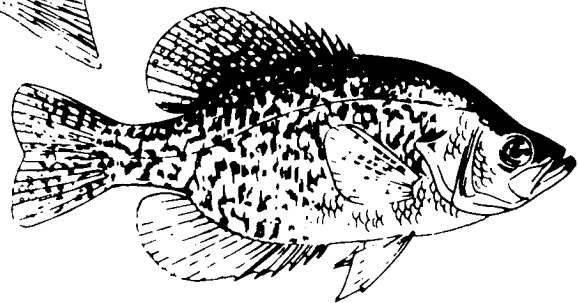
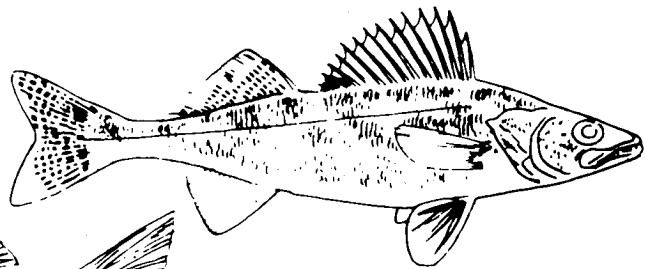
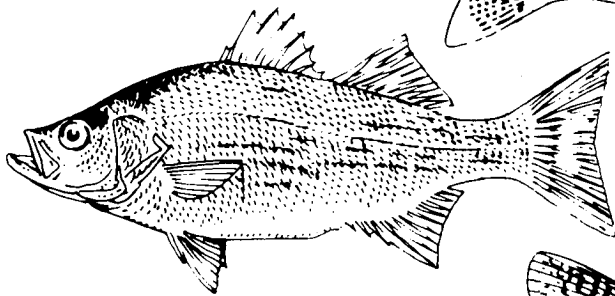
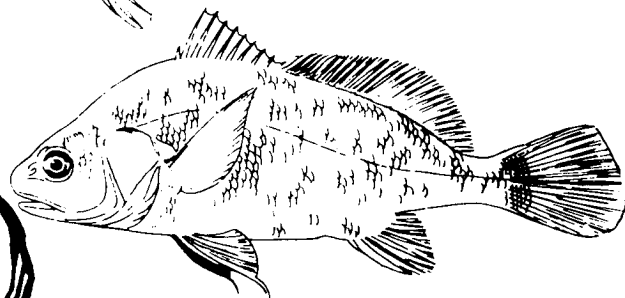
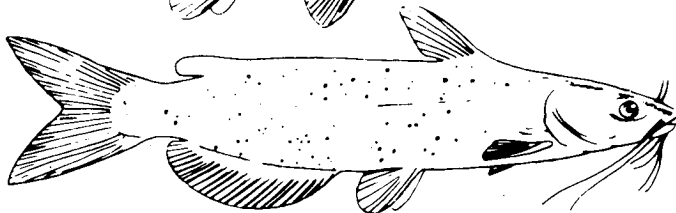
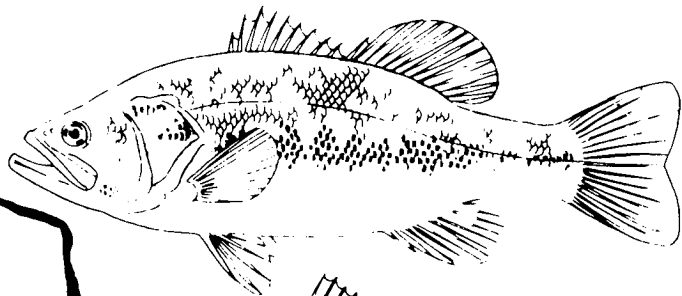
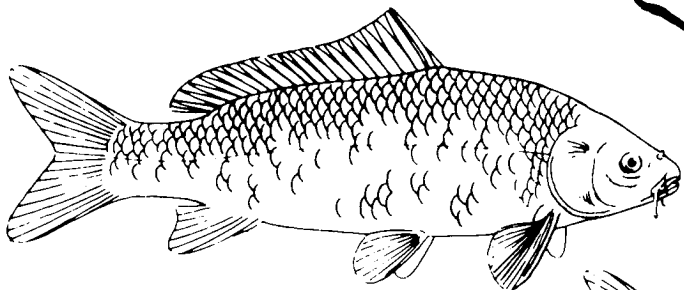


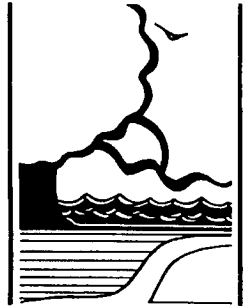
●ALTON



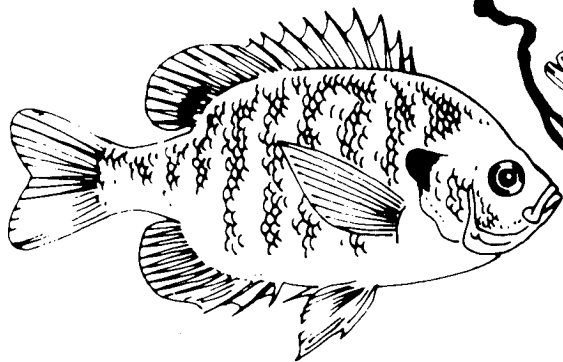
# FISHING THE MIDDLE MISSISSIPPI



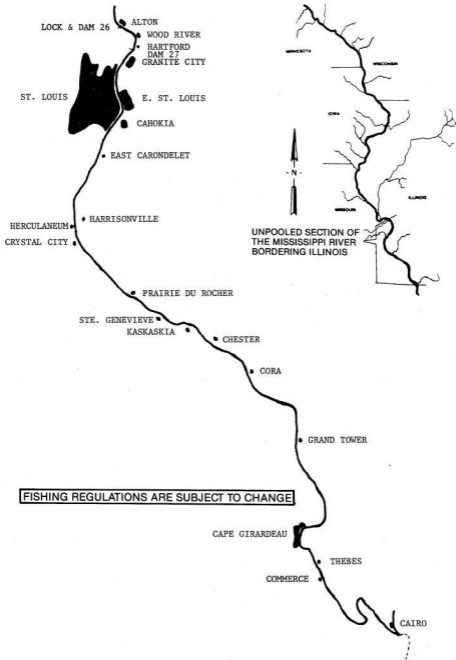
ILLINOIS



DEPARTMENT OF  
NATURAL  
RESOURCES



●CAIRO



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# Illinois Department of Natural Resources

DIVISION OF FISHERIES

## FISHING THE MIDDLE MISSISSIPPI

by Bill Boyd  
Regional Fisheries Manager  
and  
Mary Grapperhaus  
Conservation Worker

Revised June, 1995  
by Butch Atwood  
Mississippi River Biologist

### INTRODUCTION

The vast sport fishery resources of the Mississippi River provide Illinois fisherman with sport as fine as that found anywhere in the state. Major game fish of the river include crappie, largemouth bass, walleye and sauger, channel catfish, white bass, and bluegill. However, the river does not receive the amount of fishing pressure it could stand, even though many Illinoisans are crying for a place to fish.

### DESCRIPTION OF RIVER

The portion of the upper Mississippi River often times referred to as the "middle Mississippi River" between Cairo and Alton, Illinois provides 61,266 acres of water for sport fishing. This section of the river differs from the Mississippi above Alton because there are no locks and dams below Lock & Dam 27 at R.M. 185. This stretch of the river is better characterized as open river with emergent dikes, side channels, main channel, main channel border and extensive rip rap along the channel banks for bank protection.

Emergent dikes provide fast flowing swirling waters at their riverward end. When submerged or partially submerged at higher river stages, they appear to cause a riffle effect in the water. At the riverward ends and immediately downstream of the dikes, deep scour holes are formed. Channel, flathead, blue catfish, white bass and freshwater drum inhabit these areas. The area behind many of the emergent dikes and especially those dikes

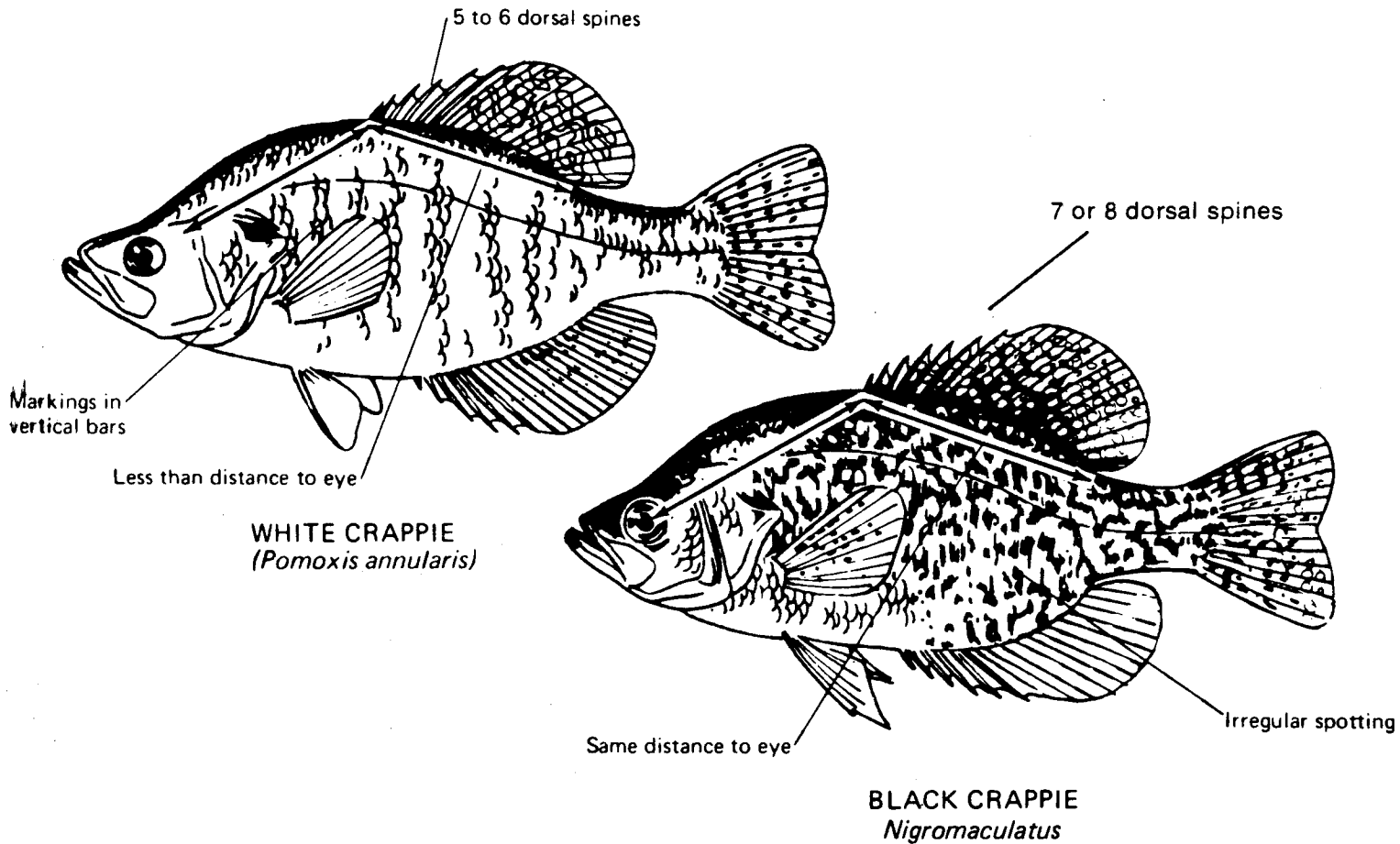
with L-heads (or trail dikes) provide quiet, backwater-type habitat in this open river environment where backwaters are relatively scarce. In addition to the aforementioned fish species, don't be surprised to find largemouth bass, bluegill and crappie in these protected habitats. Also keep an eye out for "notched dikes" as this type of modified dike offers fish increased habitat diversity by creating scour holes below the notch and thus increased numbers of fish should be found in these areas. The flood of 1993 caused a good deal of scour in many side channels, creating better access from the river and better fish habitat. Don't overlook the upstream side of dikes, these areas sometimes hold fish as well.

