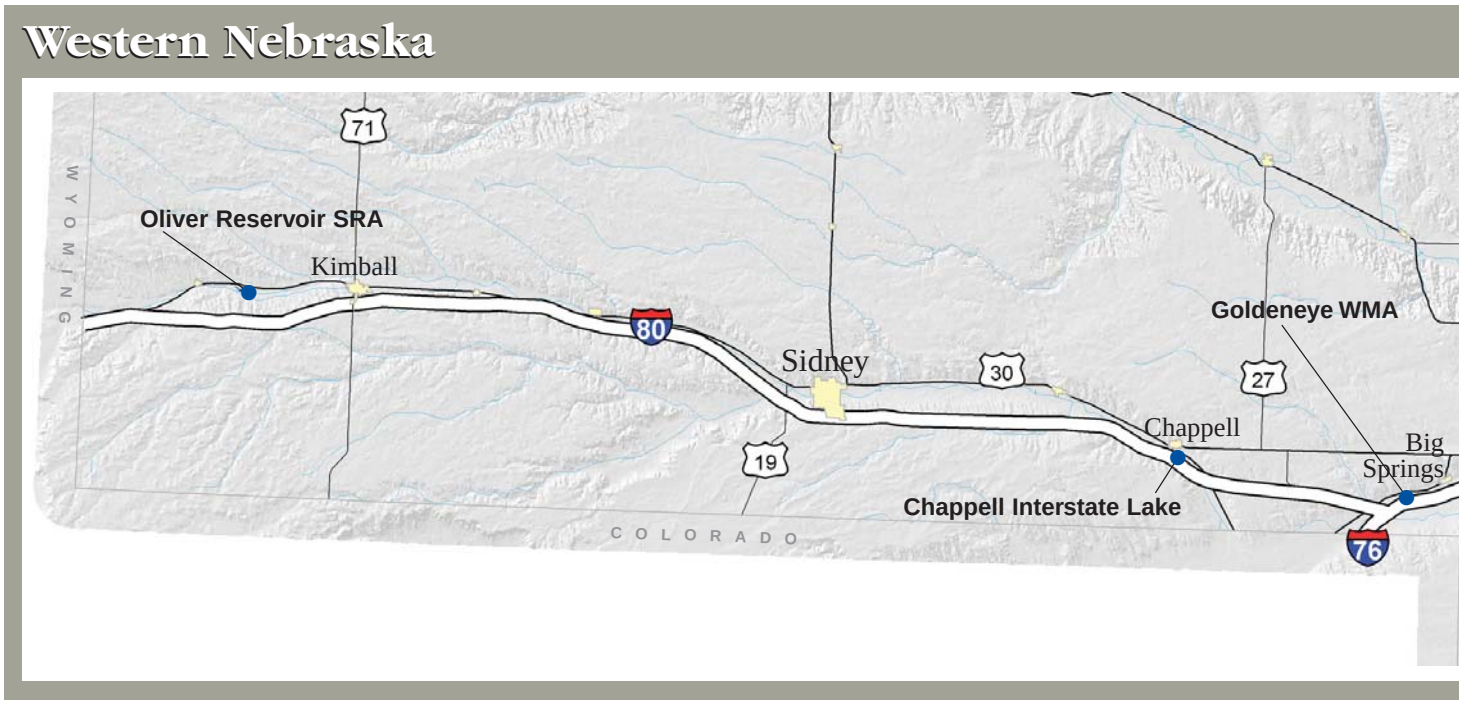
Types of Parks

Virtually every lake or park in Nebraska is named in a way that tells you something about its ownership and primary use. An understanding of these designations may help you decide which lakes would suit you best. The majority of the waters listed are owned and managed by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the agency in charge of managing the state's fish, wildlife and park resources.

Areas designated as a State Park (SP) have the most accommodations and activities, including lodging, modern campgrounds, restaurants, swimming pools, hiking trails and horseback riding. Many state parks are vacation destinations. Park entry permits are required at these areas and can be purchased on-site. Fishing permits are also available.

State Recreation Areas (SRA) are not as developed as state parks and amenities vary considerably. Most provide camping, drinking water, pit toilets and other basics. Outdoor water fountains and modern restrooms are usually closed for the winter months. Hunting is permitted on many SRA's from the Tuesday after Labor Day through the conclusion of the spring

JON FARRAR



turkey season in mid-May, unless posted or restricted by regulations. Park entry permits are required. The larger, more developed SRAs will have permits available. At several smaller SRAs along I-80, campers can self-register at "iron ranger" stations and also purchase a required state park entry permit. Anglers will need to visit a Commission office or permit vendor to obtain a fishing permit.

Many of the I-80 lakes are on State Wildlife Management Areas (WMA). As the name suggests, these areas are managed for wildlife, fishing and hunting. Camping is permitted unless otherwise posted, but few areas have amenities. Do not expect to find drinking water, restrooms, playgrounds, garbage cans or fishing piers. Some may have a small boat ramp. While these areas may be short on amenities, many provide quality fishing. Finding them may take some effort – they may not be shown on maps and there usually are no road signs to follow. Most are on dirt roads. Hunting, trapping and target shooting are permitted on WMAs unless otherwise posted. Park entry permits are not required.

Properties not owned by the Commission have other designations, and amenities will vary. Visitors should look for special regulations signs when entering any public area.

The I-80 Corridor

This guide provides information about the best fishing lakes within 10 miles of Interstate 80. There are others. For a complete list of public waters, pick up a copy of the annual Nebraska Fishing Guide.

The state has been divided into four regions for this guide: Western Nebraska from the Wyoming border to North Platte; the Western Platte River Valley from North Platte to Lexington; the Central Platte River Valley from Lexington to Grand Island; and Eastern Nebraska from Grand Island to the Missouri River. Directions from I-80, fish species present, facilities offered and a brief description of each area are provided. Parks are listed according to their I-80 exit number as you travel east.

Happy fishing!

Western Nebraska

The most popular destination for recreation along I-80 in this region is Lake McConaughy, Nebraska's largest lake. Located just north of Ogallala, this 30,000-acre lake has miles of white, sandy beaches, great fishing and boating, and plenty of places to camp. Nearby Lake Ogallala offers some of the best trout fishing in the Great Plains.

