

STARVED ROCK & MARSEILLES POOLS ILLINOIS RIVER

2024 FISHERIES FACT SHEET

The Illinois River is formed at the confluence of the Des Plaines and Kankakee rivers near Channahon. It flows southwest for 273 miles across the state to enter the Mississippi River at Grafton. There are five dams along the Illinois forming pooled reaches named (upstream to downstream) the Dresden Pool, Marseilles Pool, Starved Rock Pool, Peoria Pool and La Grange Pool. The downstream reach is called the Alton Pool because it is influenced by Mel Price Lock and Dam on the Mississippi River at Alton.

LOCATION: The Starved Rock Pool of the Illinois River extends from the Starved Rock Lock and Dam near Utica at mile 231 to the tailwater of the Marseilles Lock and Dam at mile 247. The Marseilles Pool of the Illinois River extends from mile 247 to the tailwater of the Dresden Island Lock and Dam at mile 271.5. LaSalle and Grundy counties border this reach.

RIVER ACCESS: The lower end of the Starved Rock Pool is wide with slower velocities, while a more narrow channel with higher gradient and swift waters is found further upstream. The Marseilles Pool is a narrow, high gradient, swift pool. Public lands bordering the pools include Starved Rock State Park, Buffalo Rock State Park, Illini State Park, Gebhard Woods State Park, Heidecke Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area, and Goose Lake Prairie State Natural Area. Public boat access to the river is available at Starved Rock and Illini State parks, as well as in South Ottawa and Morris. Public boat access areas offer good bank fishing opportunities.

STATUS OF THE SPORT FISHERY: When the first European settlers arrived the Illinois River supported one of the most productive freshwater fisheries in the world. The reversal of the Chicago River in the early 20th century brought an influx of pollution that tainted the river all the way to Peoria. Water quality has rebounded dramatically since institution of the Clean Water Act in 1977 and the fish community has rebounded as well. Diversion of water from Lake Michigan into the Illinois River, levee construction and isolation of the floodplain, changes in land use and construction of locks and dams has resulted in aquatic habitat degradation. Additionally, Asian carp and other exotic species have invaded the river. Despite these negative impacts, a diverse fish community remains in the Illinois River evidenced by the collection of 66 native fish species during annual electrofishing surveys in 2023.

Channel catfish – Channel catfish are abundant in the upper Illinois River. Hoop net surveys conducted in the Starved Rock and Marseilles pools in 2023 yielded a total catch of 695 channel catfish ranging from 12-28 inches weighing up to 8 pounds. Notable habitats for channel catfish are main channel border (area between the navigation channel and the river bank), and side channels with current. The Marseilles and Dresden dam tailwaters are notable channel catfish areas. There remains a do-not-eat contaminant advisory on all channel catfish in the Marseilles Pool and no more than 1 meal/month advisory for all channel catfish in the Starved Rock pool due to PCB detection in the flesh. PCB contamination in fish is a remnant of past pollution that is declining. Advisories are developed to protect infants, children, and women of child bearing age and may be overprotective to adult men and women over child bearing age. Trim the fat, particularly around the belly, and allow fat to drip off the fish when cooking to minimize exposure to PCBs.

Flathead catfish – Flathead catfish provide a chance to catch a big fish in the upper Illinois River. Hoop net surveys conducted in 2023 resulted in the collection of 69 flathead catfish ranging from 16 – 42 inches weighing up to 39 pounds. Trophy-sized fish exceeding 36 inches and 25 pounds are common in the Starved Rock and Marseilles pools of the Illinois River. Fish the deep holes and main channel border near current breaks for trophy flathead catfish.

Largemouth Bass/Smallmouth Bass – Largemouth and smallmouth bass catch rates were above average in the Starved Rock Pool and below average in the Marseilles Pool. The Starved Rock Pool electrofishing survey resulted in a catch rate of 9.6 largemouth bass/hour ranging from 10-14 inches and 42 smallmouth bass/hour ranging from 3-18 inches. The largest smallmouth bass weighed 3.3 pounds. The IDNR – Division of Fisheries State Hatcheries annually stocks smallmouth bass in the upper Illinois River to supplement the population. Like channel catfish, a contaminant advisory recommendation has been issued to limit consumption of all sizes of smallmouth bass from the Marseilles Dam upstream to one meal per week. This does not apply to the Starved Rock Pool or to largemouth bass in either pool.



Sauger/Walleye – Some of the best sauger and walleye fishing is downstream of the Starved Rock Lock and Dam, but they may also be caught in deep waters of the upper pools during the day or in the shallows at night. Few sauger or walleye are collected during day-time electrofishing surveys. The IDNR – Division of Fisheries State Hatcheries annually stocks sauger fry in the Peoria Pool and upper pools of the Illinois River.

White Bass - The white bass is a schooling species that may be found in open waters with slower velocities upstream of the Starved Rock Dam. White bass have been absent from our annual electrofishing surveys in the Starved Rock and Marseilles pool for the last several years, but catch rates were average in 2023 with 3/hour and 1/hour of electrofishing, respectively. There is a one-meal-per-month contaminant advisory on white bass in both the Starved Rock and Marseilles pools.

Crappie – Both black crappie and white crappie are found in the upper Illinois River. The 2023 fish community survey showed catch rates for white crappie above average in the Starved Rock Pool. Black crappie are stocked by IDNR – Division of Fisheries State Hatcheries annually in the upper Illinois River to supplement the population. Backwaters, side channels and main channel border areas with submerged brush are the best locations for crappie.

FISHING REGULATIONS FOR STARVED ROCK & MARSEILLES POOLS:

There is a 12 inch minimum length limit for largemouth and smallmouth bass in the Marseilles Pool, where the daily creel limit is 6 fish (only 3 of which can be smallmouth bass). The Starved Rock Pool has an 18 minimum length limit with a one fish daily creel limit for bass and a 10 fish daily creel limit for white, black or hybrid crappie. The statewide regulations are in effect in both pools for walleye, sauger and hybrids. The minimum length limit is 14 inches with a 6 fish (singly or collectively) daily creel limit. Bowfishing is not permitted in this reach of the river.

For further information contact: Starved Rock State Park at (815) 667-4726; Illini State Park at (815) 795-2448; IDNR Fisheries at (309) 357-0387