Side channels are departures from the main channel and may be as wide and deep as the main channel or be so shallow that they are close to slough habitat. Side channels provide quiet backwater areas to the main channel. These side channels usually have emergent rip rap closing structures in them. Access to side channels is dependent upon river stage. Fish commonly taken in side channel habitats include channel, flathead catfish, white bass, drum, crappie, largemouth bass, and bluegill.

Main channel border habitat is the area between the edge of the navigation channel and the closest land or shallow water over submerged land. The emergent or submergent wing dams along the main channel are in this habitat and these often provide excellent fishing for white bass, catfish, drum, sauger, and walleye.

The remaining type of habitat is the main channel, which for safety's sake is a poor place to fish.

# FISHING



## CRAPPIE

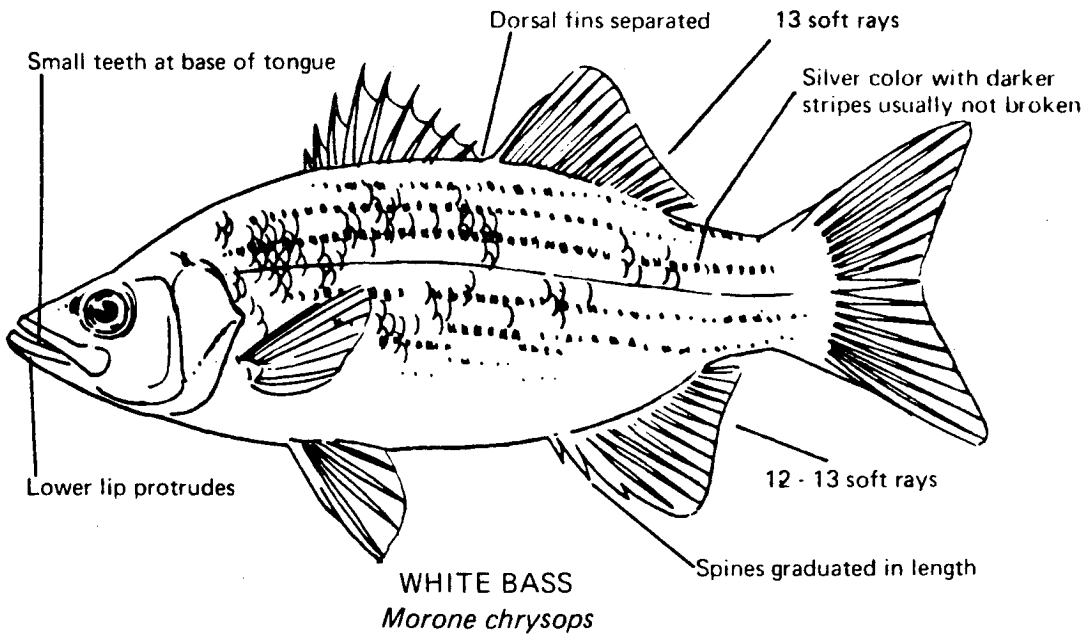
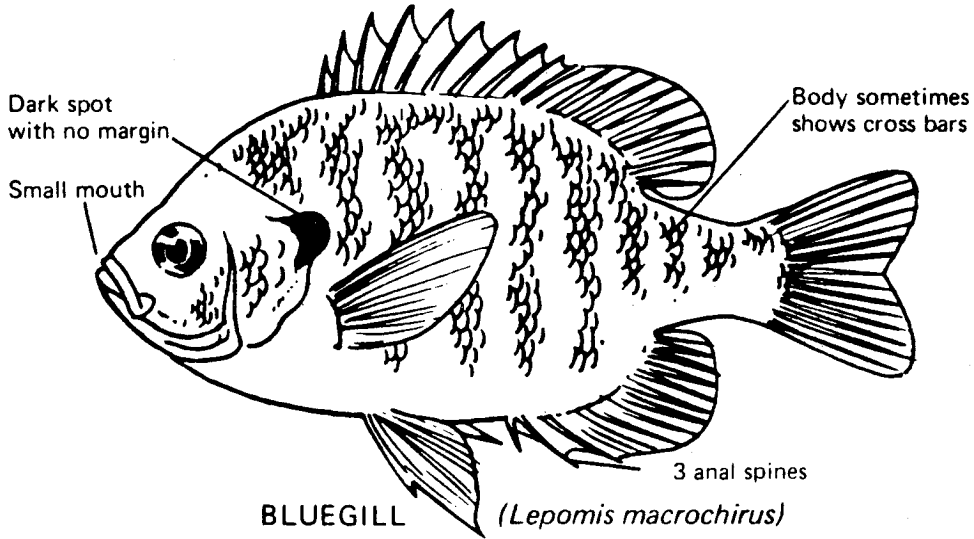
Crappie are so abundant that several years ago they were classified as a commercial fish. Two species occur -- the white crappie and the black crappie -- but, there is no apparent difference in their bait preference or methods used to catch them. These species are most often taken from side channel habitats, where catches of  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 lb. fish are taken. Fish near stumps, brush piles, or other such shelter. Small minnows are the most common bait and these should be hooked high in the back on a small hook with a bobber two to three feet above the hook. Nightcrawlers can also be used effectively in early spring. When crappie start schooling spawning (April and May) leadhead jigs and spinners become productive and may be used in combination with a lip hooked minnow. Usually the best months are March, April, and May; then fishing picks up again in the fall.

## BLUEGILL

Bluegill can be found in the side channels and can be taken during the summer months on a variety of baits. The most popular bait is the nightcrawler on a small hook, but crickets and grasshoppers work well. Fish near cover such as brush piles, stumps, or weed beds and drop your bait as close as possible to the cover. Use a small bobber to keep the bait off the bottom. Bluegill fishing is good during the evening, June through September.

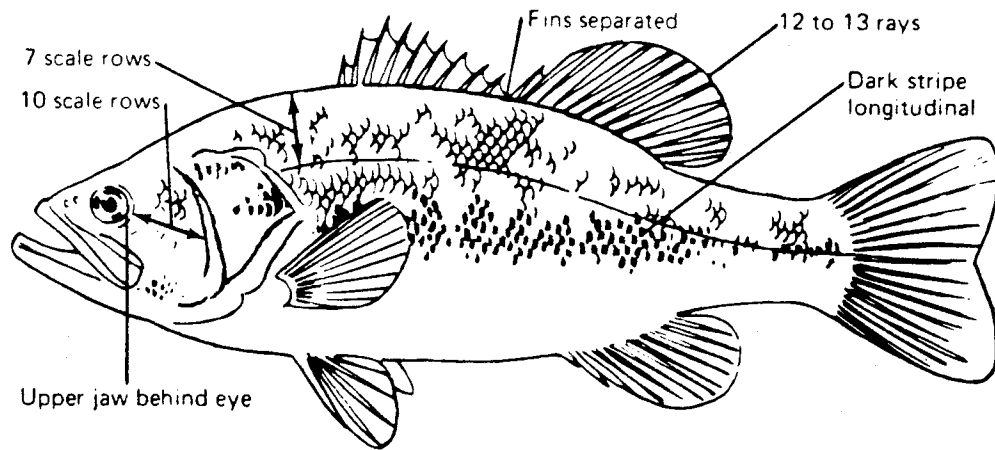
## WHITE BASS

The white and yellow basses are the true basses in our state. Local fishermen often call the white bass "striper" which is a misnomer since the true striper (or striped bass), is a larger salt



water cousin that is currently being introduced into many reservoirs. The white bass is much more abundant than the yellow bass on the river and 1-2 pounders are frequently taken. These fish like current and turbulence as is shown by their abundance in tailwaters. They are often taken on jigs by bank or boat fishermen casting into the rough water directly below a dam gate. Another place to try is the downstream side of the emergent dikes, where the water roils after crossing the dike or going around the end. Closing structures in side channels can provide at certain river stages similar good fishing. Sometimes bass can be

found in the quieter water along a sand bar or bank in the main channel border. Spinners with minnows or artificial lures resembling minnows are effective when a school of white bass are spotted by the furious surface activity of minnows, trying to elude them. Best fishing seems to be in the morning or evening, but bass may be taken from deeper water during the day by retrieving the artificial lure or minnow a short ways off the bottom. April through September have been the best months for bass during the summer.



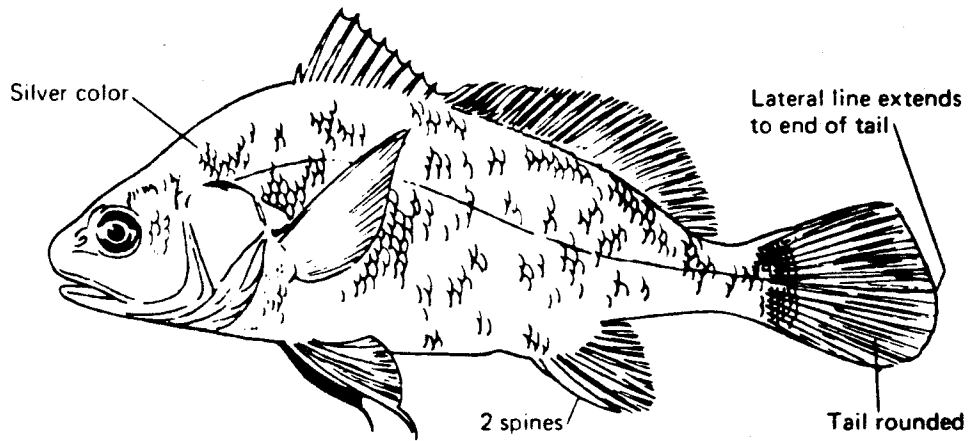
**LARGEMOUTH BASS**  
*(Micropterus salmoides)*

**LARGEMOUTH BASS**

Largemouth bass are found primarily in side channels and quiet water habitats on the Middle Mississippi but occur less frequently in the other habitat types. They prefer the cover of weed beds, brush, stumps, willows, and fallen trees where they can play hide and seek with their prey. Since largemouth are sight feeders they are attracted by action and not by smell of the bait or lure. They succumb to the temptations of a variety of lures, plugs, and jigs

which must each be retrieved in the manner best suited to the lure. Mepps spinners are commonly used and plastic worms are popular, as can be seen by the number adorning snags and limbs in some of the better bass areas.

The best fishing is in May, June and September; in early morning or in the evening, once water temperatures go above 75°.