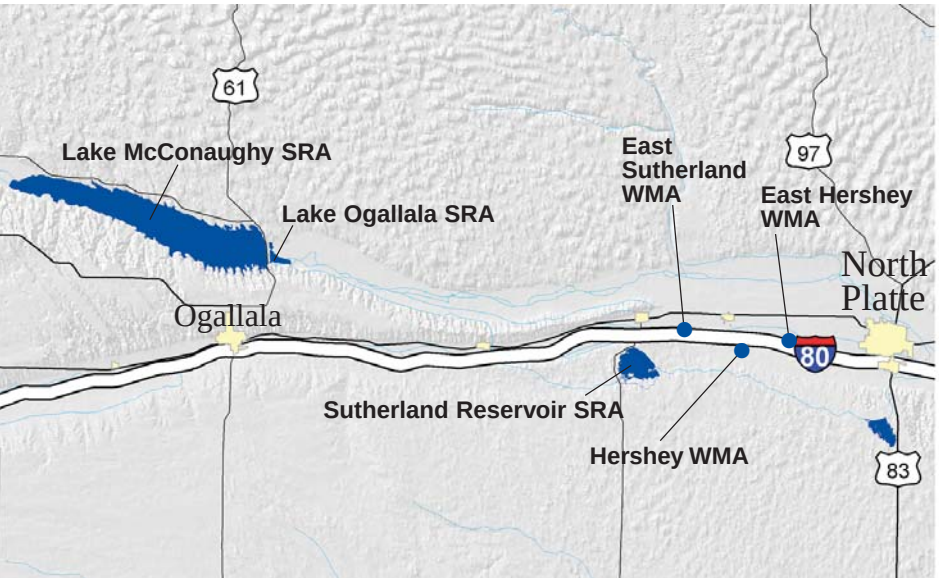
Oliver Reservoir SRA

Oliver Reservoir is a 270-acre flood-control lake built on Lodgepole Creek. Water levels can fluctuate significantly, so boaters should exercise extra caution here.

Fish species: Bluegill, crappie, largemouth bass, yellow perch, walleye, channel catfish, carp, muskie and tiger muskie

Amenities: Concrete boat ramps, wheelchair-accessible fishing pier, primitive camping, pit toilets, picnic shelters, swimming beach, iron ranger self-registration entrance station, hunting allowed

Directions: From Exit 8, go north on Link 53C about 2.5 miles to Highway 30 in Bushnell. Turn right on Highway 30 and go 3.5 miles east to the campground. Additional day use areas are available along Highway 30. From Exit 20, travel north on Highway 71 to Highway 30 in Kimball, and then travel west about 8 miles to the lake. Food, fuel and camping supplies are available in Kimball.



ALL MAPS BY JOHN MILLER, GEODETIC SURVEY TECHNICIAN

Chappell Interstate Lake

When I-80 was built, Lodgepole Creek was redirected through a new channel to avoid flooding problems. This left the old channel cut off, creating an oxbow lake that was made even larger when additional material was excavated later to be used for interstate construction. The result was a 30-acre lake with clear water. Picnic supplies and other necessities are available less than a mile north in Chappell, which owns and operates this park.

Fish species: Bluegill, largemouth bass, crappie, channel catfish, walleye, yellow perch

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, restrooms (closed in winter), picnic shelters

Directions: From Exit 85, go north a short distance and take the first right to enter the park.

Goldeneye WMA

This small WMA alongside I-80 has a 17-acre pond.

Fish species: Crappie, bluegill, channel catfish, largemouth bass, yellow perch

Amenities: Rock boat ramp, hunting allowed

Directions: From Exit 107 at Big Springs, go south 1 mile, then turn right and go 3 miles west on Road 6. Turn right on Road 203 and go north, crossing over I-80. The lake will be immediately on your right.

Lake Ogallala and Lake McConaughy SRAs

At 30,000 acres when full, Lake McConaughy is the largest lake in the state. Located below the dam is 650-acre Lake Ogallala. Together the lakes offer some of the best fishing in Nebraska. Lake Mac is well known for its walleye and also offers exciting fishing for white bass, wipers, smallmouth bass and other species. Lake Ogallala is a tailwater fishery, receiving coldwater from Lake McConaughy that allows it to support trout, many of them trophy-size, year-round. Trout are also caught downstream from Lake Ogallala in the Sutherland Supply Canal. The lakes are extremely popular with anglers, boaters, campers, sunbathers and other recreation-minded people. Weekend use during summer months is very high. Winter visitors can enjoy some exceptional bird watching for waterfowl, gulls and bald eagles. A bald eagle viewing center is located at Lake Ogallala.

Accommodations are available at both public and private establishments around the lake. Hotels, restaurants, grocery and convenience stores can be found in Ogallala. Highway 61 runs atop Kingsley Dam, providing a great view of both lakes. The Lake McConaughy Visitor and Water Interpretive Center is located along Highway 61 about a mile south of the dam. Here you can learn about the history of the lakes and water usage in Nebraska, get lake maps, purchase necessary permits and borrow fishing tackle.

Fish species (McConaughy): Walleye, wiper, white bass, channel catfish, smallmouth bass, yellow perch, bullhead

Fish species (Ogallala): Rainbow trout, brown trout, walleye, white bass, channel catfish, yellow perch, carp

Amenities: Concrete boat ramps, fish cleaning stations, modern and primitive camping, restrooms, showers, RV dump stations, concessions, picnic shelters, hunting allowed

Directions: From Exit 126, go north on Highway 61 through Ogallala, following the Lake McConaughy road signs through town. Continue north on Highway 61 for about 9 miles to Lake McConaughy. Continue on Highway 61 across the dam and turn right, following directional signs, to get to Lake Ogallala SRA.

Nearby attraction: Ash Hollow State Historical Park (SHP), located west of

BOB GRIER

Young anglers fish from a dock at Oliver Reservoir SRA near Kimball.

Lake McConaughy near Lewellen. The area was a popular stopover for westward-bound pioneers along the Oregon Trail and home to prehistoric Indians. Exhibits and a visitor center interpret both eras.

Sutherland Reservoir SRA

Water from this 3,000-acre, canal-fed reservoir helps cool a coal-fired power plant. There is a private campground with electrical hookups and a nine-hole golf course along the north shore.

Fish species: Channel catfish, walleye, white bass, wipers, yellow perch, freshwater drum

Amenities: Concrete boat ramps, primitive camping, pit toilets, iron ranger self-registration entrance station, hunting allowed

Directions: From Exit 158 at Sutherland, go south on Highway 25 1 mile, turn left on Tower Road. Follow Tower Road around the east side of the lake to the park. You can also continue south on Highway 25 about 4 miles to the camping area and boat ramp located on the southwest shore of the lake.

East Sutherland WMA

This WMA has a 27-acre lake.

Fish species: Northern pike, channel catfish, largemouth bass, bluegill, rock bass, yellow perch

Amenities: Boat ramp

Directions: From Exit 164 at Hershey, go south about 0.25 mile to West Oregon Trail Road. Turn right and go 3 miles west, then turn right on Lamont Road and go 0.5 miles north, crossing over I-80, to the lake.

Hershey WMA

In recent years, this 53-acre lake produced the most trophy-size fish of all the I-80 lakes in western Nebraska.

Fish species: Channel catfish, flathead catfish, largemouth bass, yellow perch, northern pike, rock bass, walleye, bluegill

Amenities: Boat ramp

Directions: From Exit 164 at Hershey, go south to the first left turn and then follow the road 0.2 miles to the lake.

