



EMIQUON PRESERVE

THOMPSON LAKE

FISHERIES STATUS SUMMARY

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources has the responsibility to provide diverse, outdoor recreation for the citizens of, and visitors to the State of Illinois. One means of providing for recreational opportunity has been to form cooperative fisheries management agreements with nongovernment organizations. Thompson Lake at The Nature Conservancy's Emiquon Preserve is one such area.

LOCATION and DESCRIPTION: The Nature Conservancy's Emiquon Preserve is adjacent to the Illinois River in Fulton County, Illinois, approximately 1 mile northwest of Havana and 3 miles southeast of Lewistown. Since 1996, the Conservancy has acquired nearly 8800 acres at the site and currently owns and manages approximately 7100 acres. Through the US Department of Agriculture's Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), the Natural Resources Conservation Service manages a 30-year conservation easement on a total of 6285 acres of the Conservancy's Emiquon Preserve. The Nature Conservancy's main goal for the Emiquon Preserve is the restoration and conservation of natural ecological processes and habitats that sustain native plant and animal communities of the Illinois River Valley.

Historically, what is now the Emiquon Preserve included two backwater lakes, Thompson Lake and Flag Lake, and was argued to have been one of the better hunting and fishing complexes in the Illinois River Valley if not the whole Midwest. From the early 1920s through the present, most of the property currently owned by the Conservancy was managed for agriculture, most recently primarily for intensive row-crop production. In 2007, the site pumps were shut off and the water level in the site was allowed to rise and reform the lakes. The current Thompson/Flag Lake covers approximately 4,000 surface acres. The lake topography is two large shallow basins with deep water ditches dissecting it. In midsummer, the lake basins can be 70% covered with aquatic vegetation.

Public access to the water bodies on the Emiquon Preserve is limited to registered boats. A free annual registration to access the site for all users is required and available at the adjacent Dickson's Mounds State Museum. Only electric trolling motors are allowed. No gas motors are allowed on the boats. No bank fishing is currently allowed. A concrete boat ramp with a gravel parking lot for 25 vehicle/trailers is present and a boardwalk, visitor area and canoe launch.

The site contains an inviolate refuge from public access. This refuge will attempt to serve as a limited disturbance area for all of the wildlife utilizing the Preserve. This refuge encompasses approximately the eastern half of the former Thompson Lake basin, all of the former Flag Lake basin and then to the Illinois River levee. This refuge area is designated with marked buoys and signs. The access time to the water bodies is sunrise to sunset. This access is year round, except during the Central Zone waterfowl hunting season. During the Central Zone waterfowl hunting season, no water access is allowed on hunting days. Currently waterfowl is allowed 3 days a week, thereby allowing fishing access 4 days a week. Ice fishing is allowed when practical on the entire lake basin.

HISTORY & STATUS of the SPORT FISHERY: In 2007, The Nature Conservancy entered into a cooperative fish management agreement with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources for the Emiquon Preserve. The water bodies on the site underwent an immediate fish rehabilitation project to remove exotic fish species. The IDNR initiated fish restocking in 2007 with brood fish that included: largemouth bass, white crappie, black crappie, bluegill, bowfin, spotted gar, channel catfish, brown bullhead, warmouth, orangespotted sunfish, pumpkinseed sunfish, golden shiner, brook silverside, and blackstripe topminnow. IDNR fish stockings and surveys have resulted in the potential of at least 43 fish species now present in the lake.

Largemouth Bass: In 2017 the largemouth bass population was sampled by 486 fish by electrofishing and 162 fish in large mesh trap nets. The largemouth bass population was defined by an average year of recruitment. This Young Of the Year class from 2.4 to 6.5 inches was in excellent body condition in the fall survey. The collection rate of bass under 8 inches was average at .18 fish per minute of electrofishing. The average body condition for these fish was very good with an average Wr value of 105 for fish under eight inches.

