

# LA GRANGE 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 La Grange Pool of the Illinois River extends from the La Grange Lock and Dam at mile 80.2 to the tailwater of the Peoria Lock and Dam at mile 157.7. Brown, Cass, Schuyler, Mason, Fulton, Tazewell and Peoria counties border this reach.

**RIVER ACCESS:** The La Grange Pool is typified by slow to moderate water velocities and soft substrates of sand and mud. The large number of backwater lakes and sloughs made this reach historically one of the most biologically productive river reaches in the world for waterfowl and fish. Backwaters managed for fishing by IDNR include state fish and wildlife areas at Anderson Lake, Spring Lake, Rice Lake, and Banner Marsh as well as the restored Thompson Lake at Emiquon Preserve. Bath Chute, a river side channel has excellent panfish and largemouth bass populations and is accessible by a public boat ramp in Bath. Boat access to the LaGrange Pool is also available at LaGrange Lock and Dam, Beardstown, Browning, Havana, Liverpool, Kingston Mines and Pekin. A ramp about 3 miles south of Bartonville on Mendenhall Road off of Rt. 24 provides the easiest access to the Peoria Lock and Dam tailwater. A 3 mile run gets access to excellent white bass fishing, along with concentrations of sauger, largemouth and smallmouth bass and catfish. There is a ramp upstream of the Peoria Lock and Dam but access to the tailwater requires locking through. 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 an extremely productive freshwater fishery. 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 Illinois River electrofishing samples. Still, excellent fishing opportunities remain for native game fishes. Spring floods in 2014 and 2015 contributed to a great increase in largemouth bass numbers. The gizzard shad population remains large, providing abundant forage for game fishes. Unfortunately Asian carp young were abundant in 2015, 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 La Grange Pool and they are abundant throughout the reach. Fish over 24 inches weighing 7 to 10 pounds are not uncommon. Notable areas for channel catfish are main channel border (area between the navigation channel and the river bank), and side channels with current. Hoop net sampling near Beardstown in 2015 confirmed that the La Grange Pool is especially good for channel catfish. There were multiple size classes in our sample and all were in excellent body condition. Channel cats exceeding 28 inches made up 15% of the sample and weighted an average of 11.2 pounds. PCB contamination in fish is a remnant of past pollution that is declining. There remains a one-meal-per-week contaminant advisory on channel catfish over 16 inches in the lower Illinois River due to low level PCB detection in the flesh. These 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/Blue Catfish** – Flathead catfish are quite common in the La Grange Pool and trophy-sized fish exceeding 36 inches and 30 pounds can be found. Few flathead catfish were captured in our 2015 effort in mid-May because cool water temperatures were not conducive to pre-spawn activity. The largest flathead did however exceed 36 inches and weighed over 23 pounds. Large blue catfish were captured in our nets this year, adding another potential trophy catfish species to the pool. The blue cats ranged from 32 to 39 inches with the largest weighing 30 pounds.

**Largemouth Bass** – Largemouth bass are prevalent throughout the La Grange Pool. 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. LaGrange Pool samples produces 66 bass/hour dominated by the past two year classes. All were in excellent condition.

**White bass** – The white bass is a schooling species that is present throughout the main channel of the La Grange Pool. The largest individuals and highest numbers of white bass are seen in the Peoria tailwater reach. Look for shad breaching the water surface and white bass are typically on the chase. Shad-like lures are recommended.

**Sauger/Walleye** – In the La Grange Pool sauger and, to a lesser degree, walleye are most abundant below the Peoria Lock and Dam. They 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 common in the La Grange Pool though black crappie are usually more abundant. Crappie in the 10 to 12 inch range were found in fair numbers in 2015. The numerous backwater lakes of the La Grange Pool have historically been excellent crappie waters.

**FISHING REGULATIONS FOR LA GRANGE 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. The minimum length limit for walleye, sauger and hybrids is 14 inches, with a six 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:** IDNR Fisheries at (618)468-2851

