



NEBRASKA GAME AND
PARKS COMMISSION

NEBRASKA POND GUIDE

Private Waters
Program



Management Assistance for
Lakes, Ponds, Pits & Streams



FEEDING FISH

Nebraska ponds are usually fertile enough that fish feeding is not necessary. However, feeding can be considered if the owner is willing to spend the time and money required to produce rapidly-growing, large-bodied bluegills, channel catfish, wipers (striped bass-white bass hybrid), hybrid sunfish (bluegill-green sunfish cross), or trout.

Fish must learn to eat commercial food pellets. Dispersing the pellets by hand can be done provided it is done at the same location and about the same time each day. Feeding can also be accomplished with an automatic, timer-controlled, fish feeder placed on shore or on floats and anchored in the pond. Feeding only when you feel like it is usually a waste of time and money as most fish will never learn to eat the pellets, especially if there is no signal to indicate food is being provided. Fish will learn to react to signals, such as the whirr of the feeder as it turns on, or can be trained to come and eat hand-

dispersed pellets by banging on a pipe or post that has been driven into the nearby bank.

Artificial feeding can increase the biomass of a pond beyond its normal carrying capacity. If a feeding program is discontinued, the pond may not be able to maintain the extra fish biomass, resulting in poor fish health and growth. Also, the accumulation of nutrients from uneaten pellets and the increased waste output by artificially fed fish may age a pond quickly, consume a large portion of available oxygen during decomposition, and stimulate huge algal blooms. When algae die, their decomposition can lower dissolved oxygen levels even further, stressing or killing fish during the night or following several hot, calm, overcast days. When this occurs, fish can be seen at the surface gasping for oxygen, typically early in the morning. An aeration system will help reduce the likelihood of fish kills due to low oxygen levels.

Bluegill and/or hybrid sunfish should be provided about 5 pounds of pellets per acre, per day. Make sure the pellets are small enough for them to eat. Largemouth bass normally do not eat commercial pellets. They prefer to eat live aquatic organisms, but may benefit from increased bluegill production. Keep in mind there has to be adequate bass predation on small bluegills and hybrids, unless the owner is willing to spend a fortune on food.

Channel catfish and wipers are practical to feed and quickly learn to eat pellets, resulting in increased growth rates. When catfish and wipers are present in relatively high numbers in multi-species ponds, they may consume the majority of the pellets, leaving little for other fish. Trout also readily accept dry pellets, and can be grown to larger sizes.

The amount and size of pellets to feed will depend on fish species present, relative numbers



Tapping on a metal post and tossing fish food into a 10-foot floating hoop each morning will signal fish to feed.



NEBRASKA POND GUIDE



and size range of target fish species, and the time of year. The following guidelines will help improve the success of a feeding program:

- Do not feed more than the fish will consume in 10 minutes. Keep in mind fish must first learn to come to the pellets, so start out with a small amount.
 - If fish stop eating, stop feeding and check for low dissolved oxygen levels in the water, diseases, spoiled pellets, or other problems. Consumption of spoiled pellets can stress or even kill fish.
 - Stop feeding catfish, wipers, bluegills, and hybrid sunfish when water temperatures are above 90 degrees or below 60 degrees. Stop feeding trout when water temperatures are above 70 degrees or below 50 degrees. Reduce the amount fed as water temperatures approach these temperatures.
 - Do not feed after sunset or before sunrise.
 - Feed only once and at the same time each day – preferably in the morning.
 - Check automatic feeders periodically to make sure they are operating properly.
- Use floating pellets so you are able to observe fish while they are feeding and evaluate their health.
 - Consider using a floating hoop to confine the pellets, which will prevent them from drifting to the bank.
 - Only use pellets formulated for fish.
 - Do not use old pellets – check the packaging date. Nutrient benefits decrease with time. Discard pellets if more than 6 months old.
 - Store pellets indoors with room temperatures preferably under 75 degrees.
 - Contact local livestock supply store for a source for commercial fish food.

Contacts: Jeff Blaser, Private Waters Specialist
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
2200 North 33rd Street
Lincoln, NE 68503
402-471-5435
or area Commission fisheries biologist.



NEBRASKA POND GUIDE



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CONTACTS

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (Commission)

2200 N 33rd Street PO Box 30370
Lincoln, NE 68503
Private Waters Specialist 402-471-5435
Natural Heritage Program 402-471-5419

Northwest (NW) District - Alliance

Game and Parks Commission
299 Husker Road PO Box 725
Alliance, NE 69301
308-763-2940
Fisheries Division or
Wildlife Habitat Partners Section

Northwest (NW) Field Office - Valentine

Valentine State Fish Hatchery
HC 13 Box 15B
Valentine, NE 69201
402-376-8080 or 402-376-2244

Southwest (SW) District - North Platte

Game and Parks Commission
301 East State Farm Road
North Platte, NE 69101
308-535-8025
Fisheries Division or
Wildlife Habitat Partners Section

Northeast (NE) Field Office - Bassett

Game and Parks Commission
524 Panzer Street PO Box 508
Bassett, NE 68714
402-684-2921
Fisheries Division or
Wildlife Habitat Partners Section

Northeast (NE) District - Norfolk

Game and Parks Commission
2201 N 13th Street
Norfolk, NE 68701
402-370-3374
Fisheries Division or
Wildlife Habitat Partners Section

South-central (SC) District - Kearney

Game and Parks Commission
1617 First Avenue
Kearney, NE 68847
308-865-5310
Fisheries Division or
Wildlife Habitat Partners Section

Southeast (SE) District - Lincoln

Game and Parks Commission
2200 N 33rd Street PO Box 30370
Lincoln, NE 68503
402-471-7651 or 402-471-5561
Fisheries Division or
Wildlife Habitat Partners Section



NEBRASKA POND GUIDE

Private Waters
Program



United States Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Federal Building, Room 152
100 Centennial Mall North
Lincoln, NE 68508
Statewide Wildlife Biologist
402-437-4100
or contact Local County Office

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, Cooperative Extension

211 Agricultural Hall - UNL East Campus
Lincoln, NE 68583
Main Office 402-472-2966
or contact Local County Office;
Water Quality Questions 402-472-7783

Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

301 Centennial Mall South, PO Box 94676
Lincoln, NE 68509
Water Storage Permits 402-471-2363 or
Dam Safety Guidelines 402-471-1222

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE)

8901 S. 154th Street, Suite 1
Omaha, NE 68138 402-896-0723
or contact the Kearney office at:
1430 Central Avenue
Kearney, NE 68847
308-234-1403

Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ)

1200 N Street, PO Box 98922
The Atrium, Suite 400
Lincoln, NE 68509
402-471-0096

Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD)

601 S. 12th Street, Suite 201
Lincoln, NE 68508
402-471-7670
or contact your local Natural Resources District (NRD)
listed in White Pages of the phone book