East Hershey WMA

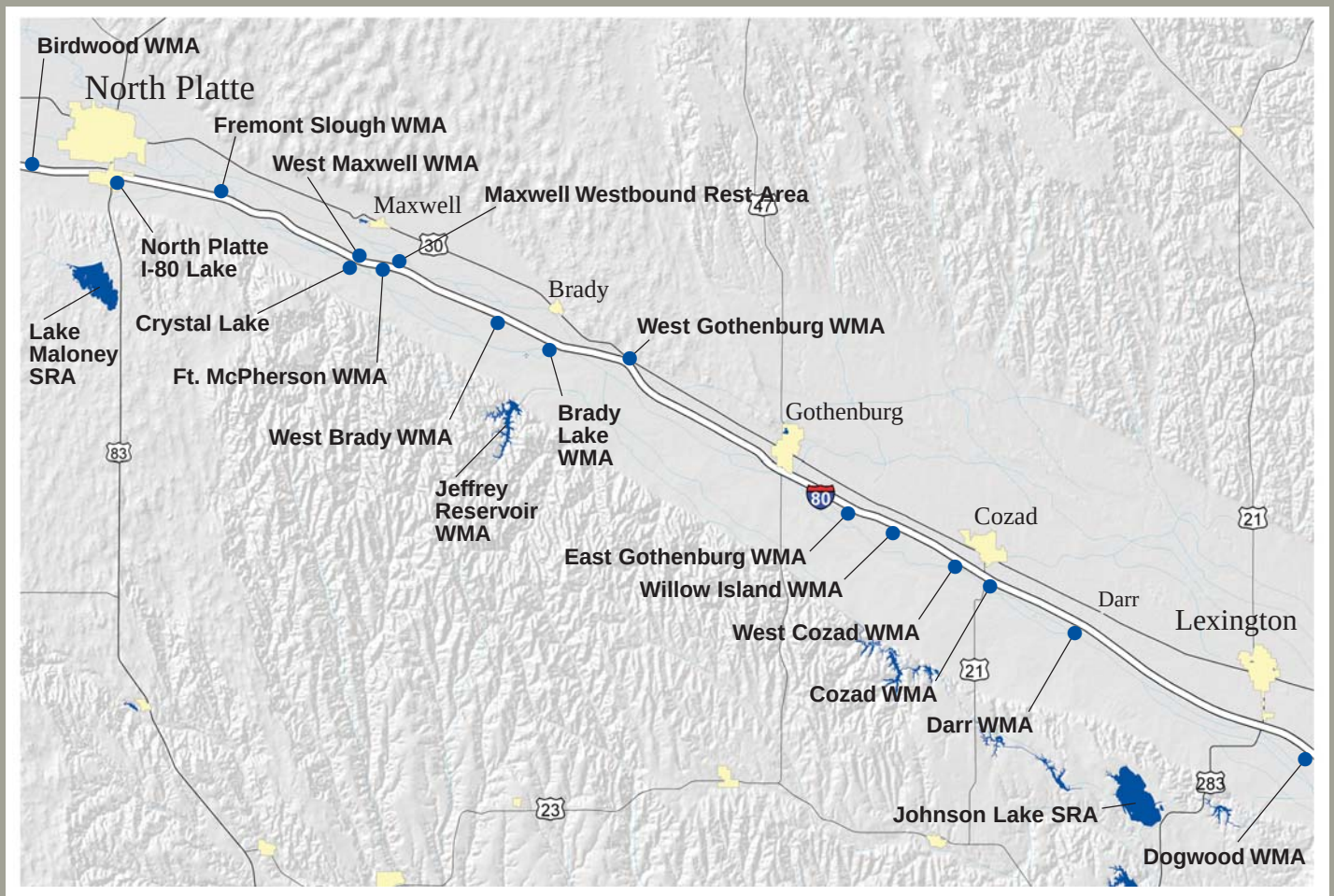
This WMA has a 20-acre lake alongside I-80.

Fish species: Channel catfish, largemouth bass, rock bass, bluegill

Amenities: None

Directions: From Exit 164 at

Western Platte River Valley



Hershey, go south about 1 mile to West Antelope Road. Turn left and go 5 miles east to South Crane View Road. Turn left and go about 0.5 miles north, crossing over the I-80 overpass. Turn right on West South River Road and follow it a short distance to the lake.

Western Platte River Valley

Just east of North Platte, the South and North Platte rivers join to form the Platte. Dozens of borrow pit lakes lie along Interstate 80, which follows the Platte River through this region rich with farmland. Many of these I-80 lakes are open to public fishing.

North Platte I-80 Lake

The North Platte I-80 Lake, also known as Iron Horse Park, is a city-owned and operated park with a 26-acre lake offering good crappie fishing. A walking trail around the lake, easy shoreline access and a fishing pier provide plenty of space to stretch your legs and find where the fish are biting. There are plenty of food and lodging choices at this exit.

Fish species: Crappie, channel catfish, largemouth bass, northern pike, rock bass, walleye, wiper, bluegill

Amenities: Gravel boat ramp, fishing pier, picnic tables, walking trail

Directions: From Exit 177 at North Platte, go south on Highway 83 to the first traffic signal at Eugene Drive. Turn left, and then left again to enter the park.

Nearby attraction: Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park is located at the northwest edge of North Platte. This site, open seasonally to the public, preserves the home of William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody that was built in 1886. Park permits are available at the park office. There is a modern campground at the adjacent Buffalo Bill SRA.

Birdwood WMA

The 20-acre lake is a good spot to catch largemouth bass and bluegill. Rainbow trout are stocked during the winter.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, rock bass, yellow perch, channel catfish, rainbow trout (winter)

Amenities: Boat ramp

Directions: From Exit 177 at North Platte, go south on Highway 83 to the second traffic signal at Walker Road. Turn right and go 3.5 miles west, then turn right on Homestead Road. Cross over the I-80 overpass to the lake, which will be on your left.

Fremont Slough WMA

While adjacent to I-80 and readily visible, this 30-acre lake is hard to find without directions.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, carp

Amenities: None

Directions: From Exit 177 at North Platte, go south on Highway 83 about 1.5 miles to State Farm Road. Turn left and go 4 miles east until the paved road makes a sharp 90-degree right turn. Turn left onto Shack Road. This is a dirt road. Drive over a canal bridge, then under I-80. Turn right and go 0.3 miles to the WMA.

Lake Maloney SRA

At 1,600 acres, Lake Maloney is the largest lake in the North Platte area. Private residences line most of the lake, but there is plenty of public access for anglers, including a wheelchair-accessible fishing pier at the lake inlet near the west end of the dam.

Fish species: Channel catfish, flathead catfish, crappie, bluegill, walleye, white bass, wipers, smallmouth bass, carp, freshwater drum

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, fish-cleaning stations, marina, modern camping with electrical hook-ups and showers, RV dump station, primitive camping, pit toilets, swimming beach, iron ranger self-registration entrance station

Directions: From Exit 177 in North Platte, go south 6 miles on Highway 83, then turn west on South Maloney Drive to the SRA.

