



FOX CHAIN O LAKES

FISHERIES STATUS SUMMARY

LOCATION – 50 miles northwest of Chicago off Ill. Rt. 173 and U.S. Rt. 12 near the cities of Antioch, Fox Lake and McHenry.

DESCRIPTION – The Fox Chain O’ Lakes are unique from other major water bodies in the state in that they were formed by glaciers thousands of years ago and their depth is maintained by a lock and dam system south of McHenry. The system is composed of 9 major lakes interconnected by channels, the Fox Chain O’ Lakes is classified as a public navigable waterway managed under the authority of the Department of Natural Resources and the Fox Waterway Agency to provide a variety of water oriented recreational activities. Total - 7110.0 acres above the Stratton Dam, 1100 acres between the Algonquin and Stratton dams, Lake Catherine 149.5 acres; Channel Lake 348.5 acres; Lake Marie 585.0 acres; Bluff Lake 92.4 acres; Grass Lake 1451.4 acres; Petite Lake 234.5 acres; Fox/Nippersink Lake 2376.8 acres; Pistakee Lake 1715.7 acres. **State owned FREE boat ramps available at Chain O Lakes State Park**, private (for fee) launches available throughout the system. Concessions are available at Chain O Lakes State Park and the McHenry Dam offering fishing boat and motor rental, canoe/kayak rentals, live bait, tackle, ice, food, and soft drinks. Boat rentals, restaurants, bait/tackle and guide services are available via private vendors throughout the system. Fish cleaning facilities are NOT available in State Parks or at the McHenry Dam.

MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES - The Division of Fisheries has been actively monitoring the status of Fox Chain O’ Lakes fishery for over 60 years (1954 to present). We usually collect between 35 and 40 fish species during our Biennial fish surveys. Three fish species have voluntarily become established in the Fox Chain O Lakes; **yellow bass** (1973, then experienced significant die-offs in 1995 and 1997), **freshwater drum** (1992) and **gizzard shad** (2007). The State owns management jurisdiction for the Chain O Lakes and allows homeowners to treat vegetation in front of their homes by hiring a Licensed Commercial Applicator and obtaining a Letter of Permission (LOP) from the Division of Fisheries.

STATUS OF THE SPORT FISHERY – The Fox Chain was stocked with 336,950 2” walleye fingerlings, 2,242,000 walleye fry, 3633 muskie fingerlings between State and Club Donations and 25,157 4” to 6” largemouth bass fingerlings in 2021. Natural reproduction maintains all other species including northern pike, channel catfish, crappie, bluegill and white and yellow bass.

LARGEMOUTH BASS – In 2021, bass were collected at a rate of 41.2 fish/hr., this is slightly above the long term average of 21.8 fish/hr. Fish measured from 2.5” to 20” long and weighed up to 4.4 lbs.; 50% of the bass collected were over 12” long and sexually mature, 24% exceeded 14 inches (legal size), 17% were over 15” long, 10% were over 16” long, and 1% were over 18”. The population appears to be well balanced and supports our goals to provide predation on panfish species and maximize bass angling opportunities.

WALLEYE – The Chain O Lakes is a brood source for the State Hatchery System so it is managed to produce large walleye! During the biennial fall survey (2021), walleye were collected at a rate of 13.3 fish/hr. compared to 19 fish/hr. in 2017 and 16 fish/hr. in 2015. Fish ranged from 7” to 27” long and weighed up to 7.5 lbs. In spring 10+ lb. fish are collected. In 2016 a 12.5+ lb. female was collected. All brood fish were returned to Lake Marie after being processed at La Salle Fish Hatchery! Fall sample data (2021), (n=186) had 94% of the walleye >14”, 48% were >18”, 11% were >24”. The protective slot regulation keeps females with high egg quality in the system and promotes harvest of smaller male fish.

Muskellunge – Muskie are managed for high catch rates and the longevity of the stocking program has allowed females to grow LARGE! The average muskie is 36” long but fish up to 51” are reported by anglers almost annually. In the Chain, it takes at least 12 years for a muskie to reach 48” (legal length) and about 15 years to reach 51”+. Male muskie occasionally grow beyond 40” long but females easily grow through that size and are the biggest muskie in a system. Muskie are surveyed each year, in spring nets, to track

tagged fish and growth. Females weighing over 30 lbs. are regularly collected with our largest fish ever weighing 36.2 lbs. (in 2007!). There are some really nice fish in the Chain!! The American Fisheries Society values muskie at \$50/lb. so have the right gear and practice good handling techniques. To put it in perspective: A 20 lb. muskie is valued at \$ 1000, a 48" fish weighing thirty pounds or more would be valued at over \$2400!

BLUEGILL – In 2021, 55% of the bluegill collected (n = 966) were longer than 6". Fish ranged from 1.2" to 8.7" and topped the scale at 0.47 lbs.; 25% of the bluegill collected were over 7" long and 3.3% exceeded 8" long. Bluegills are a bread and butter species in the Chain, if fishermen aren't targeting the big predators they're probably catching bluegills!

BLACK and WHITE CRAPPIE – Both black crappie (n=84) and white crappie (n=63) catches increased since 2015 but fish measured about the same, between 2" and 18" long and weighed up to 2.1 lbs.; 43% of black crappie and 61% of white crappie exceeded 9", and 1.3% of black crappie and 21% of white crappie exceeded 11" long. Crappie fishing remains popular in the Chain, especially in the spring: Fish beyond 16" are possible!

CHANNEL CATFISH – This species is maintained through natural reproduction and are common in river systems. Since the Chain is part of a river system these fish are a significant predator, relatively abundant and caught by a lot of fishermen. Channel catfish ranged in size from 10" to 28" long and weighed up to 9.5 lbs. In 2021, 72% of the channel catfish collected exceeded 18" in length, 39% were over 22" long and 16% were over 24" long. Flathead catfish are present up and down the entire Fox River/ Fox Chain O' Lakes system but are more common the further you go below the McHenry Dam and all the way south to Dayton.

FISHING REGULATIONS – Includes the Fox River from the Illinois State line to the Algonquin Dam. Trot line fishing is permitted.

Species	Daily Creel Limit	Minimum Length Limit
Largemouth Bass and Smallmouth Bass (No more than 3 fish can be smallmouth bass, smallmouth must be released immediately between April 1 to June 15, no possession)	6	14"
Walleye	4	14" to 18" (18" to 24" protected slot limit, no possession) only 1 fish can be >24"
Muskie	1	48"
Northern Pike	3	24"
Flathead catfish	3	1>28" and 2<28"

(see current Illinois Fishing Information booklet or <http://www.ifishillinois.org/> for specific details).

ADDITIONAL USER INFORMATION: Fox Waterway Agency user's fee/sticker required to access the Chain O Lakes system.

CONTACT INFORMATION – Chain O Lakes State Park: 847/587-5512.
IDNR Fisheries Biologist: 815/675-2319.
Fox Waterway Agency: 847/587-8540.

