

STATUS OF THE CATFISH FISHERY



ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES DIVISION OF FISHERIES

MARCH 2009

STATUS OF CATFISH FISHERY IN ILLINOIS REGION I

DISTRICT 1: JO DAVIESS, STEPHENSON, WINNEBAGO, BOONE, DEKALB, OGLE, AND CARROLL COUNTIES

SHABBONA LAKE - Shabbona Lake is a 319-acre impoundment constructed in 1974. It is located in the DeKalb area situated in the 1,550-acre Shabbona Lake State Park.

On a yearly basis reliable stocks of 8" catfish from the hatchery system began in 1981. From 1985 to 1991 (6 years) 77,476 catfish have been stocked (average 40 per acre), and from 1991 through 2000 (10 years) 114,515 catfish have been stocked or 36 per acre per year. From 2001 to the present, 65,538 or 26 per acre have been stocked.

A 1988 creel census found 11.1 pounds of catfish per acre caught with 79% of these fish harvested or 8.8 pounds per acre. Both harvested and released catfish weighed close to 1 pound.

The 1990 creel census found an increase to 16.4 pounds of catfish per acre caught with an 88% harvest or 14.5 pounds per acre. This year the harvested fish weighed nearly 2 pounds.

The 1997 creel census found 21.3 pounds per acre caught with 74% harvested or 15.8 pounds per acre. These fish averaged 1.64 pounds.

In the 2002 creel census channel catfish were harvested at 26.8 pounds per acre and averaged 2.9 pounds.

Catfish angling should continue to be strong in 2009, with catfish as large as 15 pounds

PIERCE LAKE - Pierce Lake is a 162-acre impoundment constructed in 1960. The lake is situated in Rock Cut State Park, a 3,092-acre park northeast of Rockford. Pierce Lake has been stocked with 47,024 non-vulnerable catfish from 1985 to 1991 (6 years) or 48 catfish per acre per year. From 1991 through 2000 (10 years) 55,383 catfish or 34 catfish per acre per year have been stocked. From 2001 to the present, 15638 or 20 per acre have been stocked.

A creel census in 1987 found 11.66 pounds per acre of catfish caught with 96% harvested at 11.15 pounds per acre of fish weighing an average of only .98 pounds.

A creel census in 1993 found a harvest of 9.6 pounds per acre at a harvest rate of 46%. The 1999 creel census found a harvest of 10.89 pounds per acre of fish weighing 1.002 pounds at a harvest rate of 60%.

Anglers appear to be willing to accept a smaller size catfish on Pierce Lake than on other lakes, but are also beginning to creel fewer fish.

LAKE LE-AQUA-NA - This 43-acre impoundment is located in northwestern Stephenson County, three miles north of the village of Lena. The lake was constructed in 1955 and is situated in the 715-acre Lake Le-Aqua-Na State Park.

Lake Le-Aqua-Na has been stocked with a total of 11,258 non-vulnerable catfish from 1985 to 1991 (6 years) or 43.6 fish per acre per year. From 1991 through 2000 (10 years) 20,744 catfish or 48 catfish per acre per year have been stocked. From 2001 to the present, 15,845 or 45 per acre catfish have been stocked.

A 1989 creel census found a harvest of 11.3 pounds per acre of catfish that weighed 1.3 pounds. The ratio of kept-to-caught fish was 87%.

The 1994 creel census found 20.4 pounds per acre caught with 84% kept or 17.1 pounds per acre. These fish weighed 1.26 pounds.

Channel catfish angling has always had an excellent reputation at Lake Le-Aqua-Na and this year should be another ideal one.

DISTRICT 2: ROCK ISLAND, HENRY, BUREAU, LASALLE, LEE, AND WHITESIDE COUNTIES

LASALLE LAKE - The 2,058 acre cooling lake in LaSalle County was opened for public fishing in 1987. The lake was stocked initially with 10,000 - 8 to 10 inch channel catfish from Fountain Bluff Fish Farm. No catfish stockings have been necessary since then. LaSalle Lake is like most cooling lakes in that they are catfish factories. The lake has a tremendous population of channel catfish of all sizes. A creel conducted in 1996 reported 17,213 channel catfish were harvested. Anglers caught over 42,000 channel catfish. The harvested catfish averaged 0.6 pound. Three gillnets set overnight in 1996 and in 1999 ranged from 38 to 49 channel catfish per net. Channel catfish as large as 15 pounds are occasionally caught. This lake should continue to produce large numbers of channel catfish.

Remember, when fishing LaSalle Cooling Lake, it is a perched cooling lake and gets very rough when the wind picks up. The lake has a fair population of flathead catfish up to around 40 pounds. The lake was stocked with blue catfish in 1999, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2006 and 2007.

A blue catfish collected on 01-09-02 weighed 23 pounds and 12 ounces. Anglers did well for blue catfish in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008. In 2007 and 2008 the blue catfish was one of the most sought after species. The fall electrofishing survey in 2003

resulted in the collection of 30 blues between 5.4 and 21 pounds. The fall electrofishing survey in 2004 resulted in the collection of 156 blue catfish. The largest collected weighed 20 pounds. Larger blues were observed. One angler reported catching a 40 pound blue catfish in 2004. In 2005, 97 blues were collected in 40 minutes of DC electrofishing. All sizes of blues up to twenty pounds were collected. Anglers reported good catches of blues up to the 25 pound range and 1 angler reported catching a 42 pound blue. In 2006, 311 blues were collected in 65 minutes electrofishing. All sizes up to 22 pounds were collected. In 2007 we collected 209 in 60 minutes. In 2008 using only 1 boat blues were collected at 113 per hour. Pictures at the boat ramp showed two 43 pound blues that were caught. Reports of blues in the mid 50's have been reported. This program looks very promising.

HENNEPIN CANAL - The Hennepin Canal is a 96 mile long canal which travels through 4 counties. The canal is very shallow, averaging between 4 and 5 feet and is approximately 80 feet wide. The canal is fed by the Rock River at Rock Falls. The canal was never stocked with channel catfish. The catfish came in from the Rock River. The canal has a strong population of 1 to 7 pound channel catfish. Because the canal has such a strong channel catfish population, there is no size or creel limit. Jug fishing is also permitted from sunset to sunrise. The canal offers many anglers enjoyment fishing for channel catfish. The Canal also has a good population of flathead catfish. Flathead catfish as large as 50 pounds have been caught in the Canal.

For more information about location of boat ramps, fishing or camping, contact Hennepin Canal Parkway at 815-454-2328 or write the Hennepin Canal Parkway, 16006 - 875 E Street, Sheffield, IL 61361.

DISTRICT 3: HENDERSON, KNOX, MCDONOUGH, MERCER, AND WARREN COUNTIES

ARGYLE LAKE - This 92.7 acre state lake, located west of Macomb in McDonough County, has been a popular fishing site since construction in 1951. The most recent "creel survey" at Argyle Lake in 2002 (197 day survey) revealed the overall fishing pressure at 154 hours/acre (down from 378 hours/acre in 1995). The 2002 survey also revealed that 945 channel catfish were harvested in the April through September period with an average size of 1.15 pounds. The 1995 creel survey revealed that during a 243 day period a total of 1,492 channel catfish were harvested with an average weight of 1.01 pounds. The 2002 survey data suggest that 1,253 channel catfish were caught & released during the April through September period.

The channel catfish population at Argyle Lake is maintained through annual stockings of 8 inch non-vulnerable size fish due to limited natural recruitment. The 2008 spring trap net and fall electrofishing surveys at Argyle Lake reveal a quality population of one

to five pound fish with individual fish up to 10 pounds. The lake has a daily limit of 6 channel catfish per person.

CITIZEN'S LAKE - This small 26.0 acre public lake, located on the west edge of Monmouth in Warren County is a popular catfishing site for local anglers. The lake has a north basin (8.3 acres) and a south basin (17.7 acres) that are connected by a short channel. The south basin has a maximum depth of 33 feet and the north basin has a maximum depth of 13 feet. Most of the 1.4 miles of shoreline is accessible to bank fishing. However, some of the shallow shoreline may not be accessible during the May and June period due to excessive aquatic plants growth.

The channel catfish population at Citizen's Lake is maintained through annual stockings of 8 inch non-vulnerable size fish due to limited natural recruitment. The 2008 fall electrofishing survey at Citizen's Lake revealed an ample supply of one to four pound fish with individual fish up to six pounds. Recent "creel survey" data is not available for Citizen's Lake; however, angler reports indicate average to good catfishing success. The lake has a daily limit of 6 channel catfish per person.

LAKE STOREY - This 132.5 acre public lake, located at the northwest edge of Galesburg in Knox County has a tradition of good channel catfish fishing during the summer through fall period. Many catfish anglers report their best success during the fall water level drawdown period in mid to late September. A 2007 "creel survey" at Lake Storey revealed that 978 channel catfish were harvested during the April through September period having an average size of 1.8 pounds. The total catch for channel catfish during the survey period was 1,540 fish.

The channel catfish population at Lake Storey is maintained through annual stockings of 8 inch non-vulnerable size fish due to limited natural recruitment. The 2008 spring trap net and fall electrofishing surveys have revealed an excellent density of one to ten pound fish with a few fish up to 12 pounds. The lake has a daily limit of 6 channel catfish per person.

DISTRICT 4: PEORIA, FULTON, AND STARK COUNTIES

ANDERSON LAKE STATE FISH & WILDLIFE AREA - This 1,132 acre bottomland impoundment is adjacent to the Illinois River, 12.5 road miles southwest of Havana. In 2008, catfishing was rated as good by the site staff, with channel catfish averaging 1-3 pounds. Periods of high or rising water can produce excellent fishing for shore anglers and trot lines. In 2009, catfish and bluegill should provide good fishing opportunities. The site has good shoreline access, a new road, and concrete boat ramp. The lake has no horsepower motor limit, but caution is advised due to numerous stumps. Contact the site staff at 309/ 759-4484 about water conditions.