Ft. McPherson WMA

This WMA has a 30-acre lake.

KEN BOUC

Fish the underwater structure and you might catch a hard-fighting largemouth bass such as this one.

Fish species: Smallmouth bass, rock bass

Amenities: Boat ramp

Directions: From Exit 190, go south on Link 56A and take the first left turn to enter the WMA.

Crystal Lake

This is a small, out-of-the-way 7-acre lake.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish

Amenities: None

Directions: From Exit 190 at Maxwell, go north on Spur 56A about 0.5 miles to West Island Road. Turn left, and follow the road, which runs parallel to I-80, about 6 miles west. Turn left on Novacek Road and cross the I-80 overpass to the lake.

West Maxwell WMA

This 7-acre pond is a good spot to catch bluegill.

Western Platte River Valley

ROCKY HOFFMANN

Birdwood Lake near North Platte offers nice scenery and good fishing.

Fish species: Bluegill, channel catfish, largemouth bass, rock bass

Amenities: None

Directions: From Exit 190 at Maxwell, go north on Spur 56A about 0.5 miles to West Island Road. Go west for 0.8 miles, then turn left on Old Military Street and go south 0.2 miles to the WMA.

Maxwell Westbound Rest Area

Travelers heading west on I-80 can stop and fish the 5-acre lake at this rest area, operated by the Department of Roads (DOR). There is a paved walking path from the rest area to the pond, which is located at the west side of the rest area. No camping or boating is allowed.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish

Amenities: Modern restrooms, drinking water, picnic shelters, vending machines

Directions: Located at the rest area on westbound I-80 near milepost 194.

Brady Lake WMA

This WMA has a 25-acre lake.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish

Amenities: None

Directions: From Exit 199 at Brady, go south a short distance to the first left turn into the WMA.

West Brady WMA

This WMA has a 6-acre lake.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish

Amenities: None

Directions: From Exit 199 at Brady, go north 0.5 miles to East Island Road. Turn left and go 2.5 miles west, crossing over I-80.

West Gothenburg WMA

This WMA has a 15-acre lake with good bass fishing.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, rock bass, redear sunfish

Amenities: None

Directions: From Exit 199, go north on Link 56D to Brady. Turn right on Highway 30 and go 4.5 miles east. Turn right and drive across the railroad tracks on an unmarked road. The road is just a few yards past mile marker 205. The WMA is on the right.

Jeffrey Reservoir WMA

This area south of Brady has a 900-acre, canal-fed lake.

Fish species: Channel catfish, flathead catfish, crappie, bluegill, walleye, white bass, wiper, freshwater drum, carp

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, fishing pier, primitive camping, picnic tables, limited hunting

Directions: From Exit 199 at Brady, go 3 miles south to Brady-Moorefield Road, turn right and go 1.5 miles west to the lake.

East Gothenburg WMA

This WMA has a 15-acre lake.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, rock bass, redear sunfish

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp

Directions: From Exit 211 at Gothenburg, go south on Highway 47 a short distance to Willow Island Road. Turn left and follow the road, which parallels I-80, about 4 miles east to the lake.

Willow Island WMA

This area has a 24-acre lake and access to the Platte River.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, carp

Amenities: None

Directions: From Exit 222, go about 1 mile north to Highway 30 in Cozad. Turn left and go about 5 miles west to County Road 416. Turn left and go 1 mile south, crossing the I-80 overpass to the lake.

Cozad WMA

This area has an 18-acre lake and access to the Platte River.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, rock bass, carp

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, hunting allowed

Directions: From Exit 222 at Cozad, go south on Highway 21 a short distance to the first left turn.

West Cozad WMA

This 18-acre lake is hard to find, but anglers are rewarded with quality largemouth bass fishing. The lake was renovated in 2003 to improve the fishery.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, channel catfish, redear sunfish, rock bass

Amenities: None

Directions: From Exit 222, go 0.5 miles north on Highway 21 to West 2nd Street in Cozad. Turn left and go 0.25 miles west, then turn right on Road 225 and go another 0.25 miles north. Turn left on West Railroad Street and go 1 mile west, then turn left and go 1 mile south on Road 419.

Central Platte River Valley

Darr WMA

This WMA includes a 13-acre lake that provides quality largemouth bass fishing.

Fish species: Channel catfish, largemouth bass, bluegill, rock bass

Amenities: None, hunting allowed

Directions: From Exit 231 at Darr, go north on Road 428 to the first left turn. Go 0.25 miles west on Road 756 (dirt road), then turn left and go 0.1 miles south to the WMA.

Dogwood WMA

This WMA has two lakes and access to the Platte River. The 8-acre east lake is larger and offers better fishing than the west lake.

Fish species: Channel catfish, largemouth bass, bluegill, rock bass

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, hunting allowed

Directions: From Exit 237 at Lexington, go north on Highway 283 a short distance to the first right turn, Heartland Road. Turn right and go 5.5 miles east on Heartland Road to County Road 439. Turn right and go 2.5 miles south, crossing an I-80 overpass to the lake.

Johnson Lake SRA

This 2,190-acre lake south of Lexington is a good place to camp, water ski and fish. Private homes around the lake limit shoreline access, but bank anglers and boat anglers can still find good fishing for walleye and white bass, and some big channel catfish. The inlet on the west side of the lake can be especially productive. Two wheelchair-accessible fishing piers are available there. Campers may register at the park office, where they can also purchase fishing and park entry permits.

Fish species: Flathead catfish, channel catfish, crappie, walleye, sauger, white bass, wiper, smallmouth bass, freshwater drum, carp

Amenities: Concrete boat ramps, fish-cleaning stations, modern camping with electrical hookups and showers, modern restrooms, RV dump station, primitive camping, swimming beach, hike/bike trail, picnic shelters, pit toilets. Restaurants, marinas, bait shops, golf course, and motels nearby.

Directions: From Exit 237 at Lexington, go 8 miles south on Highway 283.

Central Platte River Valley

I-80 parallels the Platte River through this farming region, with many small borrow pit lakes along the way. Hundreds of thousands of sandhill cranes and millions of geese and ducks stop on the river on their northward migration in early spring, making it popular with bird watchers.

Blue Hole WMA

This WMA has a 37-acre lake fed by a Platte River channel, with many fish species including plenty of crappies.

Fish species: Crappie, largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, sauger, carp

Amenities: Boat ramp, hunting allowed

Directions: From Exit 257 at Elm Creek, go south a short distance on Highway 183 to the first right turn.

