

ILLINOIS RIVER: RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

Illinois' rivers and valleys are becoming increasingly important as recreation resources. River areas display scenic overlooks and geologic formations, harbor rich archaeological sites, and historic river towns. The rivers, backwater lakes, and forested bottomlands provide excellent opportunity for a variety of recreation activities.

Recreation today is seen as a major segment of the economy. Diverse, high quality recreation opportunities are attractive to Illinois' citizens, prospective businesses, and tourists. The "Study of the Economic Significance of Recreation in Illinois," conducted by the Department of Conservation discovered. Illinois residents spent over \$6.3 billion in 1985 on recreation. The recreation industry in Illinois employs approximately 150,000 people. Contributions to the Illinois economy from Illinois' Park, Forest Preserve and Conservation districts alone in 1991 were more than \$3.1 billion.

Recreation also enhances the quality of life. The Illinois River basin provides recreation in both quality and quantity, and the people of Illinois recognize it as a significant recreational resource.

Recreation in the basin includes water-dependent activities such as fishing, waterfowl hunting, boating, and swimming. Recreation also includes activities which are enhanced by proximity to water such as hiking, picnicking, and camping.

In the basin, many recreational sites and facilities are focused on the water - rivers or lakes -for recreation. In addition, wildlife habitat and forests are concentrated along the rivers and lakes of the basin. Although there are many recreation providers and many recreation sites in the basin, the largest percentage of land adjacent to rivers and lakes is in private ownership, and generally not accessible to the public. Levees have converted bottomlands to agricultural and urban development. About 20 percent of the bottomlands are publicly owned or used for public recreation, the remaining bottomlands are now in urban and industrial use.

These water-related recreation sites are directly affected by the quality of the natural resource in and surrounding them-the rivers, lakes, backwater areas, forests, and geologic formations. Degradation of this resource is occurring at an alarming rate and directly affects the quality and quantity of recreation available in the basin. All of the water-related recreation activities in the basin in fact, are impacted, as is quality of life , as the basin degradation continues.