BANNER MARSH - In 2008, the water level of Banner Marsh remained at approximately 1,200 acres. The three major lakes are Johnson (600 acres), Wheel (350 acres), and Shovel (100 acres). All have boat access ramps and a 25 hp limit. A good channel catfish population exists in the three major lakes. Fish range between 1 - 6 pounds with fish over 8 pounds available. Shoreline fishing access is good, but boat fishing is probably the best method to use on these lakes. Due to the clear water, fishing after dark near weedlines and points is most effective with cutbait or large minnows.

CANTON LAKE - The current channel catfish population consists of a high density of fish from 1/3 - 3.0 pounds. The turbid water conditions have permitted natural reproduction and recruitment to maintain a large population of small size fish. From 1997-1999, 992 flathead catfish from 1 to 42 pounds have been stocked into Canton Lake. In 1999 and 2001, 5000 blue catfish at 5 inches long were stocked into Canton Lake. The 2007 spring survey sampled blue catfish up to 28 inches long and 15 pounds. The main forage base of Canton Lake is gizzard shad and would also be a very good bait for catfishing in this lake.

DISTRICT 5: TAZEWELL, MARSHALL, PUTNAM, AND WOODFORD COUNTIES

POWERTON LAKE - This 1426 acre lake was built in the early 1970s and opened for public use in 1983. It was a "perched" reservoir, completely surrounded by levees. Built in a drainage district in the Illinois River bottom, it inundated old drainage ditches. Fill water was pumped through the Commonwealth Edison Powerton Plant and dumped into the lake directly from the Illinois River. For these reasons, Powerton was initially populated with strong year classes of channel catfish. As a result of the rock rip-rap habitat on the shoreline, reproduction of channel catfish and recruitment into the fishery has been quite good until recently. Powerton has all three of the most popular catfish species among sport fishermen, flathead, blue and channel catfish.

In October of 1999 - 35,000 - 4.4 inch blue catfish were stocked at Powerton. Blue catfish were also stocked at Powerton in 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008. In keeping with the trophy fish management at Powerton, it is hoped that these fish will provide additional big catfish angling opportunity in the future. Blue catfish that have been stocked at Powerton in the recent past are present up to 50 pounds in size. They are often confused with large channel catfish. Blue catfish forage on gizzard shad and suckers when they become larger fish. A recent creel survey revealed that over 11 pounds of blue catfish and channel catfish are caught at Powerton Lake per acre per year. The catch rate is .33 pounds of catfish per hour of fishing effort.

Recent population surveys have indicated an increase in channel catfish population density. Condition and plumpness of all the channel catfish sampled has been much improved over the past several years due, in part, to the introduction of threadfin shad.

Good reproduction and recruitment into the population have been observed for each of the past 8 years.. Numbers and growth of channel catfish were positively impacted by the introduction of smallmouth bass in the 1980's. Recent mortality due to extreme warm water temperatures does not seem to have had a major effect on population structure of channel catfish.

The best times to fish are mid-spring (April and May) and late summer (August-September). Best locations are in the warm water discharge in spring and the water intake in the later portions of the year. Best baits are shad and cheese bait. There is a pole and line fishing regulation in place (no multiple hooks). Powerton Lake has no food, fuel or services. There is no horsepower restriction on the lake. Powerton is closed for all fishing during the regular waterfowl season each year.

SOUTH SPRING LAKE - South Spring Lake was rehabilitated in 1986 to remove a very undesirable fish population. Shortly after the restocking of the lake, a major fishery for channel catfish was established. A creel census conducted in 1996 on South Spring Lake showed that 36% of all anglers were fishing for channel catfish. The total catch the year the creel was done showed that 6.6 pounds of catfish were caught per acre. A creel just recently completed indicates a catch rate of 2.9 pounds per acre and 6.7% of the anglers specifically fishing for them. Larger channel catfish caught at South Spring Lake may be marked by way of a fin clip to indicate year of stocking. Non-vulnerable stockings were discontinued several years ago as natural reproduction is sufficient to provide a good, catchable population of fish. The 2008 population samples showed a large number of fish from 2 - 15 pounds present at the lake.

The best fishing for channel catfish occurs along the rock rip-rap levee after dark during the months of June and July. Best baits are minnows, small bluegill (caught lawfully at the site), cut-shad and shrimp. No multiple hook devices are allowed (pole and line only) and a six fish limit applies. Food and boat rental as well as camping are found at Spring Lake. There is a 25 horsepower regulation in effect.

STATUS OF CATFISH FISHERY IN ILLINOIS REGION 2

DISTRICT 6: DUPAGE, KANE, AND MCHENRY COUNTIES

McCULLOM LAKE - Catfish grow well in this 244-acre glacial lake and large fish weighing over 5 lbs. are typically caught by anglers. Non-vulnerable fingerlings ($N = \sim 2,400$; average length = 8 in.) produced by the State hatchery system are stocked annually to maintain the population. A fall 2008 electrofishing and netting survey indicated good survival of stocked catfish over the past 3-4 yrs. Eighteen catfish were sampled and 31% of these fish were over 16 in. long. Nearly 6% of the stock was over 20 in. long. Data from the past several surveys suggest that McCullom Lake should

provide excellent fishing for catfish that are suitable for the frying pan. Two pole and line fishing only is enforced and there is a six fish daily creel limit for channel catfish. Access to this lake is limited to shoreline fishing at several small parks and one small, undeveloped boat ramp. Outboard motors are limited to 9.9 horsepower. A handicap-accessible fishing pier is available in Petersen Park on the lake's northeastern shoreline. Ice fishing is very popular here, in part, because of improved access on the ice. There is an aerator that runs periodically during winter so beware of open water and areas of thin ice.

SILVER LAKE - This DuPage County Forest Preserve District lake has a channel catfish fishery that has been improving in recent years. The District periodically restocks this relatively deep (maximum depth = 35 ft.) reclaimed gravel pit lake with about 3,500 non-vulnerable catfish fingerlings to maintain the population. A spring 2008 electrofishing and netting survey caught 12 catfish that ranged from 11 to 22 in. long and 0.3 to 3.9 lbs. Larger catfish over 25 in. long are regularly caught by anglers. Current regulations include two pole and line fishing only and a 12 in. minimum length limit and three fish daily creel limit for channel catfish. An improved launch, rental boats, and handicap accessible fishing piers are available at this 62-acre lake. Anglers can launch their own non-gasoline-powered boats up to 20 ft. in length.

DEFIANCE LAKE - The channel catfish population had been declining in this 48-acre natural glacial lake located in Moraine Hills State Park due, in part, to a shift in stocking priorities among lakes within District 6. In summer 2005, the lake was again stocked with non-vulnerable catfish fingerlings ($N = 646$; average length = 8 in.) from the State hatchery system to enhance the catfish population. A spring 2006 electrofishing and netting survey produced a good catch of catfish ($N = 27$) for the first time in several years. Sampled catfish ranged in size from 11-24 in. long. Nearly 60% of the sampled catfish were over 16 in. long and 11% were larger than 20 in. long. The largest catfish weighed 5.5 lbs. A spring 2008 survey caught fewer catfish ($N = 3$) that were all less than 16 in. long, but older and larger catfish continue to be caught by anglers. Shoreline fishing at Defiance Lake is limited during summer because of dense shoreline vegetation and abundant submersed plants in shallow areas around fishing piers. Vegetation treatment is not an option due to the presence of State endangered and threatened plants. Boat rental is available through a concessionaire and electric trolling motors are allowed at the lake; gasoline motors are not allowed. Anglers now may launch their own canoes and kayaks for fishing. Check with the park office (815-385-1624) for the most current access information.

DISTRICT 7: LAKE COUNTY

FOX CHAIN O' LAKES - Channel catfish naturally reproduce in the Fox Chain O' Lakes system and maintain their population without supplemental stocking. Catfish are very abundant and under fished in the Chain. They offer tons of fight and are often caught

on small crank baits with trolling for other species. The IDNR commonly collects fish to five pounds whiles sampling in spring trapnets or in fall electrofishing. The Proportional Stock Density (PSD) for catfish has increased to a high of 86% (in 2007) from a low of 7% in 1988. Fish averaged 18.6 inches in 2007 with several fish over 30 inches and 10 pounds. Flathead catfish are present but not abundant in the Fox Chain system, fishermen catch a few fish each summer below the McHenry Dam.

DIAMOND LAKE - This 149.0 acre lake is managed in cooperation with the Mundelein Park & Recreation District and began receiving annual stockings of non-vulnerable fingerling in 1985. Approximately 1700 non-vulnerable channel catfish are stocked annually in Diamond Lake. Stocking were reduced from an initial stocking rate of 50 fish per acre to 25 fish per acre to 10 fish per acre in order to improve fish condition which was low due to overabundance. Condition has rebounded since the stocking reductions and fish are more “plump”. In 2008 Relative Weight values increased to 100.

STERLING LAKE - This small 74.4 acre lake is managed in cooperation with the Lake County Forest Preserve District and began receiving annual non-vulnerable size fingerling stockings in 1986 to establish a catfish fishery. Sterling Lake receives approximately 790 non-vulnerable catfish annually. Creel results from 2003 indicated catfish represented 2% of the harvest and were fifth behind black crappie, bluegill, carp, and walleye. IDNR Survey data reflects this low abundance, gill net catches declined from 8 fish per net night (1993) to 3.5 fish per net night in 2006 and up from a low of 1.5 fish per net night collected in spring 2003. The goal of stocking channel catfish in this lake is to provide a put-grow and take fishery for anglers while diversifying the predator base to control forage species. Channel catfish generally don't reproduce successfully in smaller lakes so require supplemental stocking to maintain their presence.