Sandy Channel SRA

This SRA has six lakes, totaling 52 acres. The largest lake, with an improved concrete boat ramp, has excellent water clarity and is often used by scuba divers.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, rock bass, yellow perch, carp

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, primitive camping, pit toilets, hunting allowed

Directions: From Exit 257 at Elm Creek, go 2 miles south on Highway 183 and look for the park entrance on your left.

Union Pacific SRA

The 15-acre lake has good shoreline access.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, rock bass

Amenities: Gravel boat ramp, modern restrooms and water fountains (closed in winter), pit toilets, primitive camping, picnic shelters, iron ranger self-registration entrance station

Directions: From Exit 263 at Odessa, go north a short distance on Link 10B to the first right turn.

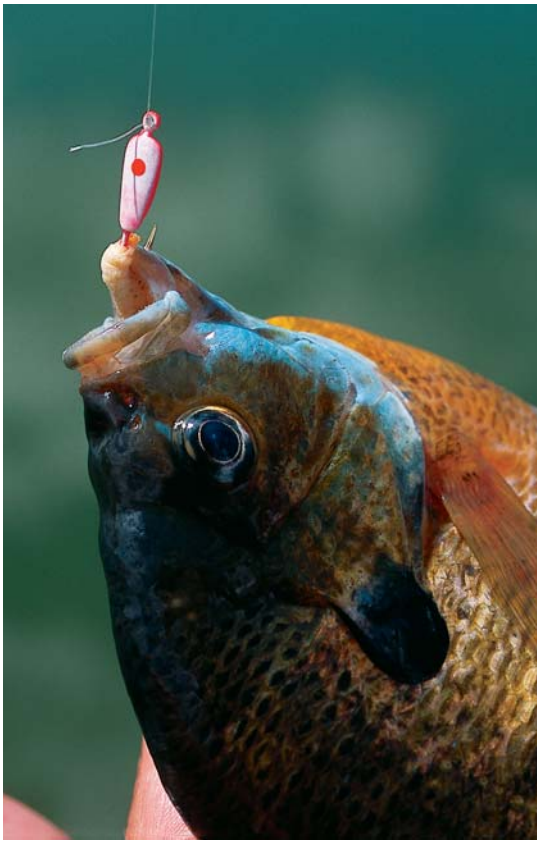
Coot Shallows WMA

This 12-acre lake was renovated in 2000.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp

Directions: From Exit 263 at Odessa, go north on Link 10B (Odessa Road) about 0.7 miles, then turn left on 11th Road (dirt road) and go 1.8 miles west to Daykin Road. Turn left. The WMA is a short distance ahead on your right.



ERIC FOWLER

Plump, fine-eating bluegill can be caught from almost all the interstate lakes.

East Odessa WMA

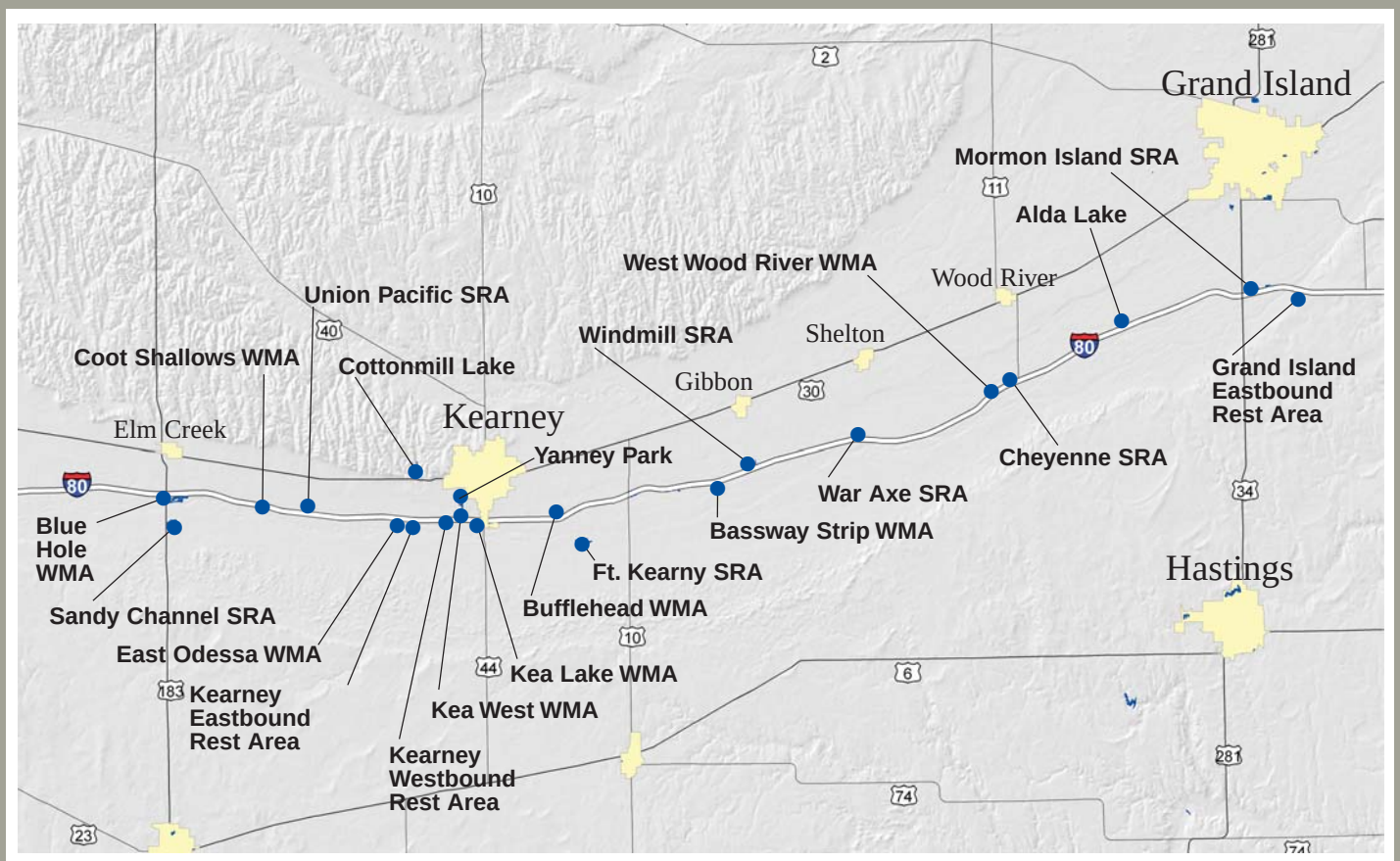
This area has a 7-acre lake, but is difficult to get to when the dirt access road is wet.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish

Amenities: Hunting allowed

Directions: From Exit 263 at Odessa,

Central Platte River Valley



travel south to the first left turn, Wildwood Road. Follow this dirt road, traveling parallel to I-80 for 4.5 miles to reach the area.