The fall 2017 survey showed a high density bass population is now present from 8.7 to 22.0 inches. The percentage of fish greater than 17 inches increased from 18% to 27% in 2016. And in 2017 the percentage was at 31%. The 2017 survey showed a stability over the 18 inch mark with an RSD18 of 9 and an RSD19 of 5. These are both high percentages for a bass population of this density. The average body condition of the fish over 8 inches was good with an average Wr value of 99.

Bluegill: In 2017 the bluegill population was sampled by 100 fish by electrofishing and 173 fish in large mesh trap nets. The survey samples represent a bluegill population with good distribution from 2.0 to 9.4 inches long. Good recruitment has now occurred each of the last 8 years. The body condition was a good Wr of 94 for the fish over 5 inches. The bluegill electro fishing collection rate for stock size fish (over 3.1 inches) was .57 fish per minute. This is a decrease from 2.4 fish per minute in 2012. And in the midpoint for the .37 per minute in 2010 and the 1.9 fish per minute collection rate in 2011.

The bluegill PSD value of 57 was above the objective range Of 20 to 40 in 2017. The bluegill RSD7 was at 35 which was also above the objective range of 5 to 20. And 22% of the bluegill sampled by electrofishing gears were over 8 inches in length. These indices all indicate a quality bluegill population.

Pumpkinseed: In 2017 the pumpkinseed population was sampled by 20 fish by electrofishing and 7 fish in large mesh trap nets. The survey samples appear to represent YOY fish up to 3.5 inches in length and several year classes up to 8.7 inches in length. The body condition was very good Wr of 103 for the adult fish. The pumpkinseed electrofishing collection rate for stock size fish (over 3.1 inches) was .17. This is consistent with the collection range since 2011. The RSD7 was 64 for the 2017 survey.

Crappie: The black crappie population was sampled by 217 fish with electrofishing and 262 fish in trap nets in 2017. The black crappie electrofishing collection rate was 1.8 fish per minute for all sizes in 2017, and the trapnet CPUE was 10.9 fish per net night. The black crappie sample appears to represent almost no YOY class from 2.4 to 8.0 inches long and multiple year classes from 8.3 to 14.2 inches long. The body condition was still a good Wr of 95 for the fish over 8 inches.

For the first time since the brood stocking in 2007, 10 white crappie were sampled in 2012, 1 fish in 2013, 63 fish in 2014, 51 fish in 2015, 108 fish in 2016, and 41 fish in 2017. The 2017 white crappie sample was composed primarily of fish from 8.7 to 14.2 inches long. The body condition average was very good at 105. This dense crappie population with large fish will feed on the gizzard shad population and also provide additional predation upon potential exotic fish species reproduction.

Bowfin: The bowfin population was sampled by 106 fish from 14.6 to 31.9 inches in 2017. Several year classes appear to be present. The body condition of these fish was extremely good. The bowfin population has seen a steady increase in density and biomass in the sampling. In 2017 the electrofishing rates were .57 fish per minute and 139.9 lbs per hour.

Channel Catfish: 15 channel catfish were sampled in 2017. 3 fish from 13.4 to 15.0 inches and indicates another new year class was recruited. A low density population of very robust fish are present up to 33.5 inches long.

FISHING REGULATIONS: Site specific angling regulations. Two pole and line fishing only, no live minnows for fishing bait, all other statewide regulations apply.	Daily Creel Limit	Minimum Length Limit
All Fish		2 pole and line only
Largemouth Bass	1	18"
Bluegill	25	None
Channel Catfish	6	None
Walleye, Sauger or Hybrid Walleye	6	14"
White and Black Crappie	25	9"

CONTACT INFORMATION – The Nature Conservancy site office: (309)547-2730.
 IDNR Fisheries County Fish Biologist: (309)446-9143.
 Illinois Fishing Information booklet and IFISHILLINOIS website <http://www.ifishillinois.org/>