



# Des Plaines River Fact Sheet - 2021

Electrofishing surveys in 2018 yielded increased catch rates (fish/hr.) for sportfish throughout the Des Plaines River (Fig 1.). Fall collections in 2020 in the lower river segment upstream of the Brandon Lock and Dam (see map on page 2) were also very productive. A summary for sportfish species is given below.

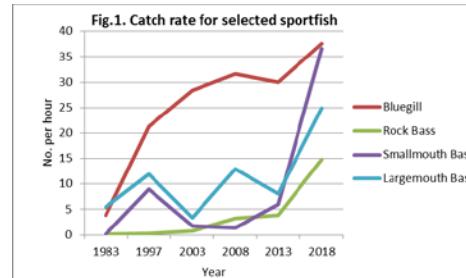
- **Smallmouth Bass.** Catch rate was over 120 fish/hr. in 2020 at Isle La Cache, near Romeoville – a record high for the Des Plaines River. All size classes were present with 15 fish/hr. in the 14-16” size range. Young-of-the-year were abundant (62 fish/hr.), indicating very good reproduction, which was a first for the previously degraded river; suggesting good prospects for coming years.
- **Rock Bass.** Catch rates throughout the river were 20 fish/hr. Highest catch rates were found at former Dam #2, Riverside and Lemont Road. Fall 2020 surveys yielded 10 fish/hr. over 8” at Isle La Cache.
- **Largemouth Bass.** Catch rates throughout the river were 25 fish/hr. with nearly 20% in the quality-size range (>12”). Larger fish were more abundant downstream of Riverside, especially at Lemont Road and Isle La Cache.
- **Bluegill.** Although widespread throughout the Des Plaines, abundance was higher at the upstream, lower gradient locations (59 fish/hr.), particularly at Wadsworth and Belvidere Roads. Individuals up to 8” were present. However, quality-sized fish (≥6”) made up only 12% of the catch.
- **Channel Catfish.** Catch rates were higher downstream of Riverside (13 fish/hr.). Individuals up to 24” were present with most fish in the 15-20” size range. Quality-size fish (≥16”) made up 93% of the total catch. Riverside, Lemont Road, and Isle La Cache had the highest catch rates.
- **Sauger.** IDNR has stocked an average of 19,000 2-inch fingerlings per year since 2000, primarily in the lower river. Catch rates ranged from 4 to 21 fish/hr. in higher gradient areas, with fish ranging from 6-19” in length .
- **Northern Pike.** Catch rates were 4 fish/hr. throughout the river. Sizes ranged from 6-26”. Fourteen of 41 Pike were >21”.



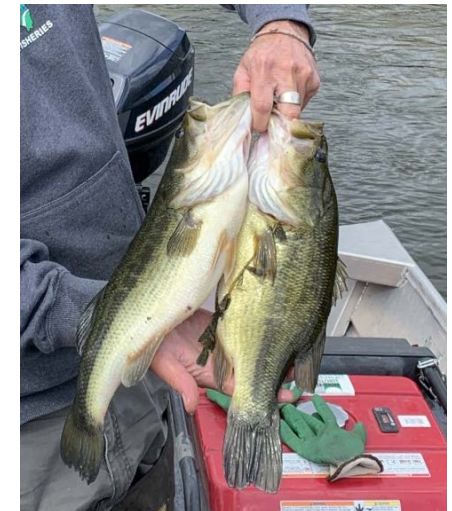
Smallmouth Bass



Rock Bass



Stocked Sauger

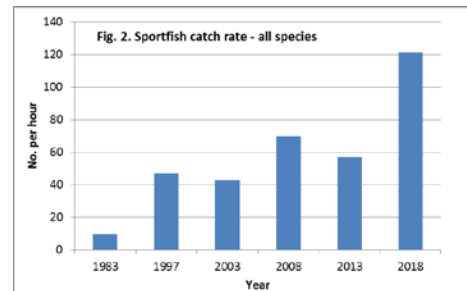
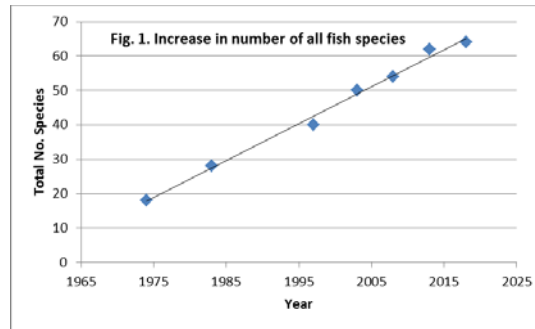


Largemouth Bass



Northern Pike

## Des Plaines River Fact Sheet – 2021 (page 2)



Rosyface Shiner



Orangethroat Darter



Blackchin Shiner

Over the past thirty years the Des Plaines River has transformed from a highly degraded stream to a healthy urban fishery thanks to clean water regulations. IDNR Fisheries sampled 16 locations on the mainstem of the river in 2018 using boat electrofishing. Stations are shown as red dots on the map. Here's a summary:

- Increase in fish species.** The IL DNR has conducted fish surveys since 1974, when only 20 species were found. The number has increased steadily over the years (Fig. 1). As of 2018, a total of 64 species have been collected.
- Species composition.** In early surveys, populations were dominated by Common Carp, Goldfish, Bullheads and other very tolerant species. The tolerant species are decreasing and being replaced by sportfish (Fig. 2) and other intolerant species like the Rosyface Shiner and Blackchin Shiner. In 2018, Orangethroat Darter, a sensitive indicator species, was collected for the first time.
- Species source.** It appeared that many of these new species, as well as the Smallmouth Bass found upstream of Brandon Road Dam, swam up through the lock. That has recently been confirmed by scientists at SIU using chemical analysis of fin rays.
- Why the increase in 2018?** In addition to the increase in Smallmouth Bass, we observed other major improvements in the lower river. It appears these can be attributed to the addition of the McCook Reservoir to the Deep Tunnel System.
- Future prospects and challenges.** Despite all the improvements, the Des Plaines is still listed as impaired by IEPA. Among other challenges, installation of an Asian Carp Barrier at Brandon Road Lock tops the list. This barrier will block native fishes needed to complete restoration efforts and insure removal from the impaired list. IDNR is working with Federal Partners to address this issue.