Kearney Eastbound I-80 Rest Area

A 1-acre pond can be found at this DOR rest area. Camping and boating are not allowed.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, redear sunfish, green sunfish

Amenities: Modern restrooms, water fountains, vending machines, picnic shelters

Directions: From Exit 263 at Odessa, go about 3 miles east on I-80 to rest area.

Kearney Westbound I-80 Rest Area

This DOR rest area has a 7-acre pond with good fishing. Camping and boating are not allowed.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie

Amenities: Modern restrooms, water fountains, vending machines, picnic shelters

Directions: From Exit 272 at Kearney, go 2 miles west on I-80 to rest area.

Ft. Kearny SRA

For travelers looking for a place to camp in the Kearney area, Ft. Kearny SRA is a convenient choice. There are seven small fishing lakes totaling 21 acres with plenty of shoreline access. Lakes 5 and 6 are good for largemouth bass, Lakes 6 and 7 are tops for channel catfish, and Lake 7 is the best spot for bluegill. Fishing tackle can be borrowed to use in the park.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, carp, wiper (Lake 4)

Amenities: Wheelchair-accessible fishing pier (Lake 7), modern and primitive camping, modern restrooms with showers (closed in winter), pit toilets, hike/bike trail to the Platte River, picnic shelters, swimming beach, small playground, iron ranger self-registration entrance station

Directions: From Exit 272, go south on Highway 44 for about 2 miles to Link 50A. Turn left and go 5 miles east, then turn left and go 1 mile north, following roadside SRA directional signs. Or from Exit 279, go 3 miles south on Highway 10 and 2 miles west on Link 50A.

Nearby attraction: Ft. Kearny SHP, site of a frontier Army post and popular stopover on the Oregon and Mormon Trails. Park and fishing permits are available at the park office.

Yanney Park

Yanney Heritage Park is a city-owned 80-acre park in Kearney that

includes a 20 acre lake. The park is under development, with new facilities being added annually.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie

Amenities: Wheelchair-accessible dock, paddleboat rentals, playground, splashground (water sprinklers where the kids can cool off), hike/bike trail connecting to 5-mile trail through Kearney, picnic shelters, observation tower, environmental resource center, restrooms, concession

Directions: From Exit 272, go 1 mile north to 11th Street. Turn left and go 1.3 miles west to Kea West Avenue. Turn left and go 0.3 miles south to the park, on the left.

Bufflehead WMA

This 15-acre lake is good for largemouth bass.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, rock bass, yellow perch.

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp

Directions: From Exit 272, go 1 mile north to 11th Street. Turn right and go 3 miles east to Cherry Road. Turn right and go 1 mile south, then turn left. Follow the road east 0.5 miles to the WMA.

Cottonmill Lake

This popular, city-owned, 43-acre lake is open from 7 a.m. to sunset daily. A park permit is not required. A lake rehabilitation project completed in 1999 resulted in excellent water quality and good fishing for largemouth bass, bluegills, channel catfish and crappies. Boating is restricted to 5 mph. Canoes and paddleboats are rented on-site.

Fish species: Crappie, largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, northern pike

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, boat rentals, playground, pit toilets, walking trail, swimming beach, picnic shelters

Directions: From Exit 272, go 1 mile north on Highway 44 to 11th Street. Turn left and go 2 miles west to 30th Avenue. Turn right and go 1 mile north to 24th Street. Turn left and go about 1.3 miles west to Cottonmill Avenue. Turn right and go 0.25 miles north to the park.

Kea West WMA

This WMA has an 8-acre lake.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, rock bass, yellow perch

Amenities: Primitive boat ramp

Directions: From Exit 272, go 1 mile north to 11th Street. Turn left and go 1.3 miles west to Kea West Avenue. Turn left again and go south, past Yanney Park, about 1 mile to the area, which is on the left.

Kea Lake WMA

This WMA adjacent to I-80 has a 20-acre lake. The Kearney Events Center, home to a local hockey team and many civic events, is located just south of the lake, and gas stations, restaurants and motels are located nearby.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp

Directions: From Exit 272, go south a short distance on Highway 44 to the first right turn. Drive through the motel parking lot to get to the WMA parking area.

Bassway Strip WMA

Several small lakes are located within this 6-mile long WMA, with the best fishing at the 7-acre west lake. This lake has excellent water quality and is used by scuba divers.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, hunting allowed

Directions: From Exit 279, go south a short distance on Highway 10 to the first left turn. Turn left and then immediately turn left again. Follow the dirt road north and then east 0.25 miles to the parking area.

Windmill SRA

There are six lakes in the park, totaling 23 acres, with ample shoreline access. Lake 1 is stocked with rainbow trout during the winter months. The lakes have plenty of bluegills, making the SRA a good choice for families with young children. For catfish, try Lake 4. Permits are available at the park office. Food, fuel and groceries are available nearby and 4 miles north in Gibbon.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, wiper (Lake 3)

Amenities: Wheelchair-accessible fishing deck (Lake 2), modern camping with restrooms and showers, electrical hook-ups, RV dump station, swimming beach, picnic shelters, archery range

JON FARRAR

All the lakes along I-80 offer plenty of bank fishing opportunity, but small boats can be used in most of them as well and can increase an angler's odds for success.

Central Platte River Valley

Directions: From Exit 285, go north a short distance on Link 10C to the first right turn.

War Axe SRA

This 14-acre lake is good for largemouth bass and also holds walleyes.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, walleye, channel catfish, bluegill, yellow perch, carp

Amenities: Modern restrooms (closed in winter), pit toilets, primitive camping, picnic shelters, iron ranger self-registration entrance station

Directions: From Exit 291, turn north on Link 10D and take the first right turn into the SRA.

Cheyenne SRA

This park has an angler-friendly, 17-acre lake and many conveniences.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, carp

Amenities: Modern restroom (closed in winter), pit toilets, primitive camping, swing set, picnic shelters, iron ranger self-registration entrance station

Directions: From Exit 300, go north a short distance on Highway 11 to the first left turn, which will take you into the area.

West Wood River WMA

This WMA has a 15-acre lake.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish

Amenities: None

Directions: From Exit 300, drive south 0.3 miles on Spur 40D, turn right on county road and go 1 mile west. Turn north on 140th Road and cross the I-80 overpass, then turn left and go 0.25 miles west on Binfield Road to the lake. The parking area is another 0.2 miles west, on the left.

Alda Lake

This 12-acre lake is owned by the DOR. There are no facilities at the lake, but food, drinks, and restrooms are available at a gas station located nearby. Camping and boating are prohibited at the lake. No park entry permit is required. Limited parking is available at the northwest corner of the lake.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, northern pike, carp

Amenities: None

Directions: From Exit 305, turn north and drive a short distance to the first right turn past the gas station.

Mormon Island SRA

Located just north of Exit 312, westbound I-80 travelers get a view of Mormon Island SRA as they approach the exit. Grand Island, a few miles north of the park, is Nebraska's fourth-largest city, offering travelers plenty of dining, lodging and shopping choices.