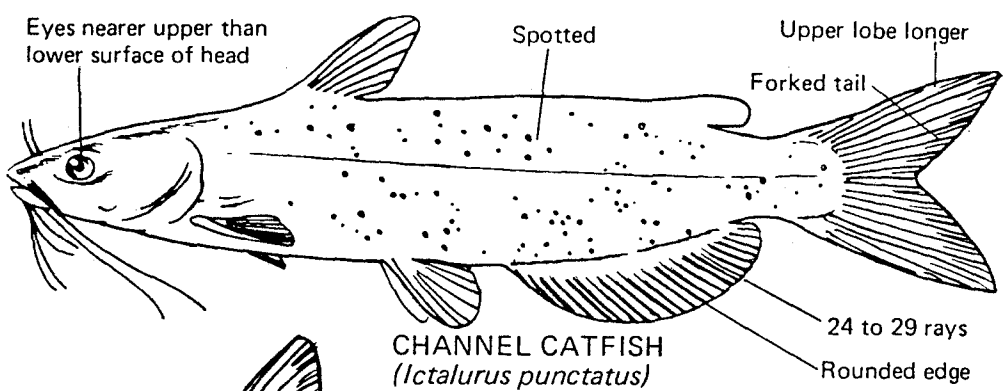


**FRESHWATER DRUM**  
*(Aplodinotus grunniens)*

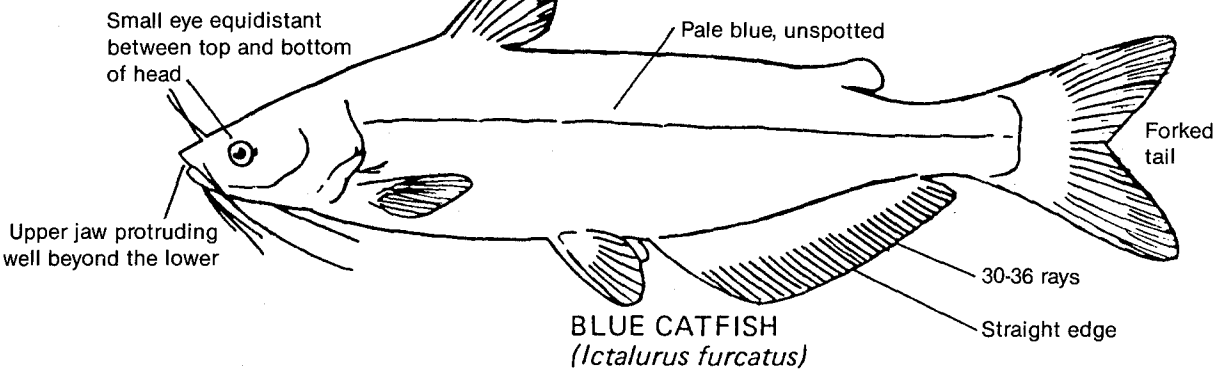
**FRESHWATER DRUM**

Drum are perhaps more commonly called white or silver perch, although they are not a member of the perch family. On the river they are most common in areas where there is good cur-

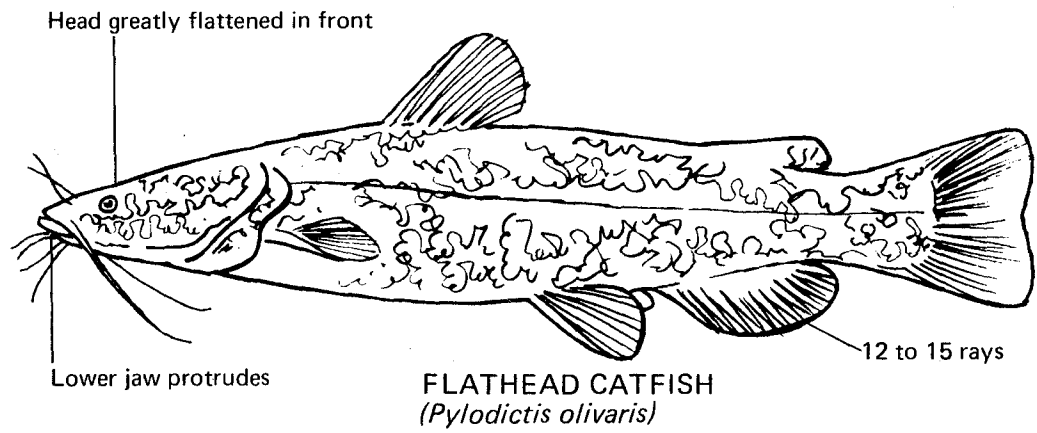
rent -- namely tailwater, side channel, and main channel border habitat. They are taken most frequently on worms fished with a tight line, on the bottom. Large drum are seldom caught by sport fishermen although 2 and 3 pounders are not uncommon.



CHANNEL CATFISH  
*(Ictalurus punctatus)*



BLUE CATFISH  
*(Ictalurus furcatus)*



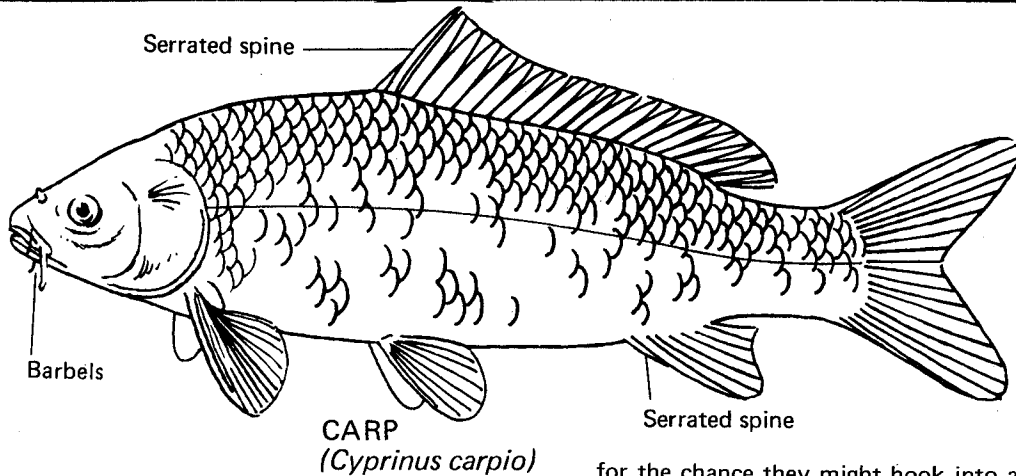
FLATHEAD CATFISH  
*(Pylodictis olivaris)*

**CATFISH AND BULLHEAD**

To a lot of people, fishing, when referring to the Mississippi, means catfish. These fish are the meat fish for many people who appreciate the occasional 10-15 pound blue or channel cat, or 30-40 pound flathead they catch along with the common 2-10 pounders. These fish species are common throughout the middle Mississippi River. Along banks of side channels or main channel borders catfish can be found hiding in holes downstream of fallen trees or small log jams along the bank. Wing dikes are likely areas, also, especially when they are in a series. Prepared stink baits, blood baits, cheese baits, and secret homemade recipes are found in use most often. Worms, liver, shrimp, and an almost endless variety of goodies are successful at one time or another for catfish. The more solid prepared baits can be balled around a treble hook and fished on the bottom with a tight line weighted by a

sliding sinker. Pieces of sponge rubber are dipped in some baits having a thinner consistency and placed on or before a hook. With any bait, bottom fishing appears to be the most successful when possible. Around trees and log jams a bobber is often necessary to keep from losing gear. Catfish also provide the basis for good trot-lining; and if you're going after flatheads, use large hooks and big bait such as 6" carp. Fishing picks up for catfish when its slacking off for many species, and the summer months are undeniably the best (May through September.)

Bullheads may be caught during the warmer months in most shallow backwater areas. Most bullheads are taken by bank fishermen using worms below a bobber or fished on the bottom 10-30" from shore. The presence or absence of cover such as brush or logs appears to be of little importance to these tasty catfish.

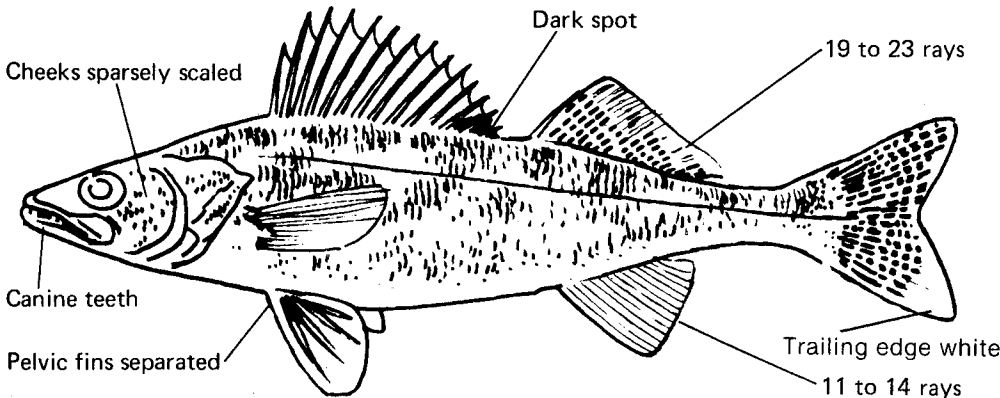


**CARP**  
(*Cyprinus carpio*)

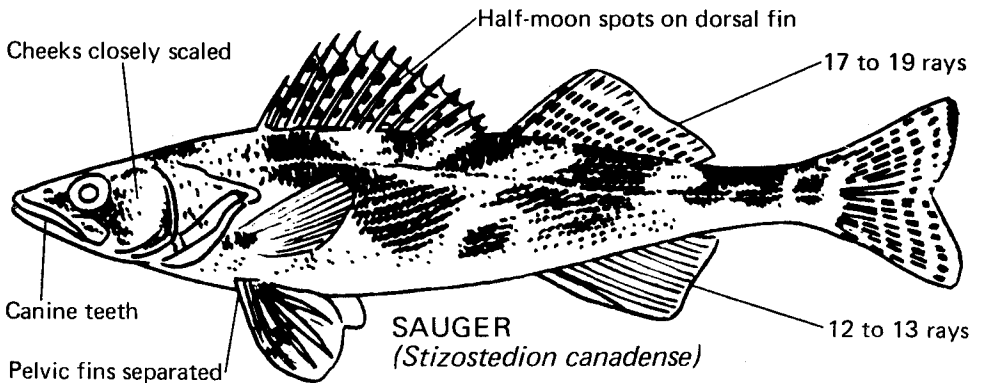
**CARP**

Carp are both the villain and heroes of the river fishery, because they can be caught in all habitats on almost any bait and at times when other species aren't biting. They are villains because this leads many people to believe they constitute the bulk of the sport fishery (which they don't). They are heroes because their abundance and willingness to bite have rescued people from fishless outings. In fact, their size and fighting ability have made fishermen out of people who would not be on the river, if it were not

for the chance they might hook into a 10-40 pound monster. In addition, a 2-5 pound carp can provide some of the best eating available anywhere. People who have sampled every sport fish available in this state, including trout, have rated carp (scored and deep-fat fried) as fine fare. Carp are commonly taken on worms, corn, and doughballs. Doughballs can be made out of a mixture of flour, a flaky cereal, and water; and this mixture is balled around a treble hook. The most productive areas are side channels, main channel border anytime from May through October.



**WALLEYE**  
(*Stizostedion vitreum*)



**SAUGER**  
(*Stizostedion canadense*)

**WALLEYE AND SAUGER**

Walleye and sauger fishing on the Mississippi is the best in the state. Most of the fish taken are the more abundant sauger, which may range in weight up to 5 lbs. (the state record sauger was 5 lbs. 12½ oz. taken from the Mississippi). The less abundant walleye are generally larger, and reports of 10 pounders come in each year. Between spring and fall these fish can often

be taken below wing dikes. A common lure is a jig-minnow combination with the minnow hooked through the head and a weight attached via a three way swivel to fish the jig a foot or so off the bottom. Lead head jigs or minnows by themselves are also popular. Crankbaits trolled above submerged wing dikes are often productive.



## SAFETY ON THE RIVER

Some fishermen avoid the river because they are afraid of it. For these fishermen who prefer quiet water, the many backwater sloughs and lakes on the river can be safer than that pond or reservoir they usually fish. However, a certain amount of respect for the river is only good judgement. Small boats are fine on quiet backwaters, but if a person intends to travel the side channels or main channel where he may encounter strong current, wakes from tows, or whitecap waves, a stable boat is needed. A wise person would use nothing smaller than a 14' jon boat or a 12' V-bottom boat with a 5 or 6 horsepower motor to navigate the open river. Boats of this size and larger can still be easily swamped if overloaded or handled by an inexperienced or careless person. Here are some additional points to take note of:

1. pay full attention to navigation of your boat
2. stay well away from towboats and barges
3. watch for wing dikes extending from the shore
4. wear life vests, at least while traveling to and from the place you fish
5. avoid the areas directly below and above navigation dams - the Corps asks that you stay at least 50 yards downstream or 200 yards upstream of the dams.

