



Illinois Department of Natural Resources

One Natural Resources Way Springfield, Illinois 62702-1271
www.dnr.illinois.gov

Bruce Rauner, Governor
Wayne A. Rosenthal, Director

As we head into 2018, I wanted to share some 2017 highlights from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources' Division of Fisheries. Thanks to angler support through programs like the Illinois Fish Management Fund and the Wildlife and Fish Fund (fishing license sales and Illinois' share of the federal excise tax on fishing equipment), we are working to improve fishing opportunities, fish habitat and fisheries management in Illinois, without reliance on funding from Illinois' General Revenue Fund (GRF). As you will read, challenges remain but we are making progress and look forward to our future.

- Our most important resource in fisheries management is our people. The Division of Fisheries has seen a significant number of retirements during the past 15 to 20 years (from 146 people to 54, plus an additional 10 in the Asian Carp crew). Thanks to angler support, the Division added staff in 2017, has five more individuals at various points in the hiring process, and hopes to fill eight more vacant positions in the near future.
- Jake Wolf Fish Hatchery: We replaced the alarm system for all raceways (external and internal) and ponds. This system monitors water chemistry levels and lets the managers know what and where problems may occur. Also, new electric lines have been run to all the wells, meaning hatchery personnel no longer have to drive to the wells to make sure they are operating correctly. We replaced a brick facade on the front of the building that had fallen. In 2018, hatchery lights will be replaced with more efficient LED lighting. Numerous other projects will also be completed at Jake Wolf.
- Little Grassy Fish Hatchery: We will fix a ground subsidence issue that has made it difficult to drive around the ponds. A new hauling truck and new tractor for the hatchery are in the works, as well.
- La Salle Fish Hatchery: After 40 years, the office trailer has been replaced with a new one that has running water and a restroom. A new fish hauling truck was put into service in 2017. As with Little Grassy, a new tractor is in the works for the La Salle hatchery. All three state hatcheries also received much-needed heavy duty ATVs in 2017.
- A large pole barn is being built at the IDNR Havana Field Station for indoor storage of Fisheries equipment. Replacement Fisheries boats and motors were purchased in 2017, with more scheduled for this year.
- We continued the Alligator Gar reintroduction program in 2017 and will continue it into the future. We will monitor that recovery to assess the progress of the reintroduction program.
- We are developing a Division of Fisheries app for mobile devices, and hope to have it up and running by April 1 for the new fishing season.
- Through a contract with our colleagues at the Illinois Natural History Survey, INHS continues to manage the popular I Fish Illinois website www.ifishillinois.org, and updates it at a moment's notice. Be sure to check out this great website and its accompanying Facebook page. Also, important research studies are being conducted for the Division of Fisheries by scientists at the Illinois Natural History Survey, Eastern Illinois University, Western Illinois University and Southern Illinois University.

- As always, our Urban Fishing staff outdid themselves in 2017. The urban, classroom and other special programs and fishing clinics conducted in 2017 were attended by nearly 90,000 people. That is amazing, considering that just three full-time Urban Fishing coordinators run the programs, with help from 15-20 summer interns for urban fishing clinics from Chicago to Carbondale.
- The Division's Asian Carp crew, working with commercial fishers under contract, removed approximately 1 million pounds of Asian Carp from the Dresden Island, Marseilles and Starved Rock pools of the Illinois River in 2017. These pools are at the leading edge of the Asian carp migration up the Illinois River. This program has been underway for six years and works to keep Asian Carp from entering Lake Michigan. This brings the total to more than six million pounds of Asian Carp removed from the Illinois waterway during those years. These three pools are two pools below the electric barrier. One Asian carp was found by our crew above the electric barrier in June 2017, which prompted a rapid response that collected and released thousands of (native) fish over a two-week period, but no additional Asian carp were found. The Asian Carp crew is to be congratulated on their efforts in that response, and to their annual collection of million pounds of invasive Asian carp.
- Our field biologists, while fewer in number (16), continued their good work on the state and public lakes and streams and rivers throughout the state in 2017. While with fewer biologists we obviously can't get to as many sites as we did when we were fully staffed (37), they do a great job.
- Our Lake Michigan team continues their monitoring and management of the big lake. Sadly, we lost Burt Atkinson, our boat captain of 40 years, in 2017, but his son has agreed to take his place as needed for our off-shore netting surveys. We are fortunate to have him. For those that don't know, Lake Michigan is a completely different animal from any of our other lakes, with dozens and dozens of interested, passionate constituent groups, as well as numerous State, tribal and Provincial (Canada) sovereign entities with authority over the lake. Lake Michigan management is a difficult task, and I commend Vic Santucci, Steve Robillard and Dan Makauskas for the great work they do in our Lake Michigan program.
- Our Commercial Fishing Program continues to permit and monitor the statewide commercial fish harvest, including the roe-take for the caviar industry. Many don't realize that we have a large caviar industry in Illinois waters.
- In closing, I want to offer a special thanks to the IDNR Division of Fisheries administrative team: Kevin Irons (Asian Carp), Mike McClelland (Statewide Biologists), Vic Santucci (Lake Michigan), Ed Hansen (retired, La Salle Hatchery), Steve Krueger (Jake Wolf Hatchery), John Zeigler (and Rick Smith, retired, Little Grassy Hatchery), Rob Miller (Region 1-2 Administrator), Randy Sauer (Region 3-4 Administrator) and Mike Hooe (retired, Region 5 Administrator). And, thanks to Jana Hirst, who will replace Mike Hooe in the coming year as Region 5 Administrator. We are all dedicated to working together to improve fishing opportunities in Illinois.

Thanks for your support of the IDNR Division of Fisheries, and best wishes for 2018!

Dan Stephenson, Chief
IDNR Division of Fisheries