



PEORIA 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 Peoria Pool of the Illinois River extends from the Peoria Lock and Dam at mile 157.7 to the tailwaters of the Starved Rock Lock and Dam at mile 231. Peoria, Tazewell, Woodford, Marshall, Putnam, Bureau and LaSalle counties border this reach.

RIVER ACCESS: The Peoria Pool ranges from slow water velocities and soft substrates of Peoria Lake at the downstream end of the pool to swift flows and coarse substrates upstream from the great bend to the Starved Rock Lock and Dam tailwaters. Public lands bordering the pool include Woodford County Conservation Area, Marshall State Fish and Wildlife Area, Lake DePue State Fish and Wildlife Area, Fox Run Conservation Area, and Starved Rock State Park. Boat access to the Peoria Pool is available at the Peoria Dam, Downtown Peoria, East Peoria, Detweiller Park, Woodford County Conservation Area, Chillicothe, Marshall State Fish and Wildlife Area (Marshall, Spring Branch and Sparland units), Lacon, Henry, Hennepin, Spring Valley, Peru, LaSalle, and Starved Rock State Park. Public lands and boat access areas offer good bank fishing opportunities.

STATUS OF THE SPORT FISHERY: When the first European settlers arrived the Illinois River supported one of the most productive freshwater fisheries in the world. 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 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. Additionally, Asian carp and other exotic species have invaded the river. Despite these negative impacts, there remains a diverse fish community in the Illinois River evidenced by the 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 Illinois River. They are very abundant in the 16-24 inch size range and fish over 24 inches weighing 7 - 10 pounds are common. A targeted hoop net survey was conducted in the upper Peoria Pool in 2023. Channel catfish catch rates were high and resulted in 252 fish collected ranging from 13–30 inches weighing up to 13 pounds. Notable habitats for channel catfish are main channel border (area between the navigation channel and the river bank) and side channels with current. The Chillicothe, Lacon and Henry areas and the Peoria Narrows are notable channel catfish reaches. There remains a do-not-eat contaminant advisory on channel catfish over 18 inches in the Peoria Pool due to PCB detection in the flesh. PCB contamination in fish is a remnant of past pollution that is declining. The advisory recommends no more than 6 meals/year for channel catfish 12 - 16 inches and 1 meal per week for those under 12 inches. 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 – Flathead catfish are abundant in the Peoria Pool and trophy-sized fish exceeding 36 inches and 30 pounds can be found. Flatheads between 28 and 36 inches are not uncommon. The 2023 targeted hoop net survey resulted in 31 flathead catfish collected ranging from 15-35 inches and weighing up to 24 pounds. Fish the deep holes, main channel border near current breaks, and woody debris piles or other structure for flatheads.

Largemouth Bass/Smallmouth Bass – The 2023 fish community survey resulted in a catch rate of 17 largemouth bass/hour of electrofishing with fish ranging in size between 1-15 inches weighing up to 1.6 pounds, which is average for the pool. The Peoria Pool had the highest largemouth bass catch rate out of all pools in 2023. The 2023 survey resulted in a catch rate of 9.4 smallmouth bass/hour of electrofishing with fish measuring 2-15 inches and weighing up to 1.3 pounds. Smallmouth bass catch rates show an increasing trend over the last 10 years in the Peoria Pool. Like other members of the sunfish family, bass have reproductive spikes during big flood years, which have been lacking over the last several years. There is a 12 inch minimum length limit and 6 fish per day creel limit on largemouth and smallmouth bass to allow for bass to spawn once or twice prior to being harvested. Like channel catfish, a contaminant advisory recommendation has been issued to limit consumption of all sizes of largemouth bass to one meal per week. Side channels, shallow water with structure, marinas and rip-rap are the places to fish for river bass in the Peoria Pool.

Sauger/Walleye – Sauger and walleye are most dense in the upper end of the Peoria Pool, with sauger being more abundant. The Illinois sauger fishery is a world class fishery bringing anglers from all over the country to fish the national Masters Walleye Circuit in Spring Valley. The IDNR – Division of Fisheries State Hatcheries annually stock sauger fry in the Peoria Pool and upper pools of the Illinois River to supplement the population. Sauger and walleye are typically found in deep waters during the day, but search for food in the shallows of the main channel border at night. This behavior results in poor day-time electrofishing catch rates of adult sauger and walleye. Few sauger were collected in the 2023 Peoria Pool fish community survey.

Crappie – Both black crappie and white crappie are present in the Peoria Pool, but black crappie are more abundant. Crappie catch rates were again above average in 2023 and were the highest for any pool in 2023 with a catch rate of 15/hour electrofishing. Catch rates of black crappie in the Peoria Pool have increased over the last ten years. Backwaters, side channels and main channel border areas with submerged brush are the best locations to fish for crappie.

Sunfish – Bluegill and other sunfish catch rates were high in the Peoria Pool in 2023. Sunfish catch rates also show an increasing trend over the last ten years in the Peoria Pool. Many bluegill collected were of harvestable size between 6-8 inches and provide an excellent fishing opportunity for anglers of all ages. Anglers can catch bluegill in the warmer months of the year using worms, crickets, or night crawlers along structured shorelines, such as rip-rap.

FISHING
REGULATIONS FOR
PEORIA 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. Statewide regulations are in effect for all other species. The statewide minimum length limit for walleye, sauger and hybrids is 14 inches, with a 6 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.

For further information contact: Marshall State Fish and Wildlife Area at (309) 246-8351; Starved Rock State Park at (815) 667-4726; IDNR Fisheries at (309) 357-0387.