Before operating a boat on the river or any water of this state, a person should obtain and read the pamphlet on the boat registration and safety act. These are available from the Department of Natural Resources, 524 S. Second St., Springfield, Illinois 62701-1787.



The Illinois Department of Natural Resources receives federal financial assistance and therefore must comply with federal anti-discrimination laws. In compliance with the Illinois Human Rights Act, the Illinois Constitution, Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended, and the U.S. Constitution, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age or disability. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility, please contact the Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, Department of Natural Resources, 524 S. Second St., Springfield, IL 62701-1787, (217) 782-7616 or the Office of Human Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240.

Department of Natural Resources information is available to the hearing impaired by calling DNR's Telecommunications Device for the Deaf: (217) 782-9175. The Illinois Bell Relay Number is (800) 526-0844.

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Rod R. Blagojevich  
Governor

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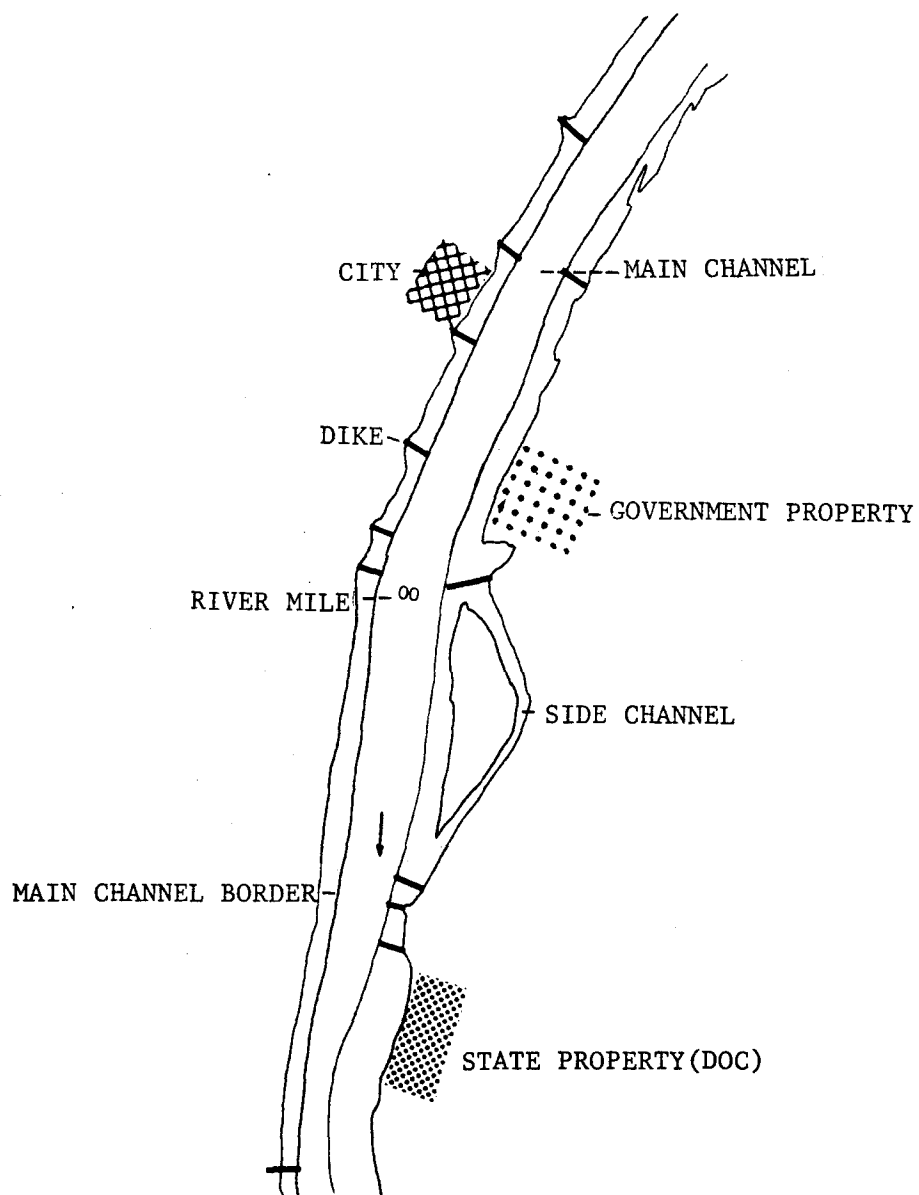
## FISHING REGULATIONS

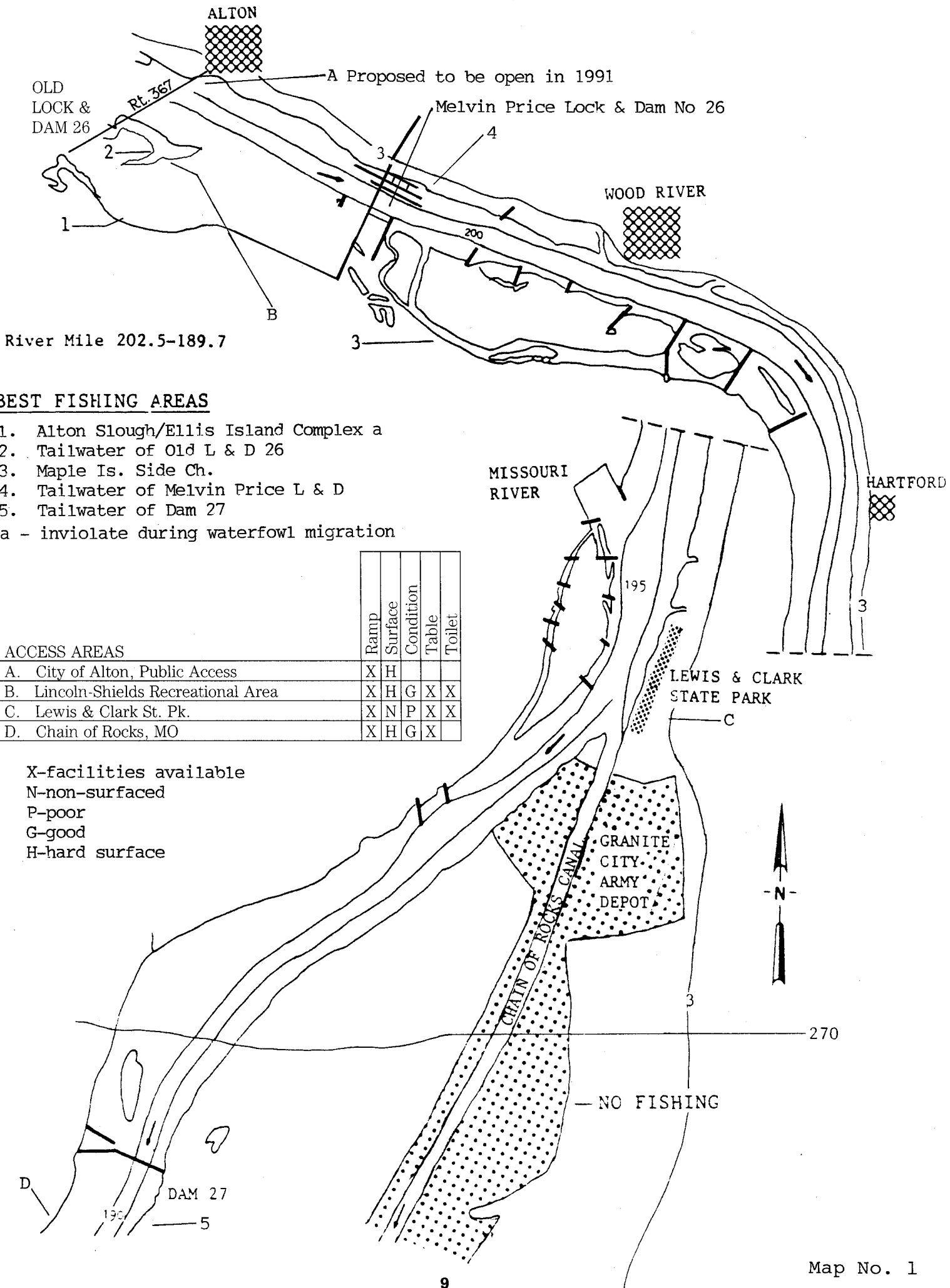
Copies of the current regulations may be obtained at local sporting goods dealers or by writing to: Department of Natural Resources, Division of Fisheries, Lincoln Tower Plaza, 524 S. Second St., Springfield, IL 62701-1787. However, the Mississippi is a boundary water, and once the fisherman crosses the navigation channel marked by buoys, he is technically in another state. Reciprocal agreements between Illinois and the states of Iowa and Missouri, allow an Illinois fisherman to fish "in any of the running waters forming a boundary between such States," without purchasing a non-resident license from the adjoining State. The term "running water" is the key - it refers to side channels and the areas that have current through them. "Bayous, backwaters, or dead end sloughs" can only be fished with a non-resident license; and a non-resident license is also required if an Illinois fisherman wants to tie or attach his boat to a Missouri bank. If you are unsure an area across the river is available to the resident Illinois fisherman, contact the local Illinois conservation officer.

## SPECIFIC AREAS TO FISH

On the following page is a key to many of the prominent features and fish habitats occurring in the middle Mississippi River. The best sport fishing areas are located around dikes, in side channels and main channel borders. The narrative on the previous pages describes species of fish that may occur in each habitat. These areas are noted on the following river reach maps. Side channels and access sites available to the public on the Illinois side of the Mississippi River are numbered and listed with the basic facilities found at each site checked. There are access sites located on the Missouri side of the Mississippi River as well as some private facilities.

# KEY TO MAPS





OLD LOCK & DAM 26

ALTON

A Proposed to be open in 1991

Melvin Price Lock & Dam No 26

WOOD RIVER

River Mile 202.5-189.7

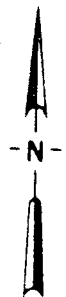
**BEST FISHING AREAS**

- 1. Alton Slough/Ellis Island Complex a
  - 2. Tailwater of Old L & D 26
  - 3. Maple Is. Side Ch.
  - 4. Tailwater of Melvin Price L & D
  - 5. Tailwater of Dam 27
- a - inviolate during waterfowl migration

