

REND LAKE GENERAL FISHING & RECREATIONAL INFORMATION

Rend Lake, the state's second largest inland reservoir, is a popular spot for bass tournaments and offers a variety of excellent fishing and recreation opportunities to folks who visit southern Illinois. Sprawling over 18,900 acres, the lake was finished by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1971. It is shaped like a broad 'Y' and is about 13 miles long and three miles wide with 162 miles of shoreline.

Principal tributaries to the lake are the Big Muddy River and Casey Fork. The main reservoir remains relatively clear due to the silt settling nature of the subimpoundment dams on these two streams at the northern or upper end of the lake.

Major bays of the lake, which averages about 9.7 feet and is 35 feet deep at its deepest spot, are Marcum Branch, Gun Creek, Atchison Creek, Jackie Branch and Sandusky Creek. Two large peninsulas of the lake are Nason Point and the one where Wayne Fitzgerald State Park is located. Portion of the lake lying north of Route 154 is quite shallow. It provides some of the best fish habitat on Rend. Much of the existing timber of the Big Muddy and Casey Fork arms surrounding Nason Point was untouched and flooded. Boatways have been cleared. Some timber in Gun Creek also was flooded upon impoundment. The lake is deeper south of Route 154, but there are some shallow areas with only one to three foot water depths, particularly in the Gun Creek and Dam West access areas.

Areas of rip rap that lead to deep water also are found at the lake and one of the popular spots both for bank and boat fishermen is the Route 154 causeway. Rip rap areas also are found elsewhere at dam areas and in some places at recreation sites. Though largemouth bass, crappie, bluegills, channel catfish and white bass draw the most attention from fishermen.

White bass fishing usually begins in late March when the fish begin to congregate along the rock rip rap areas or begin moving into the small tributary streams to spawn. This usually occurs during the latter half of April. After egg laying, the white bass return to the lake and can be caught in May and early June from the shallow flats where they forage for insects and small fishes, particularly the first hatch of gizzard shad.

About mid-July, young shad school and range near the surface, drawing the white bass and setting the stage for some exciting fishing. Anglers simply cast spoons, jigs or spinners into the top-water frenzy. Best areas to fish for white bass have been the rock rip rap of Route 154, Interstate 57 and the dam, off the points of Marcum Branch, Wayne Fitzgerald State Park and Sandusky Creek bay and around islands east of Rend Lake Marina.

Fishermen who enjoy catching bluegills and crappies disappear into the flooded timber areas around Nason Point and the upper arms of Casey Fork and the Big Muddy. Best bluegill action runs from May to mid-June during spawning time.

Bluegills build their nests in water two to five feet deep where there is hard mud or a sand bottom. Once these areas have been located, an offering of a cricket, roach, grub or redworm is enough to trigger action.

October and November are the best crappie months as this lake has one of the best fall crappie fisheries in the state. April, May and June are also good because the fish move to the shallows for spawning. They can be found in water

from two to 12 feet deep most of the time and bunch up around stickups, brush and flooded timber. Minnows and small jigs are the most popular baits.

Crappies move to deeper water in summer, and many folks try lantern fishing to catch them. As darkness arrives, a gas lantern is tied about four feet above the water to a limb or a stout stickup or a boat mounted six-foot pole. As darkness sets in, the area illuminated by the lantern attracts bugs, then minnows and hopefully the crappies. And jumbo crappies swim there. In 1976, a bass fisherman caught a 4½-pound black crappie at Rend that turned out to be the state record.

Best largemouth action usually unfolds from early April to mid-June and again from early September to mid-October because the fish are moving toward the shallows where most people fish for them. They can be caught in the summer, however, off deep water bars and points. A variety of baits from the local buzzing "Lunker Lure" to plastic worms and deep diving plugs take bass.

Channel catfish go on the prowl when the lake's pool is on the rise. They are taken by both pole-and-line fishermen and those who use trotlines or jigs.