DISTRICT 8: COOK COUNTY

BUSSE LAKE - This 590 acre lake system is divided into two portions; the Main Lake and South Pool. Both lakes offer ample opportunity to shore fish or bring a small boat (electric motors only) to get away from the crowds. The Lakes' have a 6 fish per day creel limit for channel catfish. This regulation holds true for all Cook County Forest Preserve Lakes as well as a 2 pole and line gear limit. Approximately 6,857 non-vulnerable channel catfish are stocked annually and split between the two Pools annually to maintain their presence and provide some predatory pressure on panfish and forage species. The Pools have a gizzard shad / bluegill forage base so fish are well fed and grow quickly.

SKOKIE LAGOONS - This 190 acre lake system contains 7 lagoons, many are divided by low-head dams and not negotiable by boat. A developed boat launch for small boats (electric motors only) is located on Tower Road and ample shore fishing access

areas are available. Patches of aquatic vegetation and downed timber offer structure that holds fish. The forage base in Skokie Lagoons consists of gizzard shad and bluegill; both are abundant and fatten fish quickly. These Lagoons as well as Busse Lake are about the northern most extent of gizzard shad in Illinois so enjoy these fisheries for what they offer. Insight into which portions of Skokie Lagoons offer better shore fishing opportunities than others can be obtained at one of the local bait and tackle stores. Approximately 2,689 non-vulnerable channel catfish are stocked annually in Skokie Lagoons to maintain their presence and abundance.

WOLF LAKE - This 390 acre urban lake sits on the Illinois - Indiana border and offers a considerable amount of fishable shoreline. Boats are allowed on the lake (motors over 10 hp must remain at a "No Wake" speed). Approximately 16,074 non-vulnerable channel catfish are stocked annually into Wolf Lake to diversify the predator base and provide sportfishing opportunities. Regulations for the lake include a 6 fish per day creel limit and a 2 poles and line gear restriction. Aquatic vegetation can get thick in summer but spring and fall fishing shouldn't be hindered by excessive vegetation.

DISTRICT 9: GRUNDY, KENDALL, WILL, AND KANKAKEE COUNTIES

HEIDECKE LAKE - Once serving as a cooling reservoir for Collins Generating Station, the decommissioning and subsequent demolition of this fossil fuel generating plant has resulted in Heidecke transitioning into an ambient lake. Heidecke Lake is located in Grundy County southeast of Morris and a short drive from the Chicago metropolitan area. A self-sustaining channel catfish population which produces good numbers of desirable-size fish has existed for many years. Unlike some cooling reservoirs, the channel catfish population at Heidecke Lake is not dominated by smaller fish. Similar to most other fish which comprised the 2008 fall survey, the collection of channel catfish dropped off as well; the fall collection declining by 63.8% from the 2006 survey. Gill netting efficiency was down in proportion to the declining catch, falling to 8.0 fish per net-night of effort. The average size channel catfish collected in 2008 showed a slight increase from the previous survey (from 20.2" to 21.0") and eclipsed the long-term average by one inch. During the 2008 spring trap netting survey, a significant number of adult channel catfish were observed dead along the shoreline. Most fish observed were 18 inches in length and larger and appeared to have been dead for some time. The state fish pathologist indicated that this fish mortality was likely due to environmental conditions (possibly gas super-saturation) and not due to virus, bacteria or fungus. In the last comprehensive anglers creel survey (2006) channel catfish were a mainstay and were the second most common fish harvested (3.77 pounds/acre). Channel catfish which were caught by anglers in 2006 had an average weight of 2.9 pounds (approximately a 19-inch fish). When other fish species refuse to bite during the warm summer months, channel catfish will supply the bulk of the angling action on this water area. There is a daily limit of 6 fish per angler and neither flathead and blue catfish are present in Heidecke Lake.

Heidecke Lake is open to fishing from April 1st to mid-October, closing ten days prior to the opening of the North Zone waterfowl season. The lake is open daily from 6:00 a.m. and closes at sunset. A concessionaire located at the boat ramp offers bait and tackle as well as boat and motor rentals. A partially perched cooling lake, Heidecke can become very rough under windy conditions. Water level fluctuations can restrict boat access to the north side of the lake due to restricted clearance beneath the trestle. There are no boat motor horsepower restrictions but boats must have a working gas-powered motor. The bank fishing area access is located at the eastern side of the lake and is handicapped accessible, featuring a barrier-free fishing pier.

BRAIDWOOD LAKE - Located near the town of Braidwood in Will County, Braidwood Lake is a 2,308 acre nuclear generating station cooling reservoir which is open to fishing from March through mid-October. Similar to many other cooling lakes, Braidwood has developed a thriving, self-sustaining channel catfish population. Successful natural reproduction and annually high recruitment have resulted in a population which is generally dominated by smaller, slower growing fish. In the fall of 2007 the intensified IDNR survey produced an overall electrofishing catch rate (CPE) for channel catfish which was more than twice the long-term average. The total collection of channel catfish increased by nearly 77% over the previous survey which was completed in 2005. CPE was actually highest at Station I (typically the warmest portion of the lake) where channel catfish were collected at a rate of 1.32 fish/minute. While the overall average size fish which was collected declined from the previous survey (14.2" in 2005 to 13.2" in 2007) the actual density of quality size and larger channel catfish (16-inch plus) increased. Despite the high number of fish which were collected, little evidence of forage competition was exhibited. Body condition for most all length groups sampled met or exceeded what would be considered average weight.

Channel catfish were the most frequently caught and most commonly harvested species in the 2007 angler creel survey. This same survey estimated an exploitation rate for channel catfish which approached 50% with harvested fish averaging 0.55 pounds (approximate length of 12.4"). Based on the results of the 2007 creel survey, channel catfish ranked first in a number of categories including; total number and total poundage of fish caught, total pounds harvested and most commonly caught species per hour of angling effort. Among anglers interviewed who expressed a preference in terms of their target species, the majority of anglers (39.2%) indicated they were seeking channel catfish. While generally present throughout the lake, angling success for channel catfish in any given area is often affected by water temperature. In the early season, the area off the south access (Kankakee Road) is usually best. As water temperatures warm, anglers should concentrate on current break areas in the northern portion of the lake. There is no daily creel for catfish on Braidwood Lake.

Both flathead and blue catfish have been stocked into Braidwood; flathead catfish in 1992, 1995 and 1996 and blue catfish in 2003, 2006, 2007 and 2008. Flathead catfish are present in low numbers but the recovery of smaller fish in IDNR sampling suggests natural reproduction and recruitment are occurring. Blue catfish stockings generally

involve the release of 5-inch fingerlings at an average rate of just less 5 per acre. Informal interviews conducted with anglers during 2008 indicated that these fish are becoming increasingly prevalent in the angler's creel. In 2006, 39,000 hybrid blue catfish were stocked. Difficult to accurately discern, these fish have likely entered the anglers creel as well but are mistaken for channel catfish. Braidwood Lake has two boat launching facilities, located at opposite ends of the lake as well as extensive bank fishing areas. Boats must have a working gasoline motor and there are no horsepower limitations. Braidwood Lake is open to fishing from March 1st to mid-October, closing ten days prior to the opening of the Central Zone waterfowl season.

STATUS OF CATFISH FISHERY IN ILLINOIS REGION 3

DISTRICT 10: CHAMPAIGN, DEWITT, FORD, IROQUOIS, LIVINGSTON, MCLEAN, PIATT, AND VERMILION COUNTIES

CLINTON LAKE - Channel catfish have been a major part of the fishery in Clinton Lake. Good numbers of catfish ranging in size from 8 to 16 pounds are caught each year. The majority of the catfish are caught in front of the discharge canal which opens to fishing on April 1 of each year. Anglers will also find catfish near the bridge openings that cross the lake. Water depth is good in these areas and there is a slight current coming through the openings. The North Fork area is another favorite spot for anglers seeking catfish. The discharge area of the lake is closed to fishing from October 10 through March 31. Trotline and jug fishing are restricted to the area east of Parnell Bridge in the Salt Creek Arm of the lake, and to the area of the lake located north of the Davenport Bridge in the North Fork Arm of the lake. Trotlines must be attended at least once every 24 hours, and jug anglers must keep their jugs under constant surveillance, picking them up before leaving the lake. Both types of fishing are limited to 50 hooks per licensed angler and all devices must be clearly labeled with the name of the angler and their address. This area serves as a refuge for fish and waterfowl during this time. Fishing off the bridges during this period is permitted, and does offer some good catches of channel and flathead catfish. Major access areas have bulletin boards with area rules, fish creel and size limit regulations and other visitor information posted. All state boating, hunting, fishing and park regulations remain in full force where applicable. Various portions of the lake are designated as no-wake, electric motor only, or no boat areas for safety and security reasons. Areas closed to public access include: the water intake area for the power plant, the spillway and dam areas east of the spillway, and the discharge flume (ditch). Boats and fishermen are not allowed in designated swimming areas when swimming is permitted. Please pay special attention to such areas designated by the maps, posted signs, and buoys. The entire portion of the lake between the DeWitt County Highway 14 Bridge and the Illinois Route 48 Bridge is designated as a fish and waterfowl refuge and is closed to all public use for the period of October 10th through March 31. The land portions of the site in this designated area will still be open for authorized hunting activities (except waterfowl) during this time period. As on all large lakes, Clinton Lake

can become very rough when the wind exceeds 15 m.p.h. All boaters are advised to be aware of the weather. Although there is no horsepower or speed limit on Clinton Lake, shallow areas and underwater hazards do exist in numerous portions of the lake. Boaters should operate their craft accordingly.

DAWSON LAKE - The channel catfish fishery is sustained through stockings from the State Hatchery System. Each year 8" channel catfish are stocked into Dawson Lake. The catfish population is dominated by catfish in the 12 to 24 inch range. The average weight for channel catfish harvested in the latest creel survey was 2.329 pounds. There is always a good number of catfish in the population. Dawson Lake has a two pole and line fishing only regulation and a 6 fish per day harvest restriction on channel catfish.