**ACCESS AREAS**

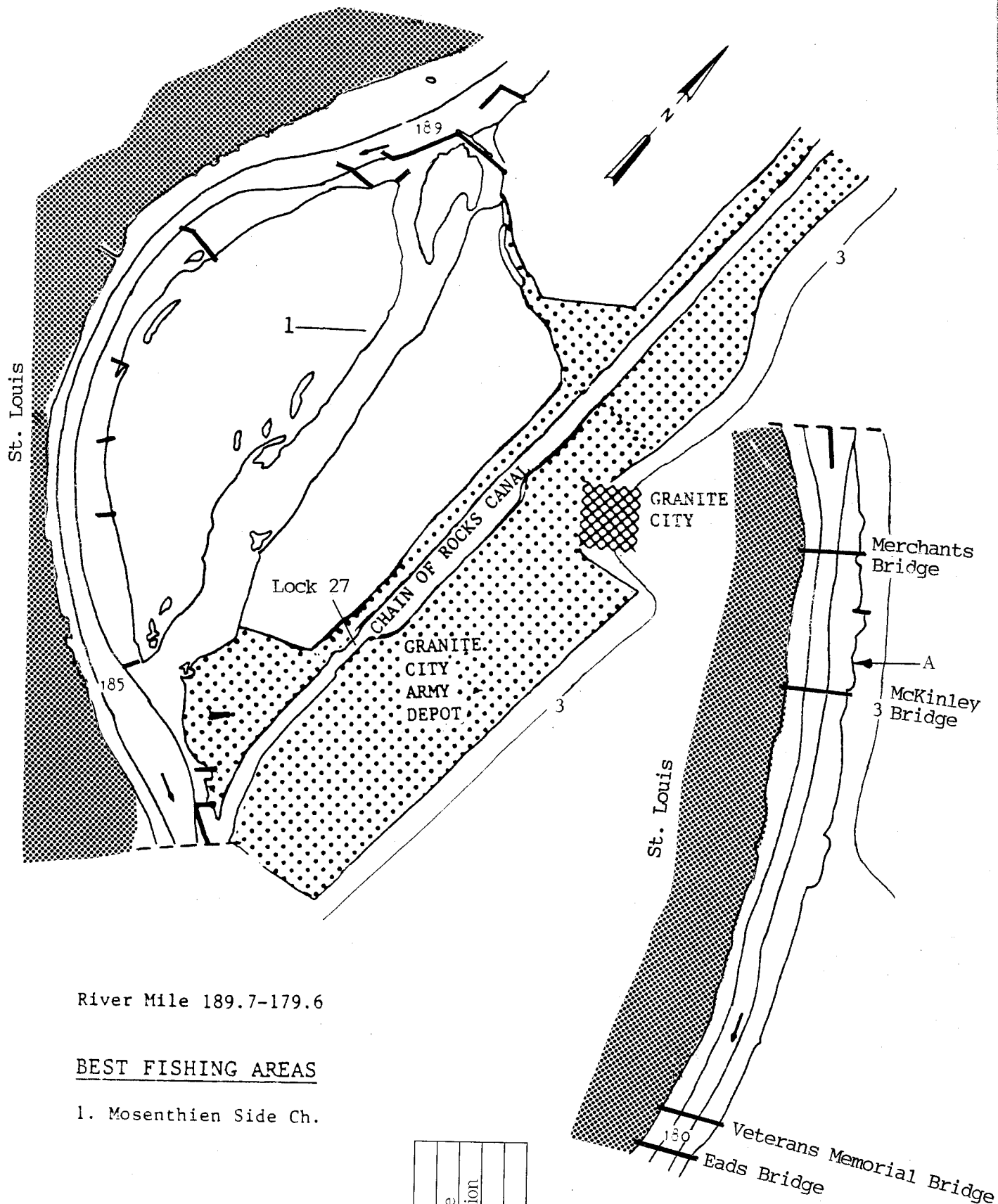
	Ramp	Surface	Condition	Table	Toilet
A. City of Alton, Public Access	X	H			
B. Lincoln-Shields Recreational Area	X	H	G	X	X
C. Lewis & Clark St. Pk.	X	N	P	X	X
D. Chain of Rocks, MO	X	H	G	X	

X-facilities available  
 N-non-surfaced  
 P-poor  
 G-good  
 H-hard surface



270

NO FISHING



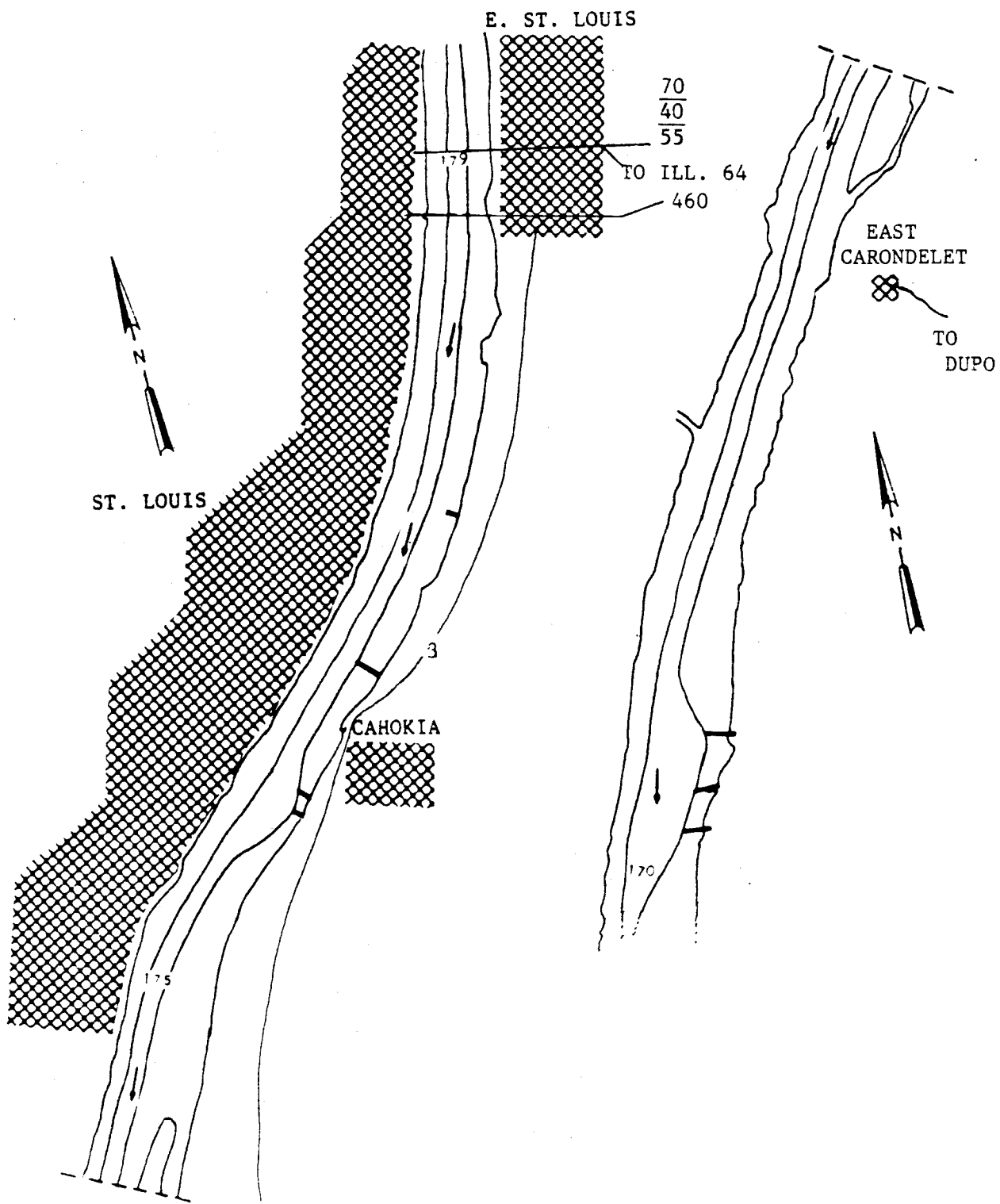
River Mile 189.7-179.6

BEST FISHING AREAS

- 1. Mosenthien Side Ch.

