

Carlyle Lake Fishing Information

If you enjoy catching catfish, mammoth Carlyle Lake, the largest man-made lake in the state, could be your Utopia.

The 24,850-acre lake, located 50 miles east of St. Louis, Mo., very well might be the finest channel cat fishery in Illinois, and they are eagerly sought by pole-and-line fishermen and trotliners alike. Bullheads are readily caught during the summer, and the bonus fish of the family are giant flathead catfish that often weigh 40 pounds or more.

Crappie fishing in spring and fall also can be excellent at times. Trophy largemouth bass lurk there, and white bass fishing can be fast and furious during the late summer months after the shad spawn. A walleye population is building, and good bluegill fishing occurs during spring and summer months. Yellow bass, often called "streakers" also are found there.

There also is an abundance of carp and freshwater drum that appeal to some anglers.

Carlyle Lake was completed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1966 and was formed with a dam on the Kaskaskia River, the same stream that is the main tributary to Lake Shelbyville, upstream to the north.

Virtually rectangular shaped, the lake is about 15 miles long and two to three miles wide. It is shallow, averaging about 11 feet in depth, and lies in flat, gently rolling country. Carlyle Lake is a typically open body of water and can soon kick up high, dangerous waves when strong winds occur.

The lake is divided by the Burlington Northern Railroad tracks which span the water from the towns of Keysport to Boulder. The upper portion is quite shallow, averaging about three feet deep, and consists mostly flooded timber and brush which was left standing when the lake filled.

Besides the main Kaskaskia River Tributary, this area of the lake has a number of smaller creeks feeding it; Hurricane, Bear, Maggot, East Fork and North Fork. These streams offer excellent fishing opportunities.

This upper one-third of the lake offers some of the best fishing opportunities for crappies, bluegills, largemouth bass, bullheads and channel catfish. There are two public access areas for easy entry to this portion of the lake; Tamalco on the west and Patoka on the east.

Below the railroad tracks, the lower two-thirds of the lake is quite open except for some timber left standing in three of the major bays.

Prime fishing areas in the area include West Branch, Burnside Bay, Allen Peppenhorst, Bond, Branch, Coles, Gibbes and Brewster creeks. There are six access areas, and two (Keysport and Boulder) offer good access to the upper portion of the lake.

Some of the better fishing spots in the lower section are the bays, river and creek channels, points, rip rap areas and around the islands.

Good crappie, channel catfish, largemouth bass, drum, bluegill and white bass fishing can be found in the lower portion of the lake.

The East and West Spillway Access Areas are directly below the Carlyle Lake dam. Another fisherman access spot is east of the easy access to the Kaskaskia River and the old river bed.

Excellent fishing is available at times in the tailwater area directly below the spillway. Spring offers opportunities for walleyes, white bass, crappies, bluegills and bullheads. Carp, drum and channel cat provide most of the summer fishing action. Angling for most species picks up again in the fall.

The popular channel catfish bites best in the main lake when there is a rise in the pool level. Areas that produce good catches are quite variable from month to month as are the baits they prefer. River and creek channels, flooded timber and shorelines are good spots to set trotlines. Some trotlines probe the open lake around islands or over the river channel. At other times, open fields above the railroad produce best.

Pole-and-line fishermen usually find the best channel catfish action in the creek, river channels, bottomland lakes or areas with hard mud or sand bottoms. Choice of baits vary but would include large shiners, gizzard shad, crayfish and leeches or cut baits from carp or shad. Nightcrawlers, stick baits or cheese or blood and soured clams and shrimp also are good at times.

Some anglers set their sites on the large "flatheads." They use mostly trotlines with big hooks (No. 2/0 to 6/0), big baits and strong lines. Baits range from live green sunfish, bullheads, carp, large shiners and shad to leeches, chicken guts and large hunks of cut baits from bowfin to carp. Most flatheads are taken around or in the old channel in the lake. This species also is occasionally taken by pole-and-line fishermen along rip rap areas or in the tailwaters.

White bass fishing is usually a hit or miss situation. When an angler finds this spunky fish feeding on surface schools of shad, action can be torrid. Any small spinning lure, jig or spoon thrown into a feeding school of white bass frequently will provide a fish on every cast. But such a spree can end as quickly as it starts, and the angler must search out another school.

Fishing for white bass has been along the rock rip rap of the dam, drop off areas of creek and river channels and around islands.

Walleyes have been stocked in the lake annually since 1974. Anglers haven't quite yet learned how to catch these excellent-eating fish in the main lake. Best fishing for this species usually occurs in the tailwater area from February to mid-June. Most walleyes are taken from along the spillway wing walls, along the rock rip rap of this area or from the low-head dam just north of the Route 50 bridge over the Kaskaskia River at Carlyle.

Spring and fall generally produce most of the crappies, since these fish drop into deeper water during the summer.