

LA GRANGE POOL - ILLINOIS RIVER

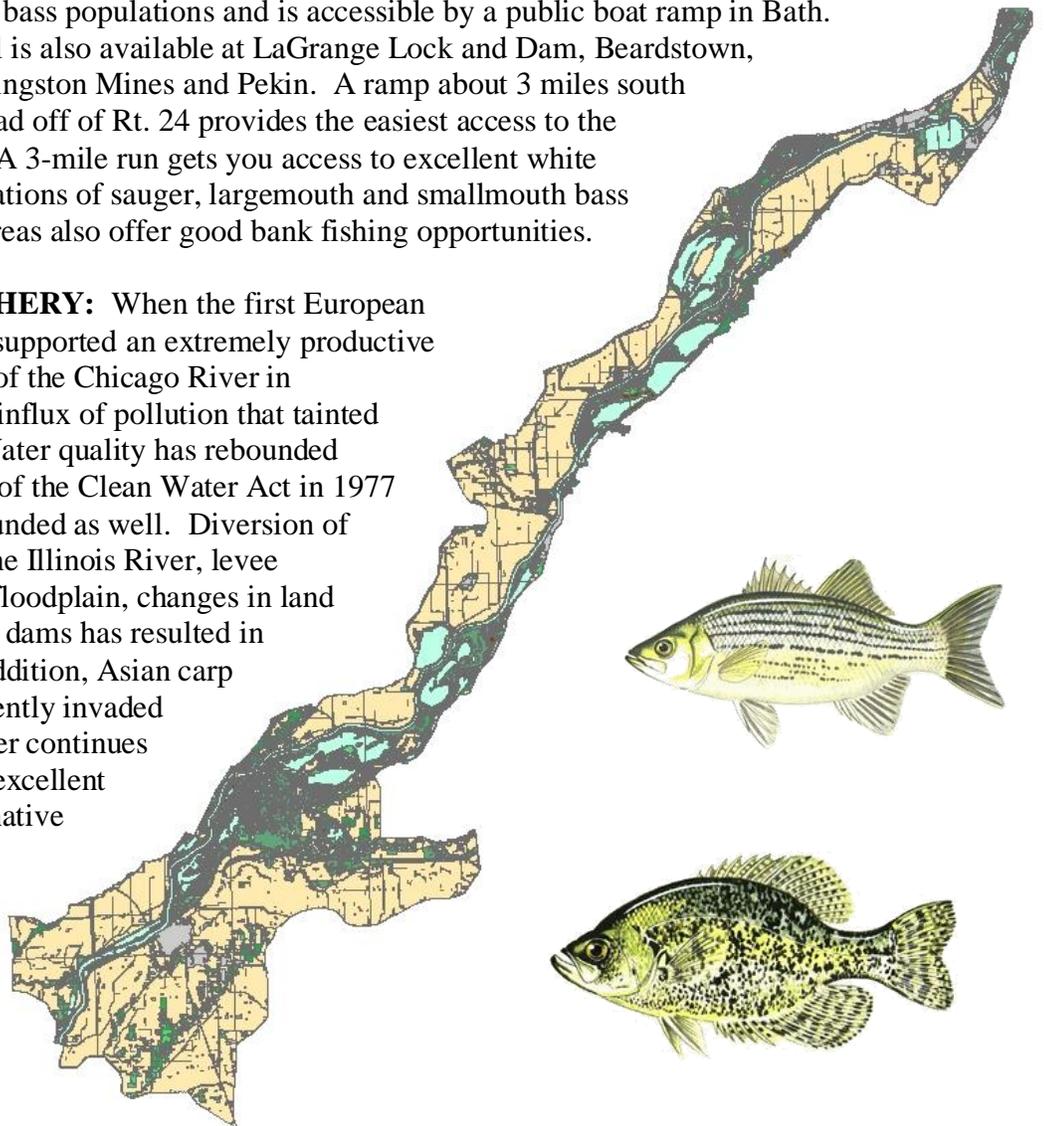
2024 FISHERIES FACT SHEET

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 characterized 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 and Flag lakes at the 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 you access to excellent white bass fishing, along with concentrations of sauger, largemouth and smallmouth bass and catfish. 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. The reversal of the Chicago River in the early 20th century brought an influx of pollution that tainted the river all the way to Peoria. Water quality has rebounded dramatically since the institution of the Clean Water Act in 1977 and the fish community has rebounded as well. Diversion of water from Lake Michigan into the Illinois River, levee construction and isolation of the floodplain, changes in land use and construction of locks and dams has resulted in aquatic habitat degradation. In addition, Asian carp and other exotic species have recently invaded the river. Although the lower river continues to face negative human impacts, excellent fishing opportunities remain for native game fishes. The Illinois River continues to support a diverse fish community evidenced by collection of 66 native fish species during annual fish community surveys in 2023.



Channel catfish – Channel catfish are one of 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 common. Notable areas for channel catfish are main channel border (area between the navigation channel and the river bank) and side channels with current and structure. The 2023 fish community survey resulted in a catch rate of only 6 channel catfish/hour electrofishing with fish ranging in size 12-23 inches weighing up to 5 pounds. Hoop net surveys are a better gear to evaluate benthic fish populations, like channel catfish. Hoop net surveys are conducted annually on various parts of the river. 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. PCB contamination in fish is a remnant of past pollution that is declining. 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. The 2023 fish community survey resulted in the collection of 11 flathead catfish ranging from 9 - 22 inches weighing up to 4 pounds. Fish the deep holes, main channel border near current breaks, and woody debris piles or other structure. No blue catfish were collected in 2023, but densities are increasing adding another potential trophy catfish species to the pool.