There are three lakes in the park and they are referred to as the East, Middle, and West lakes. The West Lake is the largest at 42 acres and the most convenient for campers and park visitors. The Middle and East Lakes are about 20 acres each and are only accessible by foot. These lakes have easy shoreline access for anglers. West Lake is good for bass, channel catfish and crappies. Campers may register at the park office, where they can also purchase fishing and park entry permits.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, walleye

Amenities: Wheelchair-accessible fishing pier (West Lake), modern camping with electrical hook-ups, modern restrooms, showers, RV dump station, swimming beach (West Lake), limited hunting opportunities

Directions: From Exit 312, go north a short distance on Highway 281 to the first right turn into the park.

Grand Island Eastbound Rest Area

There is a 6-acre lake on the west end of this DOR-owned property open to fishing. Camping and boating are prohibited.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish

Amenities: Modern restrooms, vending machines, picnic shelters

Directions: From Exit 312 at Grand Island, go 3 miles east on I-80 to the rest area.

JON FARRAR

Mormon Island State Recreation Area near Grand Island offers fishing and camping experiences for the entire family.

ERIC FOWLER

An angler fishes for white bass in Pawnee Lake State Recreation Area.

Eastern Nebraska

Just east of Grand Island, the Platte River continues its slow meander northeast, while I-80 heads straight east to Lincoln. On this end of the state, flood control reservoirs and farm ponds offer the best fishing.

Recharge Lake

This 49-acre lake is owned by the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District. Camping is not allowed at the area, but there are several motels in York. A park entry permit is not required.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, picnic tables, pit toilets, swing set

Directions: From Exit 353, go 3 miles north on Highway 81 to Spur 93D in York. Turn left and go 1.7 miles west to the park entrance, on your right. Follow the entrance road 0.25 miles to the boat ramp. Other facilities are a short distance up that road.

Twin Lakes WMA

This WMA has two lakes, totaling 270 acres. East Twin Lake offers the best fishing; West Twin Lake is shallow and periodically goes dry. The area is a waterfowl refuge and is closed from October 15 through December 31.

Fish species (East Twin): Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, walleye, carp, bullhead

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp (East Lake), limited primitive camping, limited hunting

Directions: From Exit 388 near Pleasant Dale, travel north 0.3 miles on the gravel road to Holdrege Street (dirt road). Turn left and go 0.5 miles west to the East Twin Lake boat ramp and parking area.

Conestoga Lake SRA

This 230-acre lake is popular for boating and water skiing and provides a scenic spot to camp in the Lincoln area.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, flathead catfish, walleye, wiper, crappie, freshwater drum, carp

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, fish cleaning station, modern camping with electrical hook-ups, RV dump station, primitive camping, pit toilets, picnic shelters, iron ranger self-registration entrance station, limited hunting

Directions: From Exit 388, go 0.3 miles south to Highway 6. Turn left and go 5 miles east to Spur 55A, at the town of Emerald. Turn right and go 3 miles south to West Pioneers Blvd. Turn right and go 1 mile west to the lake. Westbound travelers can use Exit 395 instead. Exit south to Highway 6 and then travel west 2.5 miles to Spur 55A at Emerald. Turn left and continue as above.

Pawnee Lake SRA

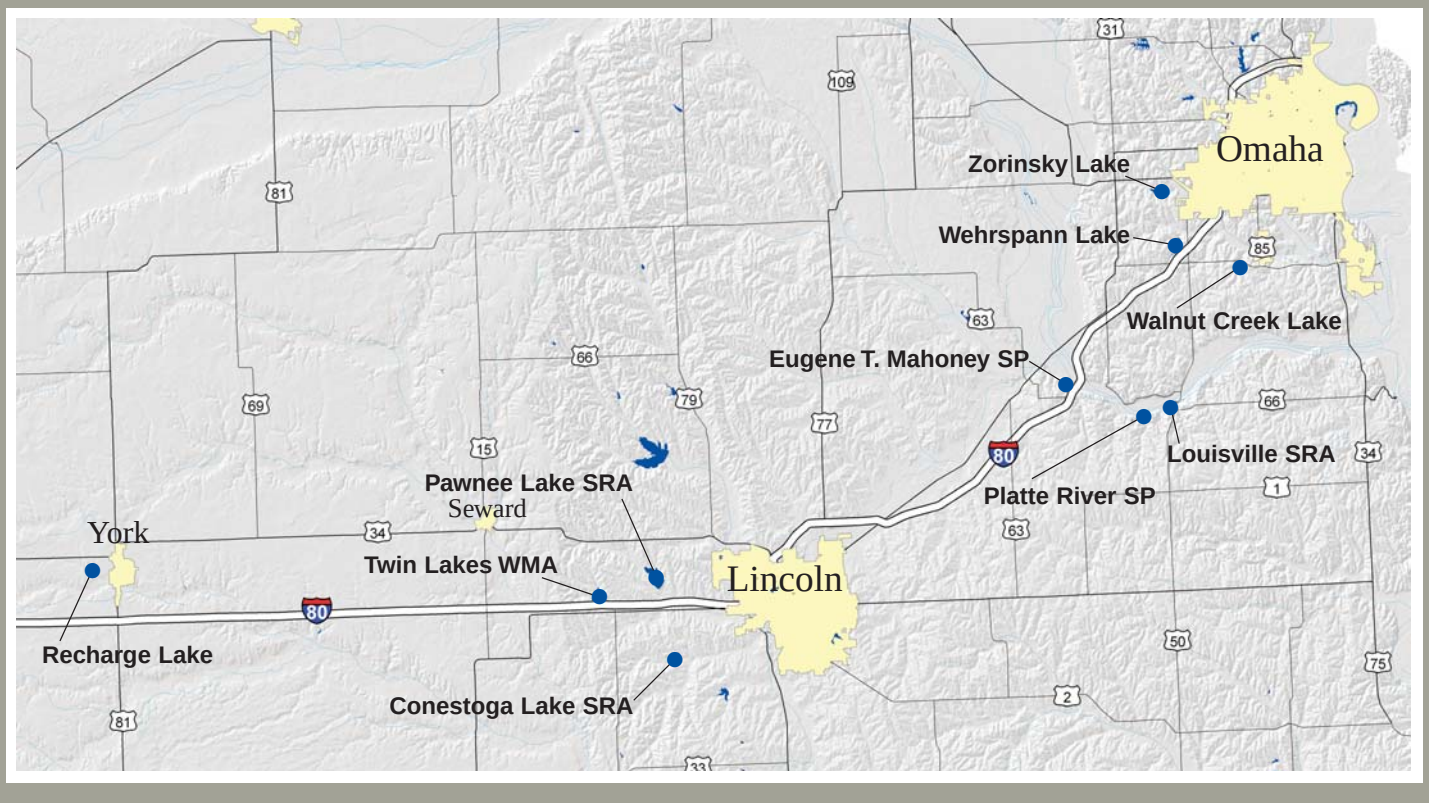
This 740-acre lake is popular with campers, boaters and anglers in the Lincoln area. Permits are available at the park office, where fishing tackle can be borrowed for use at the lake.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, walleye, white bass, channel catfish, flathead catfish, crappie, carp, freshwater drum

Amenities: Concrete boat ramps, modern camping, modern restrooms (closed in winter), primitive camping, pit toilets, restaurant (summer only), swing set, picnic shelters, swimming beach, hiking trail, limited hunting

Directions: From Exit 388, go 0.3 miles south to Highway 6. Turn left and go 5 miles east to Spur 55A, at the town of Emerald. Turn north on NW 84th Street. Go 2 miles north then turn

Eastern Nebraska



left and go 1.5 miles west on Adams Street to the lake.

