



# Reptiles and Amphibians of Lake McConaughy



*The*

**CENTRAL**

*Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation*

**DISTRICT**

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## LAKE McCONAUGHY is

the Central District's main storage reservoir for its hydro-irrigation project. The 22-mile-long, three-mile-wide reservoir is on the southern edge of the Nebraska Sandhills. With approximately 76 miles of shoreline, it provides a variety of habitats ranging from open sand beaches to riverine marshes to cold-water streams. The lake area is home to eight species of amphibians and 16 species of reptiles.

Many of these creatures, though common, are not seen by the average visitor to the area because of their nocturnal habits and/or their ability to blend in well with their environment.

Lake visitors who encounter any of these creatures are urged to respect them and their habitat and recognize their importance to the Lake McConaughy ecosystem.

## Amphibians

There are eight species of amphibians in the Lake McConaughy area. Though all but one are very common, few are seen on the shores, but most can be seen in the ponds and marshes associated with the lake.

The **Tiger Salamander** (*Ambystoma tigrinum*) is a fairly common, yet infrequently seen creature because it is normally active at night in rainy weather. The tiger salamander is large black and yellow with smooth, wet skin. The larvae, commonly called mud puppies, may be found in shallow ponds in the area.

Tiger  
Salamander

6 to 13 1/2 in.



The **Bull Frog** (*Rana catesbeiana*) is Nebraska's largest frog. Easily identified by its dull green color and large circular tympanic membrane, this frog may remain a tadpole for up to two years. Bullfrogs can be found in wet, marshy areas around the lake.

The **Great Plains Toad** (*Bufo cognatus*), though common, is rarely seen except following thunderstorms. These toads may be distinguished by the large diverging blotches on their backs. The call of the Great Plains toad is higher than other toads and is a prolonged whistle lasting up to 30 seconds.

The **Woodhouse's Toad** (*Bufo woodhousii*) is the most common toad found in the Lake McConaughy area. They may be seen on the shore of the lake as well as in the wooded campgrounds. These toads are brown or reddish brown with brown spots on their backs. Generally each spot contains a single wart.

The **Plains Spadefoot Toad** (*Spea bombifrons*) may be quickly identified by the vertical pupil of the eye; all other frogs and toads in Nebraska have horizontal pupils. The spadefoot is usually only seen after thunderstorms when it emerges from its burrows and breeds in temporary ponds left by the storms.

The **Western Striped Chorus Frog** (*Pseudacris triseriata*) is common, yet while seldom seen, it can be heard nightly during the spring and early summer. Adults are approximately one inch long. The chorus frog usually breeds in the temporary shallow ponds of roadside ditches.

The **Northern Leopard Frog** (*Rana pipiens*) is the most common "grass" frog found in the Lake McConaughy area. These 3- to 4-inch-long frogs are green to brown with elongated spots. They are found

3 1/2 to 8 in.

Bull Frog



in ponds and marsh areas near the lake.

The **Plains Leopard Frog** (*Rana blairi*) is difficult to distinguish from the northern leopard frog. Although rare around Lake McConaughy, a few Plains specimens have been found north and west of the lake.

## Reptiles

Lake McConaughy is home to 16 species of reptiles: four turtles, four lizards and eight snakes. With the exception of one or two highly visible species, most of the reptiles around the lake are seldom encountered.

### Turtles

The **Snapping Turtle** (*Chelydra serpentina*), Nebraska's largest reptile, is common in shallow pools, lakes and marshes. Snapping turtles can be very aggressive when encountered on land and should be treated with caution.

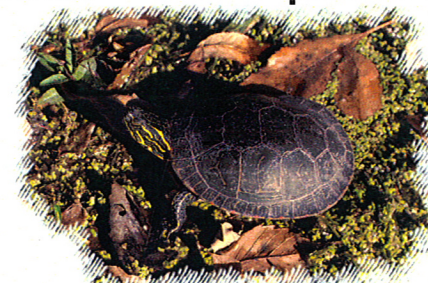
The **Spiny Softshell Turtle** (*Apalone spinifera*), also called the leatherback, is common along Nebraska's rivers. It feeds mainly on small fish and mollusks and spends much of its time submerged with only its snout extended above the surface.

The **Painted Turtle** (*Chrysemys picta*) may be Nebraska's most common turtle and one of the most easily identified. The upper shell is dark green to brown and the bottom shell is reddish with an olive and black pattern. The shell is relatively flat and does not have a hinge.

The **Ornate Box Turtle** (*Terrapene ornata*) is the closest thing to a true tortoise found in Nebraska. This turtle has a colorful black-and-yellow striped upper shell and a hinged lower shell. The ornate box turtle is common along the edge of the lake.

4 to 9 3/4 in.

Painted Turtle





## Lizards

The **Many-lined Skink** (*Eumedoes multivirgatus*) is a common lizard in the area, but is rarely seen. It is brown or olive with broad stripes and has a long tail that is easily broken off. Young skinks typically have blue tails.

The **Prairie Racerunner** (*Cnemidophorus sexlineatus*) is well named, often running at speeds of up to 20 mph. It is greenish with black and off-white stripes and, with a full tail, is more than eight inches long. The racerunner is common along the sandy shores of the lake.

The **Northern Earless Lizard** (*Hobbrookia maculata*) is common in the dune areas surrounding the lake and in the sandhills. These small lizards are easily identified by the lack of an external ear opening. They rarely exceed four inches in length.

The **Northern Prairie Lizard** (*Sceloporus undulatus*), also called a fence lizard, is the most common lizard in the area. Like the earless lizard, it is found in the dunes along the lake and in the sandhills. Adult males can be identified by the presence of blue patches along their sides.

## Snakes

The **Western Hognose** (*Heterodon nasicus*) is a harmless, patterned brown snake that resembles a rattlesnake and can be very aggressive when encountered, although it will seldom bite. They feed mostly on toads.



Yellow Bellied Racer

30 - 50 in.

The **Yellow Bellied Racer** (*Coluber constrictor*) is a quick snake with a pale green back and a dull yellow belly. They feed upon many different animals, ranging from other snakes to small mammals. Racers are common in the vegetated areas surrounding the lake.

The **Prairie Rattlesnake** (*Crotalus viridis*) is the only poisonous snake that visitors to the lake might encounter. This medium-sized rattlesnake is most common on the south side of the lake near rocky areas. However, they may also be found on the north shore, so visitors should be cautious.

The **Milk Snake** (*Lampropeltis triangulum*) is a colorful snake with black, red and yellow bands. Though common in the area, it is seldom seen because of its secretive habits.

The **Bullsnake** (*Pituophis catenifer*) is one of the most common snakes in the lake area. The bullsnake is a dynamic predator and a major control on rodents around the lake. Often confused with rattlesnakes, they are harmless, but should still be left alone.

The **Northern Water Snake** (*Nerodia sipedon*) is common over much of Nebraska. It is often mistakenly identified as a water moccasin, which are not found in Nebraska. Though aggressive, water snakes are not poisonous.

The **Plains Garter Snake** (*Thamnophis radix*) is the most common snake in Nebraska and one of two garter snakes in the Lake McConaughy area. It is uncommon along the lake and river, but it can be found in the grassy areas near the cabins and campgrounds. Like most garter snakes, it has black and yellow stripes along its entire length.

The **Red-sided Garter Snake** (*Thamnophis sirtalis*) is common along the lake and river and can be distinguished from its cousin by a band of red along either side.

1 1/4 to 5 1/4 ft.

Prairie Rattlesnake

