

PEORIA POOL ILLINOIS RIVER

2016 FISHERIES FACT SHEET

The Illinois River is formed at the confluence of the Des Plaines and Kankakee rivers near Channahon in northeastern Illinois. 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 Peoria Pool of the Illinois River extends from the Peoria Lock and Dam at mile 157.7 to the tailwaters of the Starved Rock Lock and Dam at mile 231. Peoria, Tazewell, Woodford, Marshall, Putnam, Bureau and LaSalle counties border this reach.

RIVER ACCESS: The Peoria Pool ranges from slow water velocities and soft substrates of Peoria Lake at the downstream end to swift flows and course substrates upstream from the great bend to the Starved Rock Lock and Dam tailwaters. Public lands bordering the pool include Woodford County Conservation Area, Marshall State Fish and Wildlife Area, Lake DePue State Fish and Wildlife Area, Fox Run Conservation Area, and Starved Rock State Park. Boat access to the Peoria Pool is available at the Peoria Dam, Downtown Peoria, East Peoria, Detweiller Park, Woodford County Conservation Area, Chillicothe, Marshall State Fish and Wildlife Area (Marshall, Spring Branch and Sparland units), Lacon, Henry, Hennepin, Spring Valley, Peru, LaSalle, and Starved Rock State Park. Public lands and 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. With the reversal of the Chicago River in the early 20th 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. Still, excellent fishing opportunities remain for native game fishes. Bowfishing for carp is growing in popularity and there is now an annual bowfishing tournament in Peoria. Spring floods in 2014 and 2015 contributed to a great increase in largemouth bass numbers. The gizzard shad population remained strong. Unfortunately Asian carp young were abundant too, but largemouth bass preyed on them along with the shad. There remains a diverse fish community in the Illinois River evidenced by collection of 61 native fish species during routine electrofishing surveys in 2015.

Channel catfish – Channel catfish is the primary game fish of the Illinois River, where they are very abundant in the 16 to 24 inch size range. Fish over 24 inches weighing 7 to 10 pounds are not uncommon. Notable habitats for channel catfish are main channel border (area between the navigation channel and the river bank), and side channels with current. The Lacon and Henry area and the Peoria Narrows 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 channel catfish over 18 inches in the Peoria Pool due to PCB detection in the flesh. The advisory recommends no more than 6 meals/year for channel catfish 12-16 inches and 1 meal per week for those under 12 inches. 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 are abundant in the Peoria Pool and trophy-sized fish exceeding 36 inches and 30 pounds can be found. Flatheads between 28 and 36 inches are common. 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 – Largemouth bass are prevalent throughout the Peoria Pool, and like other members of the sunfish family, they have reproductive spikes during big flood years. Largemouth bass numbers were up in 2014 and excellent in 2015. Electrofishing in this reach in 2015 produced 66.7 bass per hour. The sample contained a number of 12 to 15 inch bass, with several exceeding 15 inches. Plum Island below Starved Rock Lock and Dam held excellent populations of bass and bluegill in 2015. Like channel catfish, a contaminant advisory recommendation has been issued to limit consumption of all sizes of largemouth bass to one meal per week.

Sauger/Walleye – Sauger and walleye abound in the upper end of Peoria Pool, with sauger being more abundant. Spring Valley hosts a national walleye tournament which is an indication of the excellent fishery for these species. Sauger and walleye are typically found in deep waters during the day but search for food in the shallows of the main channel border at night. Jigs with trailing minnows make good sauger and walleye lures.

Crappie – Both black crappie and white crappie are present in the Peoria Pool but black crappie are more abundant. Electrofishing samples near Lacon and Henry produced the best crappie numbers in 2015. Backwaters, side channels and main channel border areas with submerged brush are the best locations for crappie. Jigs and minnows are typical baits.

FISHING REGULATIONS FOR PEORIA POOL ILLINOIS RIVER:

There is a 12 inch minimum length limit for largemouth and smallmouth bass. The daily catch limit is six bass and no more than three smallmouth bass. Statewide regulations are in effect for all other species. The statewide minimum length limit for walleye, sauger and hybrids is 14 inches, with a 6 fish daily creel limit. Bowfishing is allowed in the river and connected waters wholly accessible by boat, with some exceptions as listed in the Illinois Fishing Information booklet.

For further information contact: Marshall State Fish and Wildlife Area at (309)246-8351; Starved Rock State Park at (815)667-4726; IDNR Fisheries at (618)468-2851