Eugene T. Mahoney SP

Nebraska's most developed and most visited state park lies halfway between its two largest cities, Omaha and Lincoln, at Exit 426. Travelers will find a host of activities and facilities for the whole family, including fishing, hiking, horseback riding, a water park, picnic shelters, an observation tower, a theater and, in winter, ice skating and tobogganing.

Lodging options include guest rooms in a stately lodge overlooking the Platte River, cabins and a modern campground. The facilities are popular for family reunions and weekend getaways, so reservations are strongly encouraged. A restaurant at the lodge overlooks the Platte River. Campers may register at the park office, where they can also purchase fishing and park entry permits.

Anglers can fish 4-acre Baright (formerly known as Marina) Lake or 10-acre Qwest Lake. Both have special regulations in place to ensure fish populations are maintained. Baright Lake is located near the campground. Turn right after the park entrance booth and follow the park road 0.5 miles to Baright Lake, where children under 16 years of age, adults with disabilities and adults assisting children who are fishing are allowed to fish. Qwest Lake is another 0.5 miles further down the road. Boats are not allowed on either lake. Fishing tackle can be borrowed for use in the park.

Fish species (Baright Lake): Bluegill, largemouth bass, channel catfish.

Fish species (Qwest Lake): Bluegill, largemouth bass, channel catfish, crappie, rainbow trout (winter)

Amenities: Fishing piers, fish cleaning station at Qwest Lake, lodging, modern camping with electrical hook-ups, restrooms and showers, RV dump station, restaurant, paddleboat rentals, playground, water park, picnic shelters

Directions: From Exit 426 at Ashland, take Highway 66 about 0.5 miles west to the park entrance.

DOUG CARROLL

A young angler reels in a trout at Mahoney State Park's Qwest Lake near Ashland.

Platte River SP

This is another scenic area reached via I-80 Exit 426. Platte River State Park is located in the oak-forested bluffs on the south rim of the Platte

River Valley, and is popular with hikers and mountain bikers. The 4-acre Jenny Newman Lake is ideal fishing water for young children. Only those under 16 years old and adults assisting children are allowed to fish in this catch-and-release-only lake. Parents can have a lot of fun watching their kids catch fish, including some trophy-sized specimens. Visitors can borrow fishing tackle to use at the lake. Fishing and park entry permits are available at the park office.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish

Amenities: Modern cabins (camping is available at nearby Louisville SRA), hiking and mountain biking trails, swimming pool, tennis courts, observation tower, picnic shelters, pit toilets. Modern restrooms, snacks, drinks, and paddleboat rentals are available in the summer.

Directions: From Exit 426, travel 6.5 miles east on Highway 66. The park entrance road is on the left. To get to Jenny Newman Lake, turn left at the entrance booth and follow the park road 0.5 miles.

Nearby attraction: Schramm Park SRA, site of Nebraska's first fish hatchery, and the popular Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium and Outdoor Education Center.

Louisville SRA

Located on the south bank of the Platte River, Louisville SRA has five small lakes totaling 40 acres plus river fishing opportunities. Campground scenes in the Jack Nicholson movie *About Schmidt* were filmed here. Campers may register at the park office, where they can also purchase fishing and park entry permits and borrow fishing tackle for use at the park.

Fish species (lakes): Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, wiper (Lake 2 only)

Fish species (river): Channel catfish, flathead catfish, shovelnose sturgeon, freshwater drum, carp

Amenities: Modern camping with electrical hook-ups, modern restrooms with showers (closed in winter), RV dump station, tent camping, pit toilets, swimming beach, picnic shelters, nature trails, swing set. A concession is open during the summer, offering food and drinks.

Directions: From Exit 426, travel 8.5 miles east on Highway 66 to its junction with Highway 50. Turn left on Highway 50 and go 1.5 miles north. The park entrance will be on your left. Travelers may also leave I-80 at Exit 440 and travel 11 miles south on Highway 50 to the park.

Walnut Creek Lake

One of the newest lakes in eastern Nebraska, Walnut Creek is a 100-acre flood control lake built with fish and quality fishing in mind. The lake area closes at 10 p.m. There are no garbage cans here, so pack your trash out.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, redear sunfish, crappie

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, fishing jetties, wheelchair-accessible fishing pier, paved walking trail around the lake, pit toilets, playground, picnic shelters, modern campground, leash-free dog exercise area

Directions: From Exit 439, go 5 miles east on Highway 370 to 96th Street in Papillion. Turn right and go 0.4 miles to the first entrance on the right, where you'll find a playground for the kids, a picnic shelter, pit toilets, and trail access. Or, continue on 96th Street another 0.4 miles to Schramm Road, then turn right and go 1 mile to the park entrance on the right for the campground, boat ramp, and other facilities.

Wehrspann Lake

The Papio-Missouri River NRD owns this 245-acre lake in southwest of Omaha. No park entry permit is required. The park closes at 10 p.m.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, blue catfish, crappie, walleye, bullhead

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, fishing pier, pit toilets, paved walking trail, picnic shelters

Directions: Take Exit 440 at Highway 50 and go north 0.25 miles to the first traffic signal. Turn left on Cornhusker Road and follow it 0.9 miles to the lake. To access the main entrance and boat ramp, continue north on Highway 50 another 0.75 miles to Giles Road and turn left. The entrance is 0.9 miles ahead, on the left.

Zorinsky Lake

The city-owned park at 255-acre Zorinsky Lake is regarded as one of the premier parks in Omaha. Camping is not allowed, and the park is open only from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Fish species: Largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish, blue catfish, crappie, walleye

Amenities: Concrete boat ramp, wheelchair-accessible fishing pier, paved walking trail, playgrounds, picnic shelters, restrooms

Directions: From Exit 440, go north 2 miles on Highway 50 to Harrison Street. Turn left and go 1 mile west to 156th Street. Turn right and go 2 miles north to F Street, and then turn left into the park. There is additional access to the trail and lake on 168th Street, one mile north of Q Street. ■

DOUG CARROLL

Hefty bluegill can be caught from Platte River State Park's Jenny Newman Lake.