EVERGREEN LAKE - Channel catfish fishing continues to be fair at this lake. The fish population is self sustaining. Good numbers of catfish ranging in size from 8 to 16 pounds are caught each year. Evergreen Lake has a two pole and line only restriction. Evergreen Lake has two boat ramps and has a 10 horsepower limit on all boats. In order to launch a boat on Evergreen Lake, a sticker must be purchased. The stickers can be purchased at the boat ramps, Comlara Park Visitor's Center, or by calling 309/726-2022.

HOMER LAKE - The channel catfish fishery is sustained through stockings from the State Hatchery System. Each year 8" channel catfish are stocked into Homer Lake. The catfish population is dominated by catfish in the 16 to 24 inch range. The average weight for channel catfish harvested in the latest creel survey was 1.323 pounds. Homer Lake has a two pole and line fishing only regulation and a 6 fish per day harvest restriction on channel catfish.

LAKE BLOOMINGTON - This lake has always been known for its good catfish fishing. Catfish in the 4 to 16 pound range are not uncommon. The upper end of the two arms and the area by the dam provide good places to catch this species. The population is naturally reproducing, and appears to provide good year classes almost every year. Channel catfish fishing is expected to continue to be good. This lake also hosts good numbers of large flathead catfish which can add additional excitement to your fishing trip. Lake Bloomington has a two pole and line only restriction. Lake Bloomington has one boat ramp and charges an access fee. Boats are limited to 40 horsepower. For information on fees and Lake Bloomington call 309/747-2615.

LAKE MINGO - The channel catfish fishery is sustained through stockings from the State Hatchery System. Each year 8" channel catfish are stocked into Lake Mingo. The catfish population is dominated by catfish in the 16 to 23 inch range. The average weight for channel catfish harvested in the latest creel survey was 1.176 pounds. Lake Mingo has a two pole and line fishing only regulation and a 6 fish per day harvest restriction on channel catfish.

LAKE VERMILION - Channel catfish fishing continues to be good at this lake. The fish population is self sustaining. Good numbers of catfish ranging in size from 4 to 6 pounds are caught each year. The majority of channel catfish caught are between 13 and 22 inches. Lake Vermilion has a two pole and line fishing only regulation. Trot lines and jug fishing allowed north of Boiling Springs Road.

WELDON SPRINGS - The channel catfish fishery is sustained through stockings from the State Hatchery System. Each year 8" channel catfish are stocked into Weldon Springs. The catfish population is dominated by catfish in the 12 to 20 inch range. Weldon Springs has a two pole and line fishing only regulation and a 6 fish per day harvest restriction on channel catfish.

**DISTRICT 11: CLARK, COLES, CUMBERLAND, DOUGLAS, EDGAR, MACON,
MOULTRIE, AND SHELBY COUNTIES**

LINCOLN TRAIL LAKE - Is located within Lincoln Trail State Park, approximately two miles south of Marshall in Clark County. The lake covers 146 surface acres with a maximum depth of 35 feet and average depth of 15.9 feet. A 10 h.p. boat motor restriction is in effect. Public boat launching facilities are available. Only eight (8) channel catfish were collected (15-25 inches) in the 2007 fish population survey. Reports from park staff, concession managers, and anglers, indicate that catfish fishing is good. A large number of channel catfish are taken at night. A six catfish/day creel limit exists. Fishing prospects for channel catfish in 2009 are good.

MILL CREEK LAKE - Is located approximately eight miles west of Marshall, in Clark County. The lake covers 811 surface acres with a maximum depth of 60 feet and average depth of 22.7 feet. Public boat launching facilities are available. The Clark County Park District (217-889-3901) collects a boating access fee. From 1996 through 2005 the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Clark County Park District have both stocked channel catfish. 38 channel catfish were collected (14-28 inches) in the 2007 fish population survey. Results from the 2006 angler creel survey indicated that fishermen harvested 4.1 lbs./acre that averaged 3.1 lbs. A six catfish/day creel limit exists. This fishery has developed very well and numerous anglers have reported that they have been able to catch limits of channel catfish. Fishing prospects for 2009 are good.

CHARLESTON SIDE CHANNEL LAKE - Is located approximately three miles southeast of Charleston, in Coles County. The lake covers 330 surface acres with a maximum depth of 16 feet and average depth of 7.7 feet. Public boat launching facilities are available. There is a no wake regulation in effect on the entire lake. 32 channel catfish were collected (12-19 inches) in the 2007 fish population survey. A six catfish/day creel limit exists. Very good fishing for channel catfish exists through maintenance stockings by the IDNR. Fishing prospects for channel catfish in 2009 are good to excellent.

LAKE PARADISE - Is located approximately four miles south of Mattoon in Coles County. The lake covers 176 surface acres with a maximum depth of 16 feet and average depth of 8.5 feet. Public boat launching facilities are available, but are in poor condition. The City of Mattoon (217-234-3611) collects a boating access fee which covers Lake Mattoon as well. A naturally reproducing channel catfish population exists. A good number of catfish were collected (13-28 inches) in the 2004 fish population survey. This lake was not surveyed in 2006 due to low water. During the 2008 fall survey 34 channel catfish ranging from 12 to 26 inches. In addition, three flathead catfish were collected, ranging from 14 to 28 inches. Fishing prospects for channel catfish are rated as good in 2009.

OAKLAND CITY LAKE - Is located on the northeast side of Oakland in Coles County. The lake covers 23.0 surface acres with a maximum depth of 8 feet and average depth of 3.5 feet. Public boat launching facilities are available. Electric motors only are allowed on this lake. 47 channel catfish were collected (10-27 inches) in the 2007 fish population survey. Channel catfish fishing prospects are likely fair to good in Oakland City Lake. A six catfish/day creel limit exists. Fishing prospects for channel catfish in 2009 are good.

COLES COUNTY AIRPORT LAKE - Is located on the south side of Coles County Airport, between Charleston and Mattoon, in Coles County. The lake covers 20.0 surface acres with a maximum depth of 7 feet and average depth of 3.5 feet. Recreational use is restricted to fishing only. No boat launching facility is available. Good fishing for channel catfish exists through maintenance stockings by the IDNR. A six catfish/day creel limit exists.

LAKE MATTOON - Is located approximately eight miles southwest of Mattoon and about 1.5 miles northwest of Neoga, in Shelby, Coles, and Cumberland Counties. The lake covers 1050 surface acres with a maximum depth of 31 feet and average depth of 11.4 feet. Public boat launching facilities are available. The City of Mattoon (217-234-3611) collects a boating access fee which covers Lake Paradise as well. 20 catfish were collected (16-32 inches) in the 2008 fish population survey. Fishing prospects are expected to improve, as 91,700 fingerling (4") channel catfish were stocked into the lake in October 2006. Fishing prospects for channel catfish in 2009 are fair to good.

PANA LAKE - Is located approximately two miles east of Pana in Shelby and Christian Counties. The lake covers 219 surface acres with a maximum depth of 36 feet and average depth of 14.7 feet. Public boat launching facilities are available for the (new) lower lake. The City of Pana (217-562-3626) collects a boating access fee. 12 channel catfish were collected (12-21 inches) in the 2008 fish population survey. A fair to good channel catfish angling exists in the lower (new) lake through maintenance stockings by the IDNR. Fishing prospects for channel catfish in 2009 are fair to good.

WOOD LAKE - Is located on Lake Shelbyville Project Lands, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Flood Control Project, approximately four miles south of Sullivan in Moultrie

County. The lake covers 27.0 surface acres with a maximum depth of 22 feet and average depth of 7.3 feet. A gravel public boat launching facility is available. Electric motors only are allowed on this lake. Fair to good fishing for channel catfish exists through maintenance stockings by the IDNR. A six catfish/day creel limit exists. Fishing prospects for channel catfish in 2009 are excellent, although the lake will be drained and rehabilitated by mid summer in order to repair the overflow pipe.

WALNUT POINT LAKE - Is located in Walnut Point State Park, approximately 3 miles north of Oakland in Douglas County. The lake covers 52 surface acres with a maximum depth of 32 feet and average depth of 12.5 feet. Public boat launching facilities are available. Electric motors only are allowed on this lake. Only 12 channel catfish were collected (10-25 inches) in the 2007 fish population survey. Fair to good fishing for channel catfish exists through maintenance stockings by the IDNR. A six catfish/day creel limit exists. Fishing prospects for channel catfish in 2009 are good.

PARIS TWIN LAKES - Are located on Route 1 on the north edge of Paris in Edgar County. The two lakes have a combined surface acreage of 220 acres. Public boat launching facilities are available. The City of Paris (217-465-7601) collects a boating access fee. Only 7 channel catfish were collected (10-25 inches) in the 2008 fish population survey, which is a lower than average catch rate. Good to excellent fishing for channel catfish exists through maintenance stockings by the IDNR. A six catfish/day creel limit exists. Fishing prospects for channel catfish in 2009 are excellent.

LAKE DECATUR - Is located in Decatur in Macon County. The lake covers 3093 surface acres with a maximum depth of 22 feet and average depth of 6.0 feet. Public boat launching facilities are available. The City of Decatur (217-424-2837) collects a boating access fee. A naturally reproducing population exists, although recently reproductive success appears to be highly variable. A good number of catfish were collected (11-32 inches) in the 2006 fish population survey. Results from the 2006 anger creel survey on Lake Decatur indicate that channel catfish are the most widely sought species on the lake, with catch rates on 0.044/hr. and a harvest rate of 0.84 lbs./ acre. Fishing prospects for channel catfish in 2009 are good. No creel limits exist on this population.