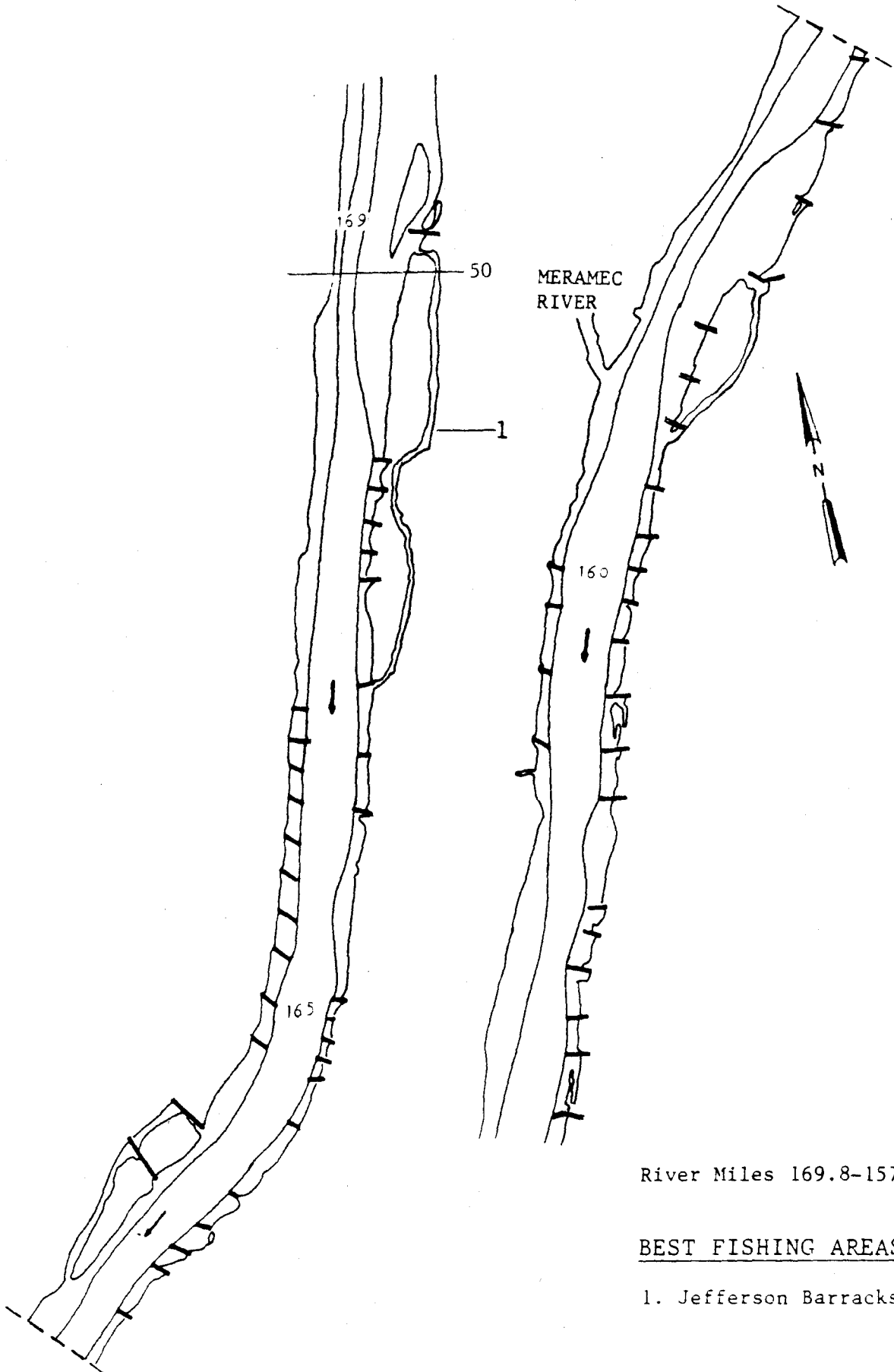
ACCESS AREAS

ACCESS AREAS	Ramp	Surface	Condition	Table	Toilet
A. Venice Public Access	X	H	P		



River Mile 179.6-169.8

NO BOAT ACCESS



River Miles 169.8-157.0

BEST FISHING AREAS

1. Jefferson Barracks Side Ch.

NO BOAT ACCESS

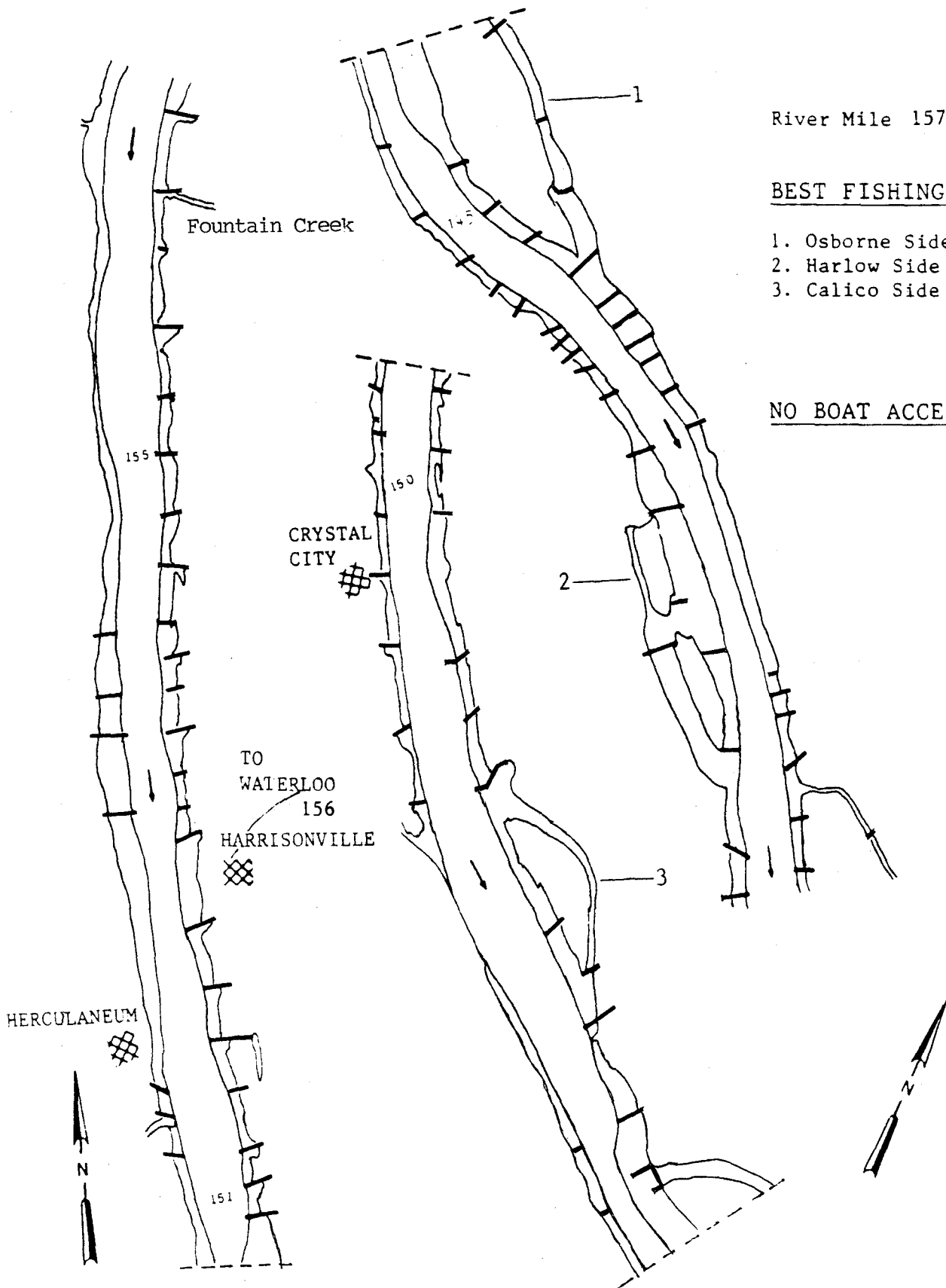
Map No.

River Mile 157.0-141.0

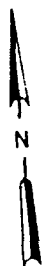
BEST FISHING AREAS

- 1. Osborne Side Ch.
- 2. Harlow Side Ch.
- 3. Calico Side Ch.

NO BOAT ACCESS



HERCULANEUM

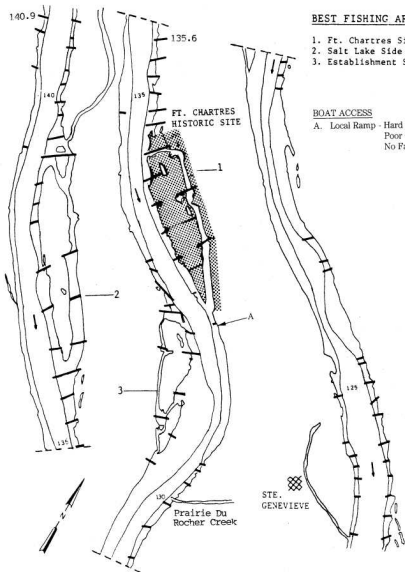


BEST FISHING AREAS

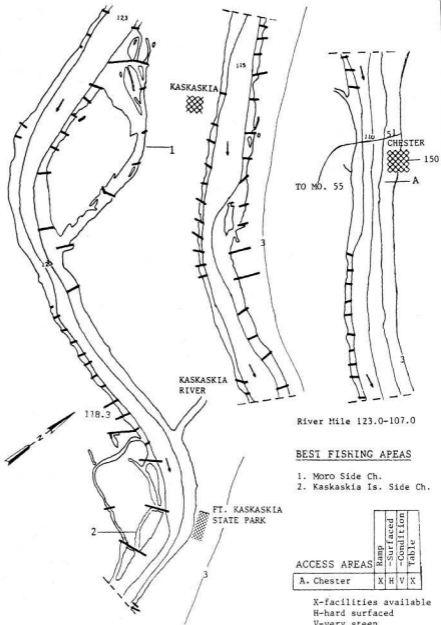
1. Ft. Chartres Side Ch.
2. Salt Lake Side Ch.
3. Establishment Side Ch.

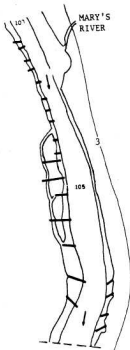
BOAT ACCESS

- A. Local Ramp - Hard Surface  
 Poor Condition  
 No Facilities









MARY'S RIVER

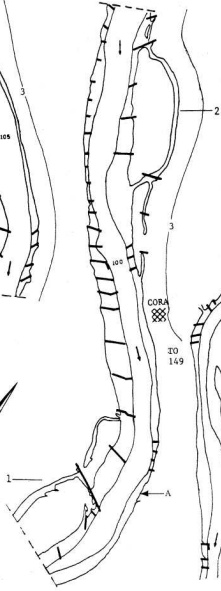
River Mile 107.0-91.0

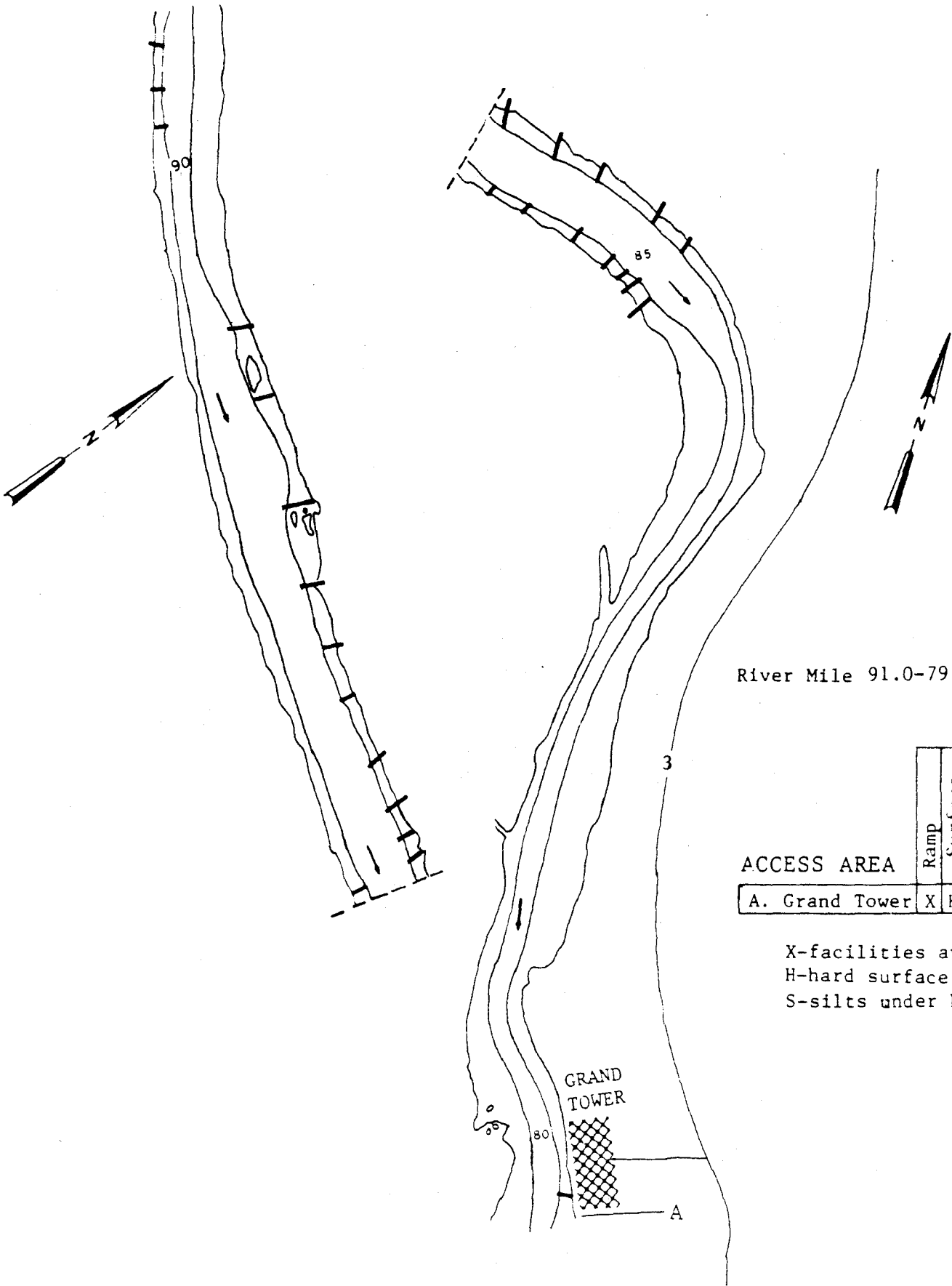
BEST FISHING AREAS

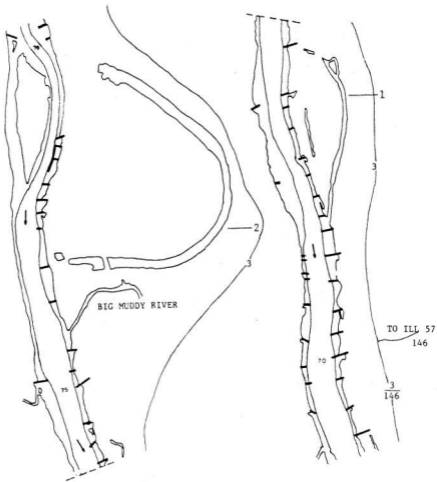
1. Jones Side Ch.
2. Liberty Side Ch.

