

More Master Angler fish were caught at Lake McConaughy than any other body of water in 2008, according to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Ninety-eight of the 1,527 Master Angler fish caught last year were taken from this western Nebraska lake.

A Master Angler Award is given to an angler whose outstanding fish, which must be caught by hook and line, meets minimum size requirements.

The second-most Master Angler fish, were taken from Branched Oak Reservoir 87, Merritt Reservoir had 85, Red Willow 73 and Harlan County Reservoir 63. The remainder of the top 10 were: Calamus Reservoir, 52; Sherman County Reservoir, 48; Burchard Lake, 29; Swanson Reservoir, 27; and Davis Creek Reservoir and Johnson Lake, 18.

The most common species to produce a Master Angler Award last year was largemouth bass, with 386 awards. The remainder of the top 10 were: channel catfish, 238; wiper, 206; flathead catfish, 129; walleye, 96; bluegill, 94; crappie, 89; northern pike, 75; white bass, 32; and drum, 29.

Also:

- A total of 1,030 of the Master Angler fish were released, giving other anglers a chance to catch them at a larger size.
- The number of northern pike awards has risen from 41 to 75 since 2006. Red Willow, Sherman and Merritt reservoirs had the three highest totals of Master Angler northern pike. Daryl Bauer, fisheries outreach program manager for the commission, said they were examples of lakes that have large pike, but not large numbers of pike.
- The largest Master Angler walleye was 15 pounds, 8 ounces. "That's an exceptional fish," Bauer said. "It's as big a walleye as we've caught in the state in years."
- Of the 87 Master Angler fish caught at Branched Oak in 2008, 45 were flathead catfish and 32 were wipers. Bauer noted there is a catch-and-release regulation on those species.
- Lake McConaughy was the top producer of Master Angler wipers with 62. Bauer said there's a good chance the next state-record wiper will come from this lake.