LAKE SHELBYVILLE - Is located in Shelby and Moultrie Counties in east-central Illinois. This lake has a surface area of 11,100 acres, with a maximum depth of 67 feet, and an average depth of 18.9 feet. Public boat launching facilities are available, with a fee assessed on U.S. Army Corp of Engineers' (217-774-3951) boat ramps, and free access on state or gravel ramps. Only 2 channel catfish were collected in the 2008 survey with the largest being 33 inches. Fishermen catch rates were reported a poor in the 2003 fishermen creel survey. The causes for reduced catch rates and numbers are unknown. Currently there are no creel limits on this population. Fishing prospects for channel catfish in 2009 are fair, although the long duration floods coupled with turbid

waters may help channel catfish recruitment in 2008 for better fishing prospect in the future.

STATUS OF CATFISH FISHERY IN ILLINOIS REGION 4

DISTRICT 12: ADAMS, BROWN, CALHOUN, HANCOCK, MORGAN, PIKE, AND SCHUYLER COUNTIES

PITTSFIELD LAKE - Located just East of the city of Pittsfield in the rolling hill country of Pike County, Pittsfield Lake provides a combination of open grasslands and hardwood forested slopes. Channel catfish natural reproduction occurs in the lake, but not enough to sustain a “quality” population. In 2003, 10,000 channel catfish were stocked into Pittsfield Lake ranging from 6 - 8 inches (#5000) and 8 - 10 inches (#5000) to supplement natural reproduction. In 2008, the average channel catfish measured 24 inches as compared to 25.2 inches in length in 2007. The largest individual channel catfish collected in 2007 measured 29.1 inches and weighed 13 pounds; however, in 2008 the largest channel catfish collected measured 30" in length and weighed 14.3 pounds. Channel catfish are heavily fished in Pittsfield Lake second only to largemouth bass. Local anglers have nicknamed one point “Catfish Point” due to the large numbers of fish caught there. A bonus to the channel catfish anglers, a small, reproducing flathead catfish population is present and occasionally large flathead catfish up to 50 - 60 pounds are caught. This city owned lake has established a 25 horsepower limit with a “NO WAKE” restriction. If any boat is equipped with a motor larger than 25 hp, the propeller must be removed. Boat anglers must purchase a lake sticker at City Hall prior to launching.

LAKE JACKSONVILLE - Located in South Jacksonville, this 476 acre lake was rehabilitated and restocked in 1986. This moderately large, recreational lake is intensely utilized by not only largemouth bass tournament anglers but water sport enthusiasts operating ski-jets and sailboats and water skiing as well. Since 1991, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Hatchery System has stocked non-vulnerable size channel catfish (8 - 10 inch) on an annual basis. In 2008, 11,178 non-vulnerable channel catfish were stocked. Annual stockings and the corresponding 6 fish per day creel and 2 pole and line fishing only have resulted in an excellent channel catfish fishery. During the 2008 fall fish survey, all of the channel catfish collected were greater than 12 inches and appear to exhibit “average” body condition. Channel catfish larger than 16 inches comprised 80% of the collection. In 2008, the average channel catfish was 17 inches in length as compared to 2007 when the average channel catfish collected was slightly over 20 inches in length. In 2008, the average weight dropped slightly to 2.0 pounds as compared to the average weight of 3.0 pounds in 2007 which was also a slight decline from 3.7 pounds in 2006. This gradual decline in average weight is thought to be the result of the three previous years of drought conditions. Low water levels exposed the shallow water habitat that provides feeding areas as well; thereby reducing forage intake and overall weight. In 2008, the largest individual

collected was 21 inches in length and weighed 3.3 pounds. Fallen timber and underwater stumps present along the shorelines in Lake Jacksonville provide ideal habitat and cover for this species. The most ideal location to pursue these whiskered critters is in the back, shallow coves in the "NO WAKE" area of the lake. The City of Jacksonville charges a moderate fee for a lake, boat sticker that must be purchased prior to launching.

WEINBERG-KING MAIN LAKE - This small, 3.8 acre lake located within the Weinberg-King State Park in Schuyler County is a moderately fished impoundment. The State Park is well known for elaborate and extensive equestrian trails and fine facilities. After a day of horseback riding many visitors relax and set along the shoreline, tight-lining for channel catfish. Weinberg-King Main is one of many state impoundments receiving annual stockings of hatchery raised, channel catfish in the 8 - 10 inch range. In 2008, Weinberg-King Main received 271 channels from the Illinois State Hatchery System. Due to lake size, fishing pressure and angler harvest, the channel catfish in Weinberg-King are somewhat smaller than other impoundments receiving non-vulnerable channel catfish (NVCC). However; forty-six (46%) of the channel catfish collected during the 2008 survey ranged from 14 to 16 inches in length. Weinberg-King Main provides approximately 80% shoreline access and a large "T" shaped fishing pier extending over the water. There is a 6 fish per day creel limit and 2 pole and line fishing only. There are no boats allowed.

DISTRICT 13: CASS, CHRISTIAN, LOGAN, MASON, MENARD, AND SANGAMON COUNTIES

LAKE SPRINGFIELD - We collected 207 channel cats in total or 23 fish per hour in the fall 2008 electrofishing survey on this 4234 acre lake. That is by far the largest number since standardized sampling began in 1982. Gill nets, which target channel catfish, were not set due to time, budget and man-power constraints. The channel catfish collected ranged in size from 10.0"-26.3" and were in excellent body condition. The largest weighed 8.4 pounds. A creel survey (angler interview survey) was conducted in 2008 but the catch and harvest information from that survey has not been compiled as of this writing. There are numerous channel catfish tournaments held at the lake each year and typically it takes an angler catch of fifty pounds to win an over-night tournament. Lake Springfield remains one of the best channel catfish lakes in the state.

In addition, in the spring of 2005 the Division of Fisheries began a blue cat stocking program. With the help of the local catfish club the lake has been stocked with 146 blue catfish brought from the Mississippi River. Those fish ranged from 3 to 57 pounds when stocked and should be much larger than that by now, given the strong forage base in Lake Springfield. To date no young have been seen so it is still uncertain if they will get off a spawn in the lake.

LAKE SANGCHRIS - This 2165 acre lake is located 20 miles southeast of Springfield. It is a power plant cooling lake and like most cooling lakes it had produced excessive

numbers of channel catfish. From the initial impoundment in the mid 60's to about 1992 the lake produced thousands of fish that ranged from 8"-15". They had slow growth rates and were in poor body condition. This indicates that there were far too many fish for the available forage. In other words the channel cats were "stunted". For some reason, beginning in 1993 we started collecting fewer, various sized individuals up to 5 pounds with the larger fish in good body condition. That trend continues through 2008, although most of the catfish we picked up were under 12.

In addition, Lake Springfield and Lake Sangchris are excellent flathead catfish lakes. Twenty to forty pound individuals are not uncommon. Lake Sangchris produced a 65+ pounder in 1996.

LAKE TAYLORVILLE - This 1286 acre lake in Christian county has long been an excellent channel catfish lake but the IDNR had been hesitant in touting it. There had been a problem with contaminants, in particular chlordane. The channel cats were removed from the Department of Public Health contaminant list for several years early in this decade but for 2009 they have been put back on it for channel cats over 21". No more than one meal per week should be eaten of fish larger than that. There is NO restriction for fish under 21". In the fall 2008 fish population survey 3 channel cats were collected per hour of electrofishing. That is a very poor number but the survey was conducted in late October when the water temperatures had cooled to a level that pushed most of the channel catfish offshore. If gill nets were to be set the numbers would dramatically increase, it is an excellent channel cat lake. Those collected ranged from 14" to 23" and were in excellent body condition.

JIM EDGAR PANTHER CREEK STATE FISH & WILDLIFE AREA - This fish and wildlife area is found in the middle of Cass County. There are three larger lakes and numerous ponds at the site and all have excellent channel catfish populations. Prairie Lake is the largest lake at 210 acres and sports the best channel cat population. In the Spring 2008 survey the channel cats ranged from 12" to 23.3" and were in excellent body condition. The largest weighed nearly 6 pounds. Most were in the 18"-22" range. The catfish populations in Drake and Gridley Lakes are about the same. Both had channels in the same size range and body condition as Prairie. There are about ten ponds on the site that have good channel catfish populations as well, so this site is a great stop for channel cat fishermen. All of the lakes and ponds have excellent bank access as well with walking paths around their perimeter except for Drake Lake. And all the lakes are stocked biennially with 8"-10" channel catfish to supplement their lack of spawning success in smaller lakes.

There are numerous small, state and city-owned lakes in this district that are stocked biennially with 8" channel catfish at rates of 10-50 per acre of water. Those lakes provide excellent channel catfish opportunities. They include: Lakes Williamsville, Mechanicsburg, Kincaid, Ashland, Virginia, Loami, Mt. Pulaski and the Illinois Department of Transportation Lake in Springfield.

DISTRICT 14/15: GREENE, JERSEY, SCOTT, MACOUPIN, AND MONTGOMERY COUNTIES

OTTER LAKE - Twenty-nine channel catfish were found via spring gill netting effort in March of 2008. This total is slightly below the five year mean of 36 catfish boated per sampling year. Captured individuals measured 15.5" to 28", and weighed up to 9.9 lbs. 19 (66%) weighed at least 3 lbs., while 5 (17.2%) exceeded 8 lbs. in total weight. Body condition remains solid with the majority of fish exhibiting large girth. I rate this population as good for the 2009 fishing season.

COFFEEN LAKE - Sixty-two channel catfish were seen via 6 hours of daytime electrofishing in October of 2008. 62 (8.5 fish/hr.) was exactly at the 5 year mean catch rate for this fish group. The catfish caught ranged from 6.5" to 19.0", and weighed up to 2.3 lbs. Reproduction is outstanding as 41 (66%) were less than 12", 4 (6.5%) were at least 16", and 0 measured more than 20" in length. As well, 4 (6.5%) exceeded 1 lb., while 1 (1.6%) topped 2 lbs. in size. Smaller fish are reproducing, and slowly recruiting into the population, but quality catfish are still hard to come by. Most fish captured were on the thin side, and looked to have slower growth. This population is rated below average.