BOAT ACCESS

A. Local Ramp - Gravel  
 Poor Condition  
 No Facilities







River Mile 79.3-69.9

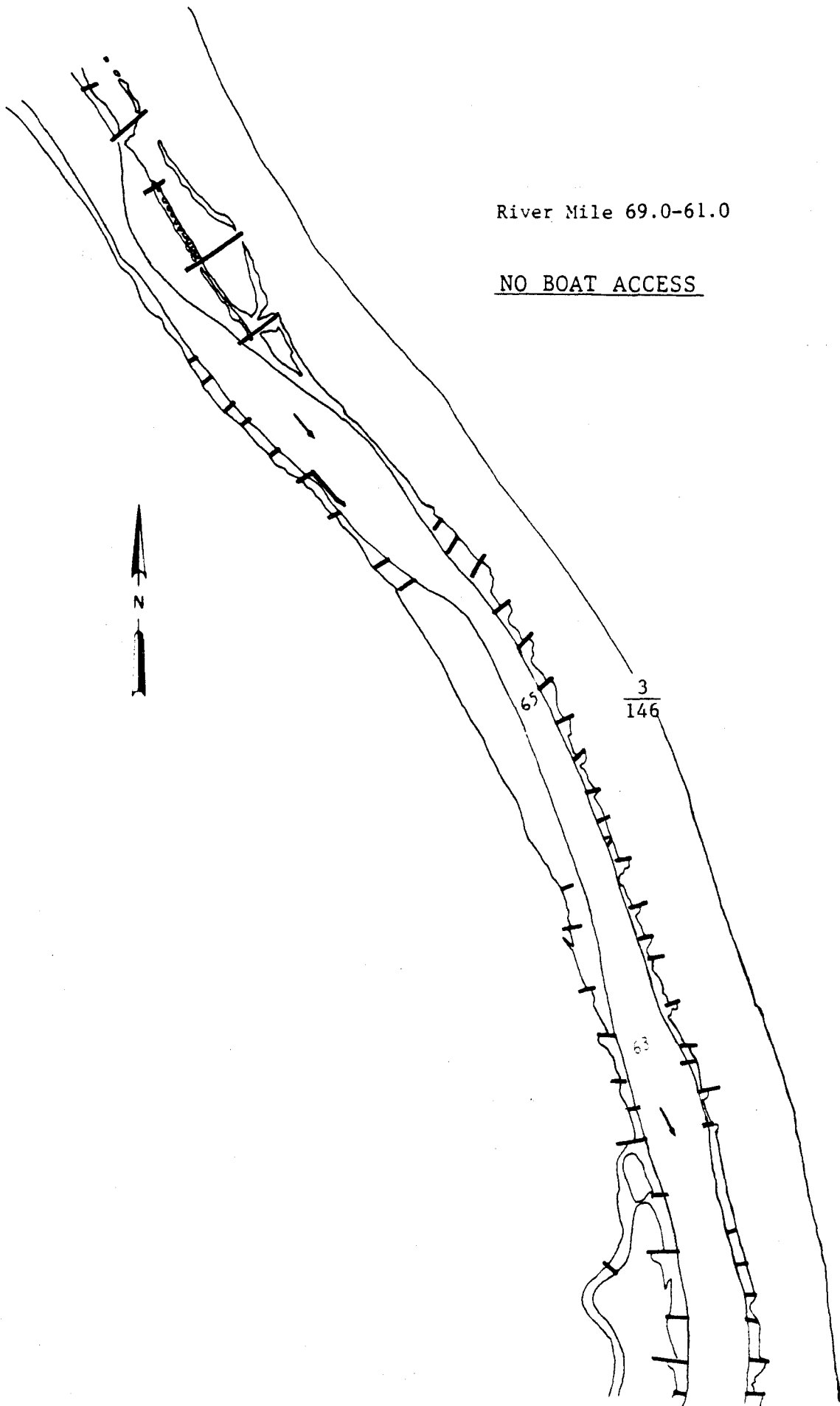
BEST FISHING AREAS

1. Crawford Side Ch.
2. Grand Tower Chute

NO BOAT ACCESS

River Mile 69.0-61.0

NO BOAT ACCESS



River Mile 61.0-52.0

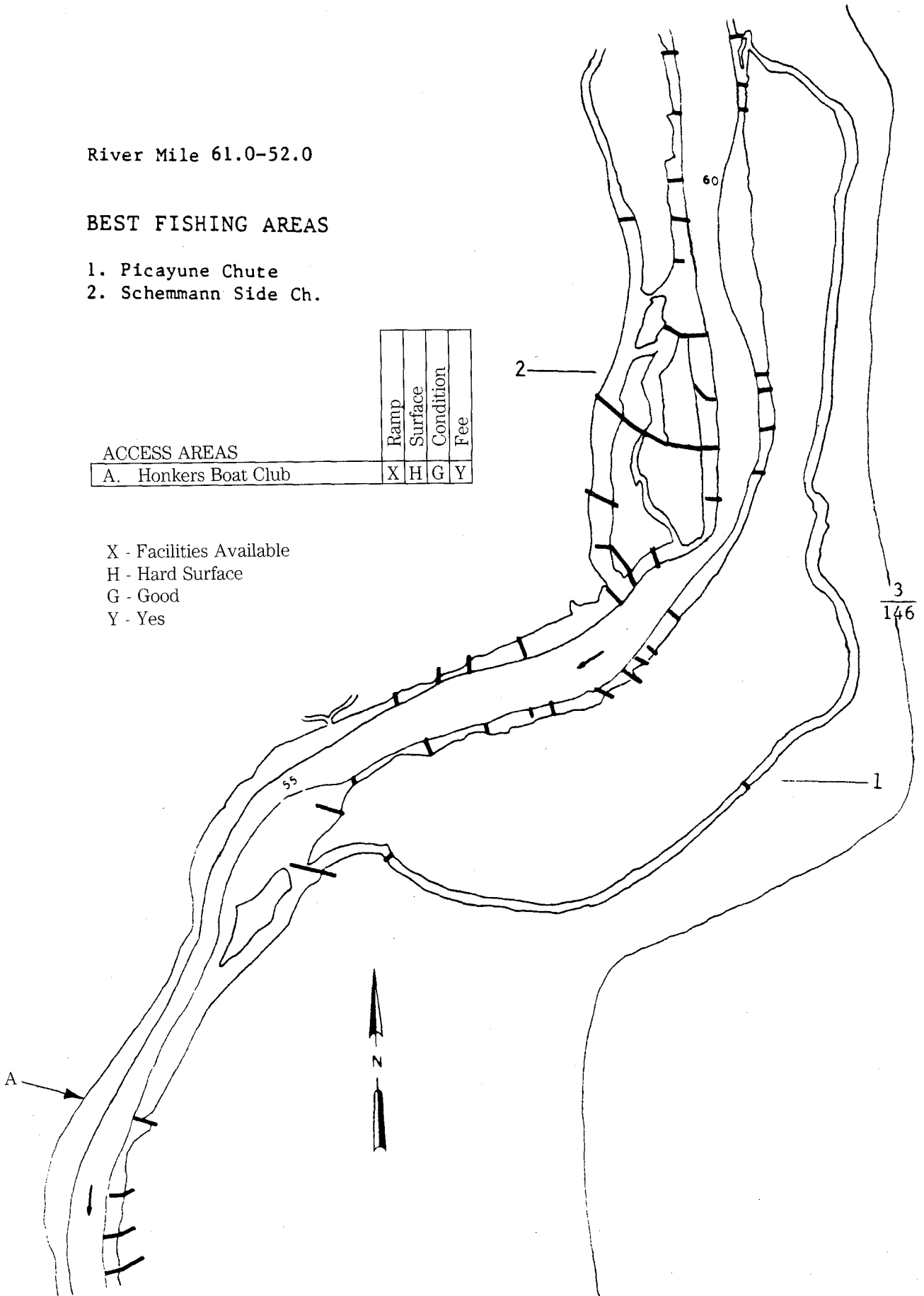
**BEST FISHING AREAS**

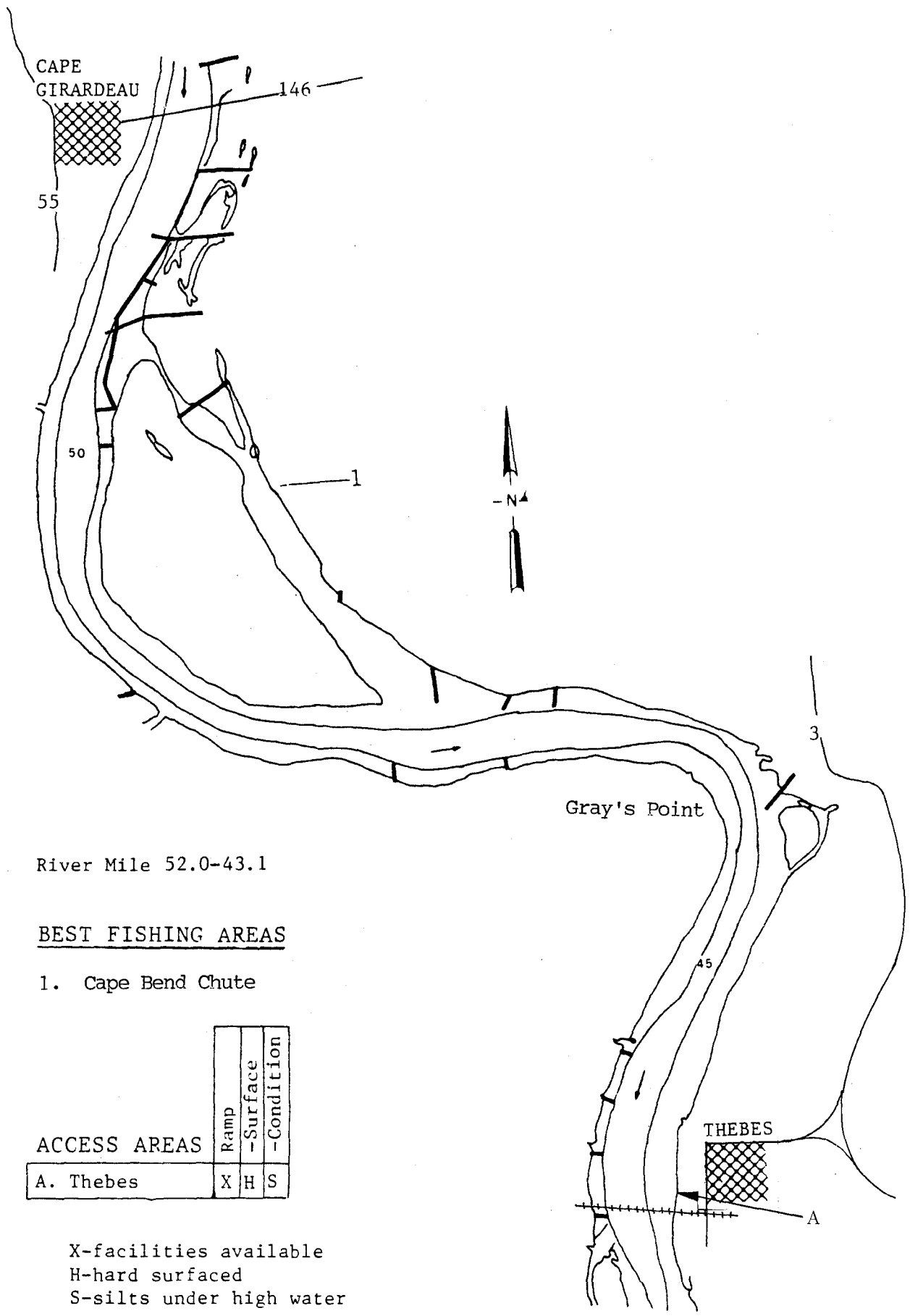
1. Picayune Chute
2. Schemmann Side Ch.

