



Horseshoe Lake – Alexander County

2024 FISHERIES STATUS SUMMARY

LOCATION: Horseshoe Lake is located in Alexander County at the Horseshoe Lake State Fish & Wildlife Area just south of Olive Branch, IL.

DESCRIPTION: Horseshoe Lake is 1890 acres in size with a maximum depth of 5-6 feet. There are several boat ramps and campgrounds around the lake. The lake resembles a southern swamp with bald cypress and tupelo gum trees growing throughout

STATUS OF THE SPORT FISHERY – The recreational fishery in Horseshoe Lake has been severely degraded due to environmental and biological factors associated with increased frequency and severity of flooding in recent decades. Of particular note is the decline in the Bluegill fishery, which used to be one of the best in the state. Fortunately, the lake still harbors good fishing opportunities for crappie and catfish. Non-traditional anglers will also find great opportunities to target Gar and Bowfin. A multi-gear fish community survey is completed every other year. The following species information is based on the most recent survey data from 2022.

Crappie – Horseshoe Lake contains a crappie population consisting of both Black and White Crappie. Anglers report that the lake supports a good crappie fishery. During 2022, a total of 21 Black Crappie and 33 White Crappie were collected, ranging up to 14 inches in length. The size structure of crappie in Horseshoe Lake is very good, as 43% of crappie in the sample were over 10 inches and 11% were over 12 inches. A total of 20 Black Crappie and 26 White Crappie from the fall trap net survey were aged using otoliths. Black Crappie generally reached 10 inches at age 3.5 and 12 inches at age 5.5. White Crappie demonstrated slightly faster growth and reached 11 inches at age 3.5 and 12 inches at age 4.5.

Bluegill – Only 31 Bluegill were collected during 2022 surveys, of which 2 were right at 8 inches in length. Body condition was very good, as the mean relative weight of Bluegill in the sample was 111. Horseshoe Lake used to harbor one of the premier Bluegill fisheries in Illinois. However, a variety of environmental factors and an influx of riverine species have severely impacted the Bluegill fishery.

Largemouth Bass – Very few bass are present in Horseshoe Lake, as only two were collected during the survey.

Channel Catfish – Five Channel Catfish were collected during the electrofishing survey, the largest weighing nearly 7 lbs. Anglers report that the lake supports a good fishery for catfish.

Spotted Gar – Spotted Gar are numerous in Horseshoe Lake and should provide excellent opportunities for bow fishing. Individuals over 5 lbs have been collected during surveys.

Bowfin – Bowfin are numerous in Horseshoe Lake and should provide good opportunities for bow fishing and anglers with the proper gear. Bowfin are aggressive predators and very strong fighters. Similar to Gar, Bowfin are a native species and should not be viewed as detrimental.

Buffalo – Smallmouth, Bigmouth, and Black Buffalo are abundant in Horseshoe Lake and should provide excellent opportunities for bow fishing or anglers with the appropriate gear to target them.

Fishing regulations:

All Fish - 2 Pole and Line Fishing Only
Only trolling motors are allowed in the refuge from October 15 through the end of February.
10 HP outboard motor limit

PHONE NUMBERS: Illinois Department of Natural Resources Fish Biologist – Nick Abell 618-967-0952.