MT. OLIVE OLD CITY LAKE - Nine channel catfish were captured while shocking for 60 minutes during daylight hours in May of 2008. This number fall short of the 5 year mean catch per unit of effort of 16 fish per hour. These fish measured from 17" to 27.5", and weighed 1.7 to 10.1 lbs. in total weight. 6 (67%) weighed 2 lbs., or more, 4 (44%) were 6 lbs., or heavier, and 1 (11%) topped 10 lbs. Even though densities were sub par for this sample, I would consider this population as average for this survey.

GREENFIELD CITY LAKE - Twenty-seven channel catfish were boated during 1 hour of daytime electrofishing effort in October of 2008. This value exceeds the 4 year mean of 17 fish collected using the same effort. The catfish ranged from 12.5" to 28", and weighed up to 9.3 lbs. in weight. 14 (52%) surpassed 2 lbs., 3 (11%) topped 6 lbs, and 2 (7%) were 8 lbs., or more. Abundance is solid in this lake with nice numbers of catchable sized fish available for the angler. I rate this fishery as good for this time frame.

DISTRICT 16: MADISON, ST. CLAIR, AND BOND COUNTIES

GORDON MOORE PARK LAKE - This 13 acre lake, located in Alton, is managed cooperatively by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Alton Parks and Recreation Department. This lake is part of the Urban Fishing Program. Under this program the lake is stocked with catchable size (8-10 inch) channel catfish every two weeks from June through September, at the rate of approximately 1,560 pounds per stocking. The large volume of stocking has created a strong channel catfish population. This lake would be rated as above average for both numbers and size of channel catfish. There is a 6 fish per day creel limit.

GOVERNOR BOND LAKE - This 775 acre water supply lake located in Greenville offers good opportunities for catfish anglers. The most recent survey (fall 2008) showed an excellent channel catfish population in this lake. 38 channel catfish were collected between 14 and 26 inches with an average length of over 19 inches and an average weight of 2.6 lbs. The condition of the fish was good with an average relative weight (Wr) of 96. Six flathead catfish were also collected. The average weight was 27.6 and the largest flathead collected was over 44 lbs! The lake has no creel or length limits for catfish. A city permit is required for boat access with a 120 hp motor limit.

SILVER LAKE - This 550 acre water supply lake located in Highland offers good opportunities for catfish anglers. The most recent survey (fall 2006) produced 26 channel catfish ranging in length from 16 to 31 inches. The average weight of the fish collected was 5.6 pounds. The lake has no creel or length limits for catfish. A city permit is required for boat access.

DISTRICT 17: CLINTON, MONROE, RANDOLPH, AND WASHINGTON COUNTIES

WASHINGTON COUNTY LAKE - This lake consistently produces some nice catches of larger channel catfish. During our population survey conducted in 2008, we collected 25 catfish during two hours of electrofishing. The average channel catfish weighed 2 lbs, and the largest fish weighed 4 lbs. Channel catfish can reach 12 lbs in this lake, and there are many fish in the 4 to 8 lb weight range. Most of the catfish were collected in shallow coves around woody structure. The population is rated as excellent. Fishing should continue to be good for this species in 2009. There is a 6 fish daily creel limit on channel catfish.

BALDWIN LAKE - This thermally enriched body of water has a channel catfish population that is characterized by excess reproduction and recruitment. The end result is a large, slow growing population, composed primarily of small individuals. The last creel census in 1996 showed that the average size of channel catfish harvested by anglers was under 1/2 pound in weight. Our fisheries surveys generally confirm this, with a few fish weighing 1 to 2 pounds. There are, however, some other species of catfish that grow exceptionally well, and to very large sizes. These are the flathead and blue catfish. Our latest population survey showed numerous blue cats in the 2.5 to 13.5 pound weight range, with the average blue cat weighing 8 lbs. The largest blue cats observed in the past weighed an estimated 65 to 70 lbs. Flatheads were collected in the 3 to 23 pound weight range, with the average flathead weighing 9.5 lbs. Flatheads can attain 50 lbs or more in this lake. Both species are plentiful, however, one must often battle small channel catfish going after the bait. The flathead and blue catfish populations are rated as very good, while the channel catfish population is rated as poor. There is no creel limit for catfish in this lake.

RANDOLPH COUNTY LAKE - This lake has a good population of channel catfish. Our survey showed that the average cat weighed 2 lbs, and the largest catfish weighed 5 lbs. The coves and upper end of the lake near the marsh are good spots to catch this

species. The population is rated as good. A 6 fish daily creel limit applies.

CARLYLE LAKE - The channel catfish population continues to look very good. Our survey showed that the average channel cat weighed 3.7 lbs compared to 3.5 lbs in 2007. Condition of these fish was excellent, much better than in 2007. This is due to the high water which allowed the catfish to feed in a multitude of different habitats, combined with the great shad population which was also utilized as forage by the channels. The flathead catfish population also looks very good. We continue to pick up high numbers of young of the year of this species. Flatheads exist in several different size classes in the lake. Everything from 1 and 2 lb fish up to some real monsters. The largest flathead collected during our survey weighed 42 lbs. Fishing should be very good to excellent for these species. There is no creel limit for catfish in this lake.

STATUS OF CATFISH FISHERY IN ILLINOIS REGION 5

DISTRICT 18: CLAY, EFFINGHAM, FAYETTE, JEFFERSON, MARION, AND WAYNE COUNTIES

FORBES LAKE - Natural reproduction is not expected to maintain a quality fishery in this 525 acre impoundment and 6,300 non-vulnerable sized fish were released. Two fish from this stocking were collected in the fall survey. Fish ranging from 14 to 20 inches in length were most abundant averaging 1.59 pounds at 18 inches, with the largest collected 22.4 inches in length at 3.39 pounds.

SAM DALE LAKE - Natural reproduction is not expected in this 198 acre impoundment and 5,600 non-vulnerable sized fish were stocked, one of which was collected during the fall survey. Fish ranging from 15 to 21 inches in length were most abundant averaging 2.4 pounds at 19 inches. The largest collected was 28.9 inches in length at 11.24 pounds.

RAMSEY LAKE - Natural reproduction is not expected in this 46 acre impoundment and 1,800 non-vulnerable sized fish were stocked, two of which were collected in the fall survey. Fish ranging from 14 to 22 inches in length were most abundant averaging 2.00 pounds at 18 inches. The largest sampled was 25.5 inches in length at 6.15 pounds.

DISTRICT 19: CRAWFORD, EDWARDS, JASPER, LAWRENCE, RICHLAND, AND WABASH COUNTIES

SAM PARR LAKE - The channel catfish fishery in this 180-acre lake in Jasper County remains in great shape. Although the total number of fish is down, data from the fall 2008 population survey indicate fish in the 1.5 - 4.5 lb range remain abundant and larger fish to ten pounds remain common. Growth rates for channel catfish in this lake

remain good and angling prospects for the coming year look great. This lake provides excellent bank fishing opportunities, and is a good location to catch a limit of quality size channel catfish. The best places to fish include the rip-rap along the dam, the upper ends of the two main arms of the lake, and in the backs of coves.

NEWTON LAKE - Natural reproduction of channel catfish in this 1,750 acre cooling lake is tremendous, and this has produced an over-abundance of channel catfish less than 1-lb. Growth rates and the condition of these smaller fish improved significantly over the past year, and improved even more for larger fish. Despite the improvement smaller fish still dominate the population. Anglers can still expect the majority of their catch to be comprised of fish under 2 lbs. with larger fish up to 6 lbs contributing to the catch. Because of their abundance, there are no daily creel or size limits for channel catfish in Newton Lake. The warm temperatures in this cooling lake provide excellent fishing opportunities year-around. Bank fishing opportunities have been expanded to include the shoreline bordering all non-restricted areas of the lake. The lake has a 25 h.p. limit, and the cold arm of the lake is closed to fishing during the waterfowl season. The entire lake is closed to fishing each fall during the regular firearm deer season.

REND LAKE - The fishing prospects for channel catfish remain excellent for the coming year. Natural reproduction and recruitment continue to be very strong, and are responsible for maintaining the large population of fish in the lake. Data from the 2008 population survey show catch rates for channels remain well above the 10 year average. Channel catfish from 1 - 2 lbs are abundant, and fish up to 7 lbs are common. Larger fish are also present. The condition of these fish remains fair and growth rates are good. This is one of the premier lakes in the state for channel catfish, and should be on your list of places to fish for channels in 2009. Drift fishing the flats or near the mouths of the larger coves with shrimp, cut shad, shad gut, or leeches works extremely well. Bank fishing near or in the sub-impoundments or along the rip-rap is also productive, especially during the warmer months.

DISTRICT 20: GALLATIN, HAMILTON, HARDIN, POPE, SALINE, AND WHITE COUNTIES

HARRISBURG NEW CITY RESERVOIR - Harrisburg New City Reservoir is located approximately one mile east of Galatia and has a surface area of 209 acres. The lake has a maximum depth of 30 feet and an average depth of 10 feet. Channel catfish fishing in Harrisburg New City Reservoir is very good. The reservoir is supplementally stocked each year with non-vulnerable channel catfish which helps sustain the population. A wide range of catfish were collected during population surveys ranging from 0.50 pounds up to 12 pounds. Abundant forage and supplemental stocking will maintain a strong channel catfish population and good fishing for many years. A 6 fish daily creel limit applies.

JONES STATE LAKE - This lake is located in southern Illinois five miles southeast of Equality on the Saline County Conservation Area. The 105 acre lake has a maximum

depth of 35 feet and an average depth of 13 feet. Channel catfish fishing in Jones Lake is very good. A strong catfish population is maintained by yearly supplemental stockings of non-vulnerable channel catfish. Catfish collected during fish population surveys range from 0.50 pounds to 10 pounds. A 6 fish daily creel limit applies.

