



Crab Orchard Lake

Fisheries Fact Sheet

Crab Orchard Lake is a 6965-acre impoundment located in the Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge between Marion and Carbondale in Williamson County Illinois. The Crab Orchard Lake fishery is cooperatively managed by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Largemouth bass: The bass fishing forecast for Crab Orchard Lake is good to very good, which represents improvement over that of one year ago. The proportion of largemouth bass larger than the 16-inch minimum size limit had been more than 20% since 2004, but the fall 2016 survey produced a sample in which 16% were larger than 16 inches. In 2017, however, the percentage of bass larger than 16 inches bounced back to 22%. Of these, 7% were also larger than 18 inches, a slight increase over the previous year. Largemouth bass abundance in the 2017 sample decreased slightly compared to the previous year from 113 to 101 per hour of electrofishing, but the general management plan goal of 60 per hour was easily met. Body condition of largemouth bass in Crab Orchard Lake has remained excellent. General good condition of the Crab Orchard Lake bass population in recent years can be at least partially attributed to a combination of more stringent harvest regulations, increased bass fingerling and threadfin shad stocking, habitat enhancement (through fish attractor installation and vegetation planting), and establishment of a spawning refuge area with artificial spawning substrates. The Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge is also limiting each bass club to one fish-off event per year to reduce angling pressure and angler conflicts.

Bluegill: Although the abundance of Crab Orchard Lake bluegill decreased somewhat in 2017 compared to that of the previous year (288 versus 345 collected per hour of electrofishing), the proportion of fish over 6 inches in length increased from 44 to 66% and easily exceeded the management goal for the fourteenth year in a row. The proportion of bluegill larger than seven inches also increased from 12 to 27%. Bluegill body condition remained excellent, indicating another good forecast for bluegill anglers.

Channel catfish: Crab Orchard Lake channel catfish quality and body condition, similar to previous years, were excellent, and 67% of the fish collected were larger than 22 inches in length.

Crappie: The percentage of white crappie larger than 8 inches remained high in 2017 at 92%, and 73% of black crappie were larger than this size. The percentage of white crappie larger than ten inches in length was fair to good at 27, while only 2% of black crappie in the sample achieved that size. Body condition of both white and black crappie was near the lower end of the management plan goal range. Crappie smaller than 10 inches in length tend to be overabundant in Crab Orchard Lake, and anglers are encouraged to remove these fish to thin the population and improve the quality of the fishery.

White bass: Numbers of Crab Orchard Lake white bass collected during the fall 2017 survey, although relatively small at 12 fish per hour of electrofishing, represented the second highest in twelve years, and the proportion over 10 inches (94%) was impressive. Fish in the sample ranged in size from 5 to 15 inches, and 63% were larger than 12 inches, while 9% exceeded 14 inches. White bass body condition was similar to that of the previous year, and did not meet the management plan goal.

Regulations in effect: Largemouth bass -- 16 inch (41 cm) min length limit, 3 per day creel limit. No other size or creel limits are in effect. Consult the Illinois Fishing Information booklet for additional regulation information.

Fees: A user permit is required to access the Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge, and a special use permit is required for competitive events. Information may be obtained by calling the refuge visitor center at 618-997-3344.

Additional Fisheries Information may be obtained by calling IDNR District Biologist Chris Bickers at 618-993-7094.