Stream channels or bay and shoreline spots where there are hard mud and sand bottoms provide good areas to offer a night-crawler, liver, leeches or any of the variety of baits used for these fish. Trotline or jug fishermen also probe flooded river and creek channels, shallow flats with three to 10 feet of water, shoreline margins and those bays with flooded standing timber and small tributary streams.

Big flathead catfish also dwell there and are occasionally caught. Carp and freshwater drum also are abundant, and bullheads also provide plenty of activity.

Walk-in bank fishing opportunities are found at the northern portion of the lake at the wildlife management areas. The spillway and auxiliary channel below the dam also provides a fishery for bank anglers looking for white bass, hybrid striped bass, and crappie.

Crappies, bullheads, carp, drum, bluegills and channel catfish are the species most frequently caught behind the dam. But occasionally one might hook into a big flathead, white bass, largemouth, sauger or an ocean "striper."

Rend Lake Profile

Location: Interstate 57 is the main road to Rend Lake and provides the least congested, carefree travel route. The route actually crosses a small portion of the lake and runs parallel to the east side. The lake lies between Mt. Vernon and Benton in Jefferson and Franklin Counties. It's about three hours from Springfield, four hours from Bloomington and six hours from Chicago.

Facilities: Largest single recreational complex on Rend is Wayne Fitzgerald State Park that covers 3,300 acres. It has 265 modern camp units with electricity, 45 primitive tent sites, four picnic shelters, five boat launching ramps and 150 picnic units. Flush toilets, showers and playground equipment are found throughout the area, and a dump station is located for trailer campers. Since more than three-fourths of the park is bordered by water, it is an excellent spot for bank fishing.

One of the outstanding features of the complex is the number of access areas that permit sportsmen to use every portion of the lake. In addition to the ramps at major recreation areas, launch facilities are scattered so fishermen and hunters can reach key fishing and hunting areas with a minimal effort.

Rend Lake Resort located in Wayne Fitzgerald State Park, includes a motel, cabins, and luxury waterfront rooms as well as a bar, restaurant, and marina.

The Corps operates four campgrounds with three (North, South Sandusky and South Marcum) providing electrical hookups.

Sandusky Creek Bay, the largest arm of the lake south of Route 154, separates the two Sandusky access areas which feature 239 camp units (combined) and 10 walk-in sites, flush toilets, dump stations, showers, ramps and two amphitheatres where interpretive programs are held in summer. Both areas rate high scenically, and South Sandusky has a swimming beach, bath house and nature trail. Sandusky Creek Bay is one of the most popular fishing spots on the lake, especially for bluegills, bullheads, crappies and largemouth bass.

The South Marcum access area, located south of the Marcum Branch Bay, has room for 147 camp units and 20 walk-in tent sites plus full modern facilities. It also has an excellent fun and fitness trail and a large amphitheatre.

Additional commercial campgrounds operate near the lake; Bates' campground and trailer park on the southwest side; Coy and Wilma's Shady Oaks campground south of Route 183 on the west side; Sherwood Camping Resort on the northeast corner of Ina and Safari Campground and a KOA Campground near Benton.

The Rend Lake Marina, formerly known as Pharoah's Garden, is located a half mile north of the Dam West Access and presently is the only full service marina on the lake. Bait and tackle, tour and guide service, rental boats and motors, topo maps, gas and oil, snack items, motor repair service, boat and motor sales and daily and yearly dockage rental are provided.

Motels: Both "chain" and private motel operations can be found at Benton near the dam and Mt. Vernon, about 10 minutes north of the lake.

Motor, Other Restrictions: There is no outboard motor size limit on the lake, but there are posted "no wake" areas. A minimum length limit has been observed on largemouth bass. Check posted regulations.

Additional Information: Maps, brochures and other information is available by writing the Corps of Engineers, Rend Lake Management Office, R.R. 3, Benton, IL 62812. Mt. Vernon Convention and Visitors Bureau, P.O. Box 2580, Mt. Vernon, IL 62864, 618-242-3151.