DISTRICT 21: ALEXANDER, JACKSON, PERRY, PULASKI, AND UNION COUNTIES

KINKAID LAKE - This 2750-acre lake is located five miles northwest of Murphysboro in Jackson County. Better known for its muskie population, this lake also has an unusually high population of channel catfish that are basically under harvested. During spring fish sampling, many catfish in the 2-5 pound category are seen. Fish up to 20 pounds are probably present. During summer months, channel catfish are commonly caught on crank baits by bass anglers. Trot lines and jugs are legal and commonly produce high catch rates of all sizes of channel catfish. There is no creel limit for channel catfish on this lake.

LAKE MURPHYSBORO - This 145-acre state park lake is located two miles west of Murphysboro in Jackson County. Lake Murphysboro has been stocked annually with non-vulnerable channel catfish for over a decade. These channel catfish measure 8"-10" when stocked in the fall and opportunities exist to catch channel catfish up to 15 pounds. Creel limits of 6 fish per day are common for experienced anglers from late spring through early fall. Approximately 1450 channel catfish are stocked into this lake each year. The lake has a 10 HP limit on motors.

DISTRICT 22: FRANKLIN, JOHNSON, MASSAC, AND WILLIAMSON COUNTIES

Crab Orchard Lake - Crab Orchard Lake is a 6965-acre federal impoundment located in Williamson County approximately one mile south of Carterville. The channel catfish population in Crab Orchard Lake is self-sustaining and has not required supplemental stocking to maintain an excellent fishery. Fall 2003 - 2005 surveys produced six channel catfish per hour of electrofishing, while five were collected per hour in 2006 and 2007, and that number increased to seven in 2008. The proportion of channel catfish which were larger than 16 inches in length was 100% during the period of 2002 through 2006, 90% in 2007, and rebounded to 97% in 2008. The percentage exceeding 22 inches has remained in the 40 to 50% range during the past eight years.

A portion of Crab Orchard Lake east of Wolf Creek Road is closed to boat traffic October 1 to March 15 to reduce disturbance of resting waterfowl, and the extreme south end of Grassy Bay is closed from April through June for a spawning sanctuary. All anglers are required to obtain a refuge user permit. For information, contact: Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge, 8588 Rt. 148, Marion, IL 62959 (618/997-3344).

STATUS OF CATFISH FISHERY IN ILLINOIS RIVERS

ILLINOIS RIVER - The channel catfish resources of the Illinois River are well known. A quality fishery for channel catfish is found in numerous locations. Some of those deserving recognition are the tailwater of the Peoria Lock and Dam, the Peoria Narrows, East River, Marshall County Conservation Area, Starved Rock and near Hennepin. There is a fish consumption advisory for channel catfish from the Peoria Pool to the head waters of the Illinois River. Fishing gear for sport fishermen on the Illinois River can include trot lines and jugs (restricted to a fifty hook limit per license).

ROCK RIVER - A survey of the Rock River Basin was undertaken in the summer of 2008 to determine the status and distribution of fish and aquatic invertebrates, and to determine the quality of the water, habitat, and substrates within the basin. As part of this survey, fish were collected at 23 locations throughout the basin using both an electric seine (wadeable sites), and a boat electrofishing unit (non-wadeable sites). Channel catfish were collected at all 9 Rock River main-stem locations and at 7 of the 14 tributary sites. In all a total of 258 channel catfish were collected. The best populations in the Rock River were found near South Beloit, below the dam in Oregon, and just upstream of the boat launch in Erie. The best populations in the tributaries were found in Pine Creek, with Rock Creek and Elkhorn Creek close behind.

The data from this survey is summarized below. The stock size for channel catfish is 11". This is the size at which channel catfish are usually first caught by anglers, and the size at which the fish are considered to be part of the population, i.e. no longer young fish and extremely vulnerable to predation. A total of 216 fish were larger than 11", with only 42 young fish (less than 11") collected. The size that most anglers consider quality size, or a good size for keeping is 16". Of the 258 fish collected, 99 were greater than 16". The preferred size is the size most anglers would prefer catching which is 24". Only 3 fish were over 24" in length although 26 of the fish were larger than 20", which is a pretty good size! From this data it appears that there are good numbers of smaller channel catfish in the river, with larger fish present but in lower numbers. The PSD (proportional stock density) is good and within the acceptable range, as is the RSD24 (Relative Stock Density for 24" fish). However, electrofishing is not the most effective method for collecting channel catfish, so this survey may be biased towards the smaller fish which inhabit the shallower areas of the river where electrofishing is used.

Table 1. Total number of channel catfish in each size category collected from the Rock River and its tributaries during the summer of 2008.

| Total < 11 inches | Total > 11 inches | Total > 16 inches | Total > 24 inches |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 42 | 216 | 99 | 3 |

PSD = Total >16"/ Total > 11" X 100 = 99/216 X 100 = 46% (Target 30-50)

RSD24" = Total > 24"/ Total > 11" X 100 = 3/216 X 100 = 1.4% (Target 1-5)

When calculating the catch per unit of effort (CPUE), only the total number collected from the main stem stations was used since many of the tributaries were too small to support channel catfish in any number. A total of 460 minutes of electrofishing time was completed on the main stem stations of the Rock River, and a total of 198 channel catfish were collected during this time. This represents a CPUE of 0.43 fish/ minute, which is an excellent catch of channel catfish using electrofishing. Most often channel catfish are collected using large hoop nets as opposed to electrofishing. Overall, it appears that there are excellent numbers of channel catfish in the Rock River with an adequate size structure to support excellent fishing prospects.

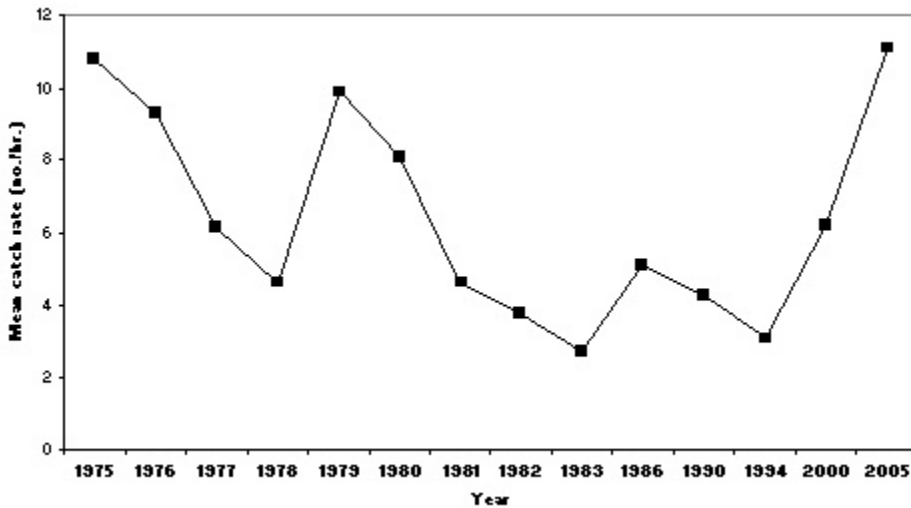
Flathead catfish were collected from the Rock River in October, 2006 using commercial hoop nets. The nets were set and pulled after 72 hours on three separate days. On the first two days all fish were fin clipped to determine the recapture rate. The results of this study along with a comparison of previous year's data are presented below.

| YEAR | # Stock >11" | Total > 16.1" PSD | Total > 24" RSD1 | Total > 28" RSD2 | Total >36" RSD3 |
|------|--------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1999 | 227 | 99.1 | 75.3 | 59.0 | 24.2 |
| 2001 | 365 | 98.9 | 86.0 | 74.5 | 37.0 |
| 2003 | 355 | 98.3 | 78.0 | 64.5 | 38.6 |
| 2006 | 945 | 100.0 | 56.3 | 29.1 | 12.6 |

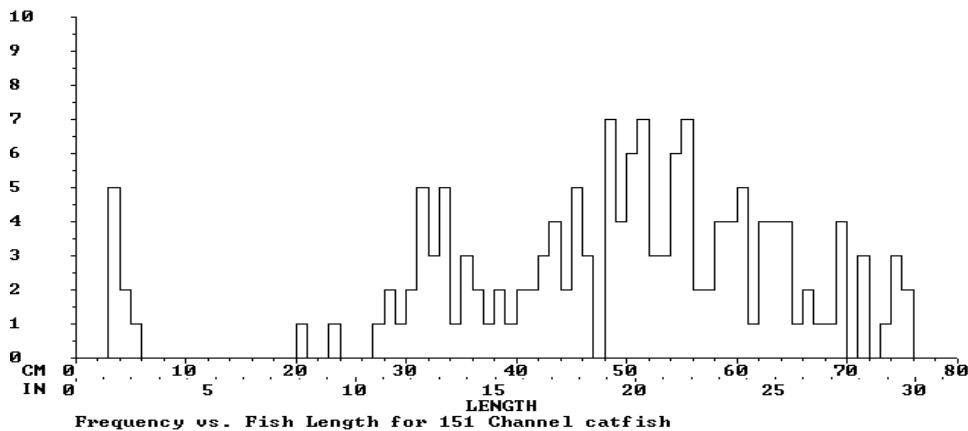
As the data indicates, reproduction and recruitment for flathead catfish in the Rock River is outstanding. In 2006 a record number (945) of flatheads were collected over the 9 day sampling period. Due to the large mesh size on the nets, all of these fish were greater than 11" (stock size), and most, if not all were over 16" in most years. The RSD1 (24") of 56.3% is outstanding! This is the preferred size of fishermen and the target is to have at least 10% of the population in this range. The RSD2 (28") is considered memorable and RSD3 (36") is considered a trophy catch. In all but 2006, over 1/4 of the fish collected were in the trophy category. In 2006 considerably more fish were collected which would decrease the % of trophy fish accordingly. However, 12.6% of the fish collected or 119 fish were still trophy size! The Rock River has long been known as a trophy flathead catfish fishery and this data indicates that the title is well deserved.