Largemouth Bass/Smallmouth Bass – Largemouth bass are prevalent throughout the La Grange Pool. Like other sunfish species, they have reproductive spikes during big flood years. The 2023 fish community survey resulted in a poor largemouth bass survey (5/hour). Smallmouth bass are collected in lower numbers in the La Grange Pool compared to largemouth bass. Bass are part of the sunfish family that need quality spawning and nursery habitat to have successful spawns. Spring flood pulses extend water surface area, which provides suitable habitat for bass to carry out their life history strategies. Spring flood pulses have not occurred in recent years.

White bass – The white bass is a schooling species that is present throughout the main channel of the LaGrange Pool. White bass can be found pool wide congregated at outflows and following schools of shad. Few white bass were collected in the La Grange Pool during the 2023 survey (4/hour). IDNR Biologists have been receiving an increase in calls from anglers catching hybrid striped bass (white bass x striped bass). There is no creel limit on white or hybrid striped bass measuring less than 17 inches, however white or hybrid striped bass measuring 17 inches or greater have a 3 fish/day creel limit on the Illinois River.

Sauger/Walleye – Sauger and, to a lesser degree, walleye are most abundant in the upper pools of the Illinois River, but are present in the LaGrange pool. No sauger or walleye were collected in the 2023 La Grange Pool annual fish survey. They are typically found in deep waters during the day, but search for food in the shallows at night, therefore our daytime electrofishing surveys are not ideal to assess sauger or walleye populations.

Crappie – Both black crappie and white crappie are common in the La Grange Pool, though black crappie are usually more abundant. Crappie catch rates in the La Grange Pool were the second highest out of all pools in 2023. Fish ranged from 2 -12 inches and weighed up to 1 pound. Backwaters, side channels and main channel border areas with submerged brush are the best locations for crappie fishing. The numerous backwater lakes of the La Grange Pool have historically been excellent crappie waters.

FISHING REGULATIONS FOR LAGRANGE POOL ILLINOIS RIVER:

There is a 12 inch minimum length limit for largemouth and smallmouth bass. The daily catch limit is six bass total with 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 or ifishillinois.org.

For further information contact: IDNR Fisheries at (309) 357-0387.