**ACCESS AREAS**

	Ramp	Surface	Condition	Fee
A. Honkers Boat Club	X	H	G	Y

- X - Facilities Available
- H - Hard Surface
- G - Good
- Y - Yes





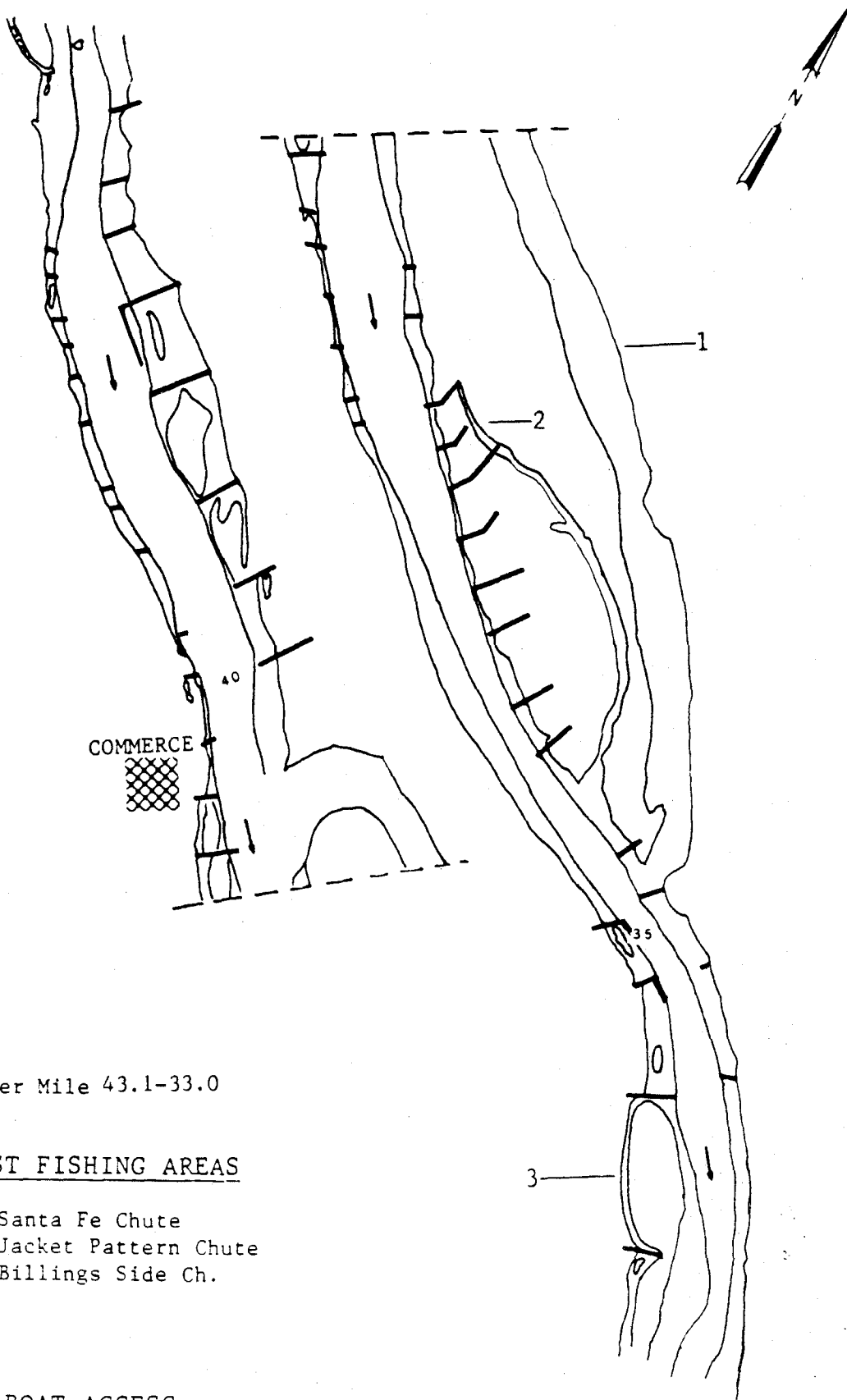
River Mile 52.0-43.1

BEST FISHING AREAS

- 1. Cape Bend Chute

ACCESS AREAS	Ramp	Surface	Condition
A. Thebes	X	H	S

X-facilities available  
 H-hard surfaced  
 S-silts under high water



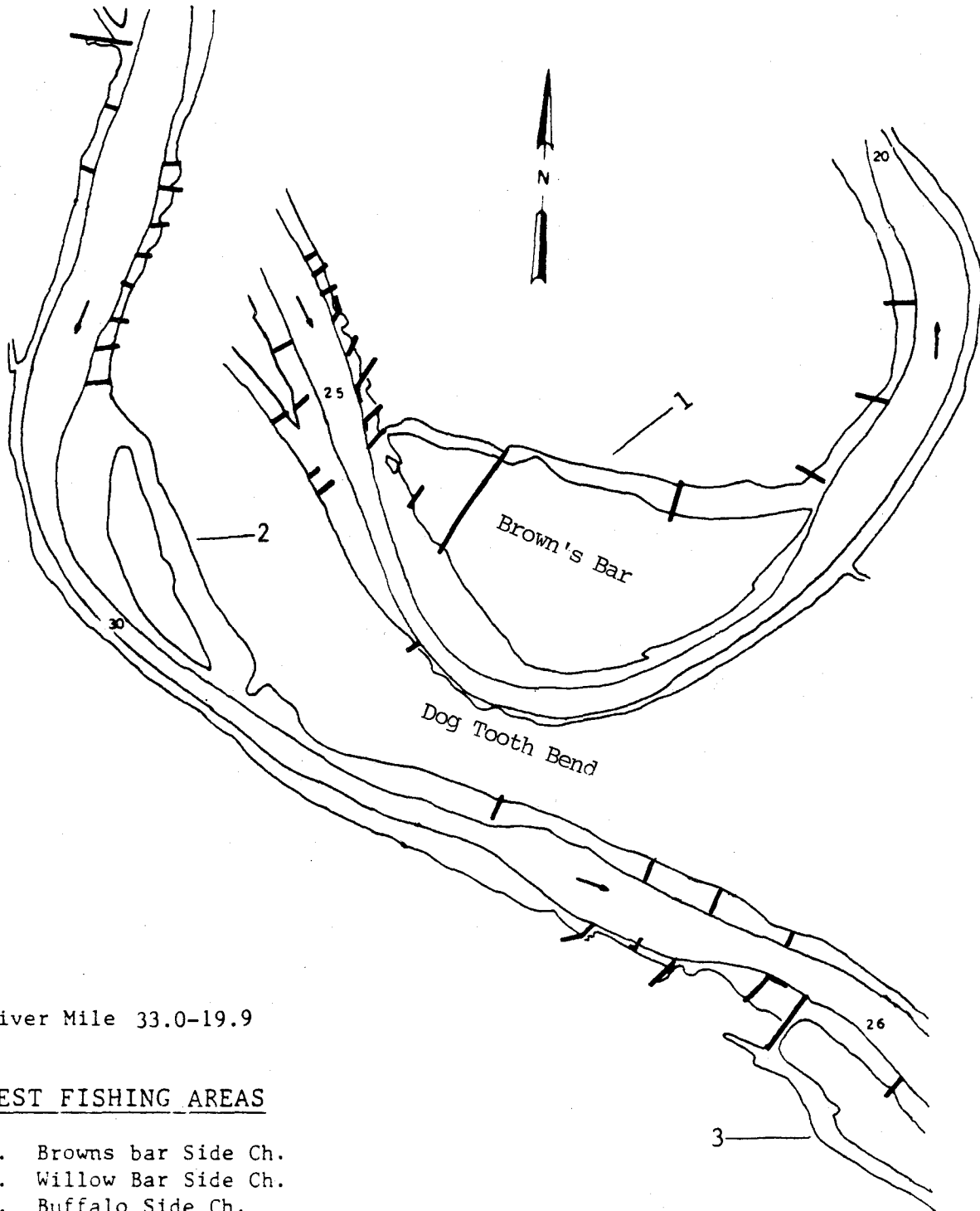
River Mile 43.1-33.0

BEST FISHING AREAS

- 1. Santa Fe Chute
- 2. Jacket Pattern Chute
- 3. Billings Side Ch.

NO BOAT ACCESS



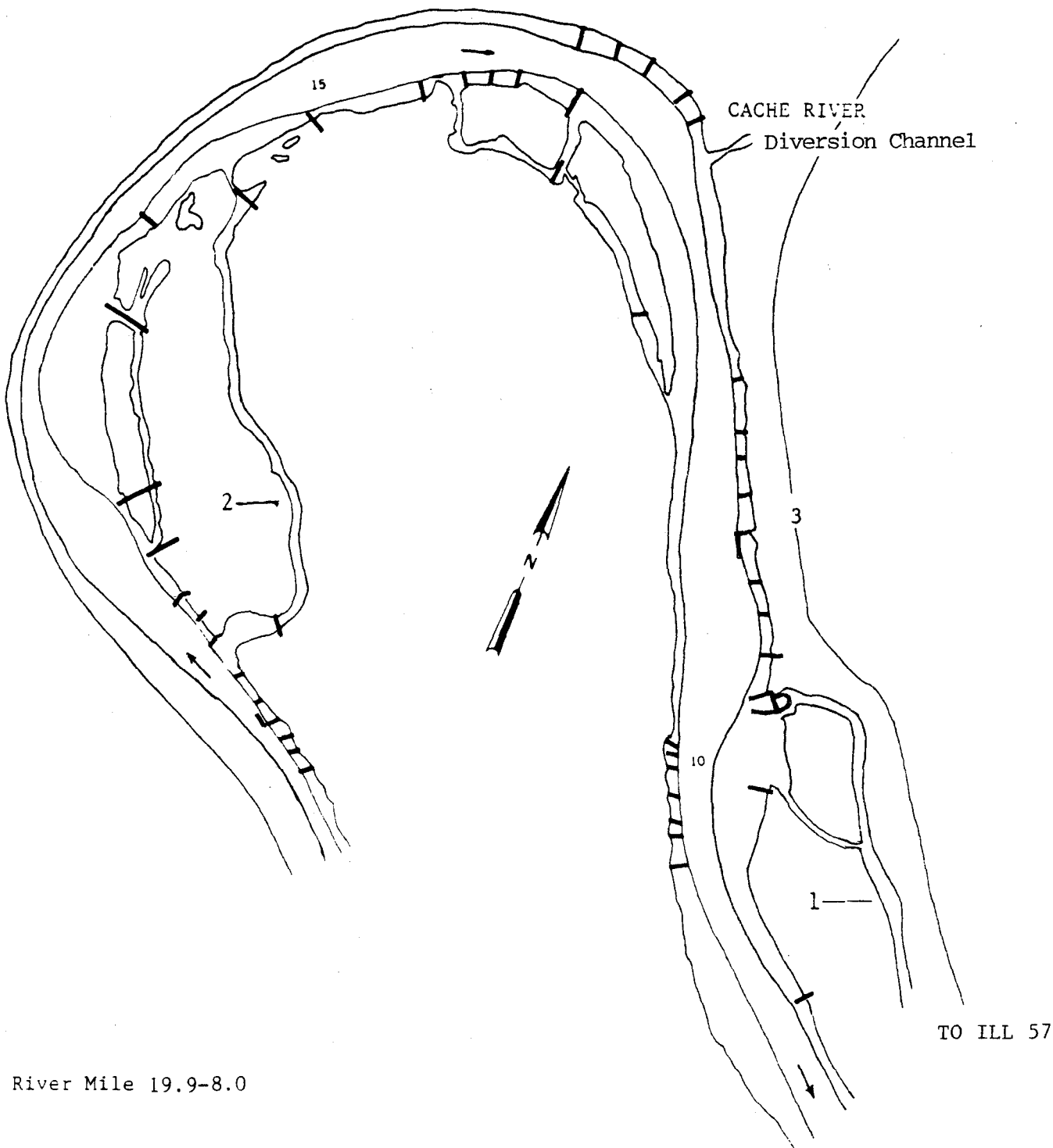


River Mile 33.0-19.9

BEST FISHING AREAS

- 1. Browns bar Side Ch.
- 2. Willow Bar Side Ch.
- 3. Buffalo Side Ch.

NO BOAT ACCESS



River Mile 19.9-8.0

BEST FISHING AREAS

- 1. Boston Bar Side Ch.
- 2. Newcums Chute

NO BOAT ACCESS

River Mile 8.0-0.0

BEST FISHING AREAS

1. Angelo Side Ch.

ACCESS AREAS

	Ramp	-Surface	-Condition	Table	Toilet
A. Ft. Defiance St. Pk.	X	H	G	X	X

X-facilities available  
H-hard surfaced  
G-good