SPOON RIVER - The Spoon River meanders for a distance of 160 miles through Stark, Knox, Peoria, and Fulton Counties in western Illinois. Sampling from 1995 through 1998 revealed healthy channel catfish and flathead populations throughout the length of the river. Public boat access, a limitation on the Spoon, has been improved very slightly by construction of a new ramp at London Mills.

KANKAKEE RIVER - Mean catch rate for channel catfish in 2005 was 11.0 fish per hour at all 13 mainstem stations, the highest rate recorded over the period 1975 - 2000 (see figure below). Channel catfish were found at all locations, but were more abundant at the higher gradient stations at Momence Island Park and within the Kankakee River State Park. The population was dominated by larger, older individuals (see graph below) with 72% of the individuals having a length of 16 inches or larger. Catch rate had been very low over the last several surveys since 1986 but increased in both 2000 and 2005. However, no significant trend was observed over the collection period from 1975-2005. Young of the year were collected indicating recent spawning success.



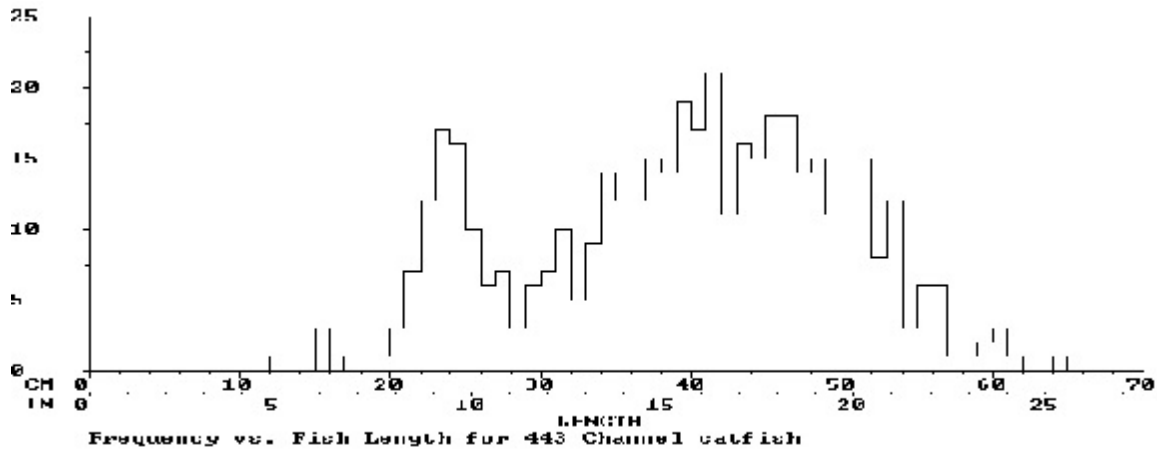
Mean catch rate (no./hour boat electrofishing) for channel catfish in the Kankakee River mainstem (13 stations), 1975-2005.



Length frequency distribution for channel catfish from the Kankakee River mainstem, 2005. All 13 stations and collection gears combined.

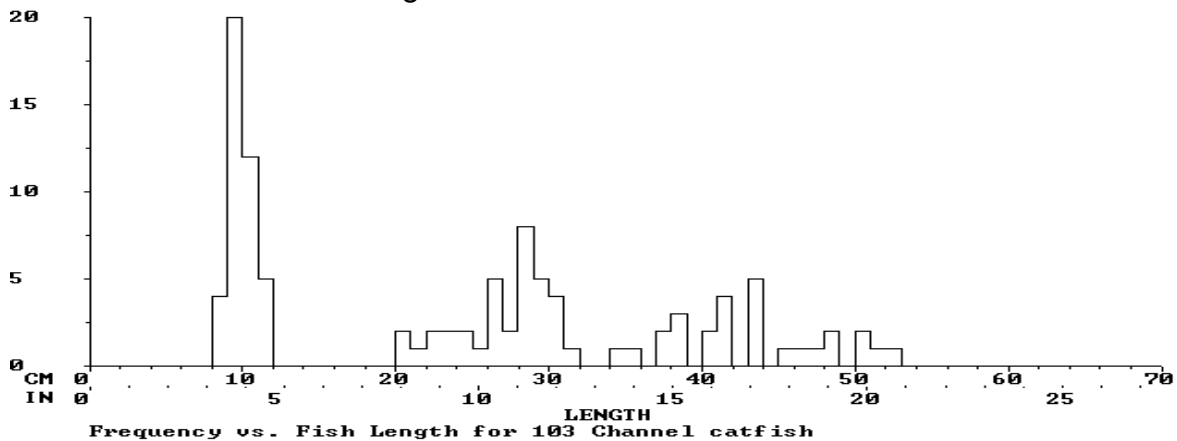
FOX RIVER - Mean catch rate for the 2007 survey on the Fox River mainstem was 31.6 fish per hour, compared to an average of 23.0 collected in 2002. Channel catfish

were found at all 14 locations in 2007, with the highest catch at Wedron (59/hour). Other spots with catch rates over 40 per hour included: McHenry, Elgin, Geneva, and Milbrook. Over 50% of the population was 16 inches or larger in length (see graph below). Catch rate for fish 20 inches or longer was 3.6 per hour. No young of the year were collected by boat electrofishing or seining, indicating poor reproduction in 2007. Samples were taken in early July, therefore, it is also possible young of the year were not yet vulnerable to collection gear due to a late spawn.



Length-frequency distribution for channel catfish from the 2005 Fox River mainstem survey. Electrofishing and seine gears combined.

DES PLAINES RIVER - Channel catfish were very abundant at two locations on the Des Plaines River sampled in 2005. These segments at Riverside and Romeoville are higher gradient than most of the river and are very productive for game fishes. Catch rate was 53 per hour at Riverside and 106 per hour at Isle la Cache. Most of the fish at Isle la Cache, a very shallow area collected by backpack shocker, were young of the year, indicating good reproduction. The Riverside collection was composed of larger fish with no young of the year present. This area was sampled with boat electrofishing which tends to select for larger individuals.



Length-frequency distribution for channel catfish from the 2005 Des Plaines River surveys at Riverside and Romeoville.

EMBARRAS RIVER - The Basin Survey conducted in 2006 produced a low number catfish upstream of Lake Charleston and relatively big populations downstream of the lake. Highest numbers of both channel catfish (37 per hour of electrofishing) and flathead catfish (6 per hour) were obtained on the Embarras River mainstem at St. Marie. Numbers collected from the tributaries were negligible. All fish collected were rather small, with the largest channel catfish at 18 inches and the largest flathead catfish at 19 inches. Despite poor sampling results, fishermen still report catching the occasional large catfish from the river. A few ramps along the river will accommodate small boats and canoes. The river is generally shallow throughout its length as well.

UPPER SANGAMON RIVER - A basin survey was conducted in 2008 on the Sangamon River Basin. Only 17 channel catfish were collected from the Upper Sangamon River Basin. Catch rates were generally low at most sampling sites. Our highest catch of 7 channel catfish came from Mosquito Creek, but these were all small in the 5.5 to 13.5-inch range. Our highest mainstem river catch rate of 4 per hour was collected at Monticello. These fish ranged from 9.5 to 19.5 inches. A flathead catfish that weighed in at 11.2 pounds was also collected at this site. The Mahomet site also produced a couple of channel catfish in the 10 to 23-inch range.

UPPER AND MIDDLE KASKASKIA RIVER - The Kaskaskia River basin was surveyed in 2007. Five mainstem river sites sampled above Lake Shelbyville produced 0 to 8 channel catfish per hour, with the largest weighing about 2.5 pounds. Only one flathead catfish was collected above the lake. Results were much better between Lake Shelbyville and Carlyle Lake. Five mainstem river sites were sampled between the lakes, producing 7 to 61 channel catfish per hour. The largest channel catfish collected was about 3.8 pounds. Ten flathead catfish were also collected. All were on the small side up to about 3 pounds.

LOWER KASKASKIA RIVER - Excellent opportunities for catfishing can be found in the nearly 95 miles of Kaskaskia River downstream of Carlyle Lake. Channel catfish are most abundant, but flatheads are not far behind in catch rates and the occasional blue cat, while rare, can reach prodigious size. The Carlyle Lake tailwater is most heavily fished, and yields many channels in the one to five lb range. Monster flatheads over 25 lbs congregate in the faster, rocky section near the Gen Dean suspension bridge. The natural, meandering channel between Carlyle and Fayetteville (about 60 river miles) is not nearly as heavily used by anglers. However, bank sets and hoop nets are commonplace, especially near the many clubhouses situated along this stretch. Boating here can be tricky, especially during lower summer flows given the number of sandbars and downed trees. However, a sturdy john boat can access the entire river and the abundant instream habitat (bankholes, brush piles, rootwads) can yield more than enough channels and flatheads to make it worthwhile. Best places to fish are the 10-15 ft deep "holes" usually situated in the outside of meander bends.

For sheer numbers (and size) of cats, the 36 mile navigation channel below Fayetteville is tough to beat. Here, streamflow is virtually non-existent due to the lock and dam less than a mile from the Kaskaskia's mouth. Without having to contend with current, catfish can devote more energy to body growth, especially given the abundance of shad and

young sunfish in this lake-like setting. Downstream of New Athens, the navigation channel is 10-20 ft deep at its midpoint although most of the habitat (riprap, submerged willows) can be found along the banks where channel cats in the prime "eating size" (one to three lbs) are plentiful. Our most recent electrofishing survey (2007) found channels most plentiful near Evansville while flatheads appeared in greatest numbers upriver near New Athens. Not to be overlooked are the two dozen oxbow "lakes" still connected to the main river at their lower ends. Here may be the best combination of depth (15 ft or more) and woody habitat in the entire river system. Our largest single flathead, well in excess of 50 lbs, was taken from an oxbow near Baldwin. While not nearly as plentiful, blue cats tend to hang in these deeper holes as well.