

# STARVED ROCK & MARSEILLES POOLS ILLINOIS RIVER

## 2016 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 Starved Rock Pool is wide with slower velocities at the lower end and swift waters upstream to, and including the Marseilles 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. Of these sites boat access to the river is available at Starved Rock and Illini State parks. Public boat access is also available at South Ottawa and Morris. Public boat access areas also 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. With the reversal of the Chicago River in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century came 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. In the past 50 years however land use changes has led to aquatic habitat degradation due to sedimentation of backwaters. In addition Asian carp and other exotic species have recently invaded the river. In 2015 Asian carp comprised 55% of the biomass of our electrofishing samples throughout the length of the Illinois River. Still, excellent fishing opportunities remain for native game fishes. Bowfishing for carp is also growing in popularity. There remains a diverse fish community in the Illinois River evidenced by collection of 61 native fish species during electrofishing surveys in 2015.

**Channel catfish** – Channel catfish are very abundant in the Upper Illinois. Hoop net surveys in the Starved Rock Pool targeting spawning adults yielded mostly 16 to 24 inch fish. Fish over 24 inches made up less than three percent of the catch and those under 16 inches comprised 12 percent of the catch. 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 reaches. Stink baits and cut shad are the baits of choice. PCB contamination in fish is a remnant of past pollution that is declining. 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. 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 big fish in the Upper Illinois River. Flatheads between 28 and 36 inches made up more than half of the hoop net catch in this reach. Trophy-sized fish exceeding 36 inches and 25 pounds made up nearly one third of the catch. Fish the deep holes and main channel border near current breaks. Gizzard shad and skipjack herring are the best baits for flathead catfish.

**Largemouth Bass/Smallmouth Bass** – Smallmouth bass are typically more prevalent than largemouth in the upper Illinois but largemouth bass numbers were high this year because of great reproductive success the past two years. Electrofishing in the swift, rocky waters below Dresden Dam in 2015 produced some nice smallmouth bass in the 20 inch range. Spinners, spoons, crank baits and crayfish are good baits for smallmouth. 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.

**Sauger/Walleye** – Most of the sauger and walleye fishing is downstream of the Starved Rock Lock and Dam but they may be caught in deep waters of the upper pools during the day or in the shallows at night. Jigs with trailing minnows make good sauger and walleye lures.

**White Bass** - The white bass is a schooling species that is may be best found in open waters with slower velocities upstream of the Starved Rock Dam. Look for shad breaching the water surface and white bass are typically on the chase. 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 but they were both sparsely represented in our Starved Rock and Marseilles pool 2015 electrofishing samples. 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.

**For further information contact:** Starved Rock State Park at (815)667-4726; Illini State Park at (815)795-2448; IDNR Fisheries at (618)468-2851

