

**ILLINOIS
STATE REPORT
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Sam Flood, Acting Director
Illinois Department of Natural Resources
One Natural Resources Way
Springfield, IL 62702-1271

Fish and Wildlife Highlights

2007 Deer Season Harvest

Hunters in Illinois harvested a total of 198,670 deer during the 2007-08 seasons, including all methods and special hunts – archery, muzzleloading, firearm season, youth hunts, late-winter and special CWD seasons. This compares with a preliminary harvest total of 197,509 in 2006-07.

Urban Deer Population Control

Deer population control permits issued to land management agencies in northern Illinois for 2007-08 resulted in removal of 1,772 deer and donation of 59,032 pounds of venison to charities.

Joint Deer Management Task Force

The Illinois General Assembly formed a Joint Task Force on Deer Population Control charged with examining and making recommendations on ways to manage the Illinois deer population. Specifically, the group is addressing maintaining and increasing deer hunting opportunities; reducing car-deer accidents and examining how they affect insurance rates; reducing crop and other property damage; and, increasing the health of the Illinois deer herd. The task force has discussed developing measurable objectives. It is to report to the General Assembly by next January 1.

2007 Waterfowl Season Harvest

Preliminary estimates of duck hunter activity on 26 public hunting areas that typically account for about 80 percent of hunter use days on monitored public areas in Illinois indicated that 61,880 hunter days accounted for a harvest of 64,037 ducks. Due to the elimination of Canada goose harvest quotas, no preliminary harvest estimates are available. Anecdotal information suggests that the north and central zones had very good hunting and the former southern quota zone season was possibly the best since the 2000-01 season.

Avian Influenza Sampling

Illinois participated in the nationwide avian influenza surveillance project administered by USDA-Wildlife Services, taking samples from four species of waterfowl at 23 sites throughout the state. Three hundred samples were taken from hunter-harvested waterfowl and 200 from live-trapped ducks. Illinois entered into an additional agreement with the USFWS to conduct some additional

avian influenza surveillance. For this project, 150 samples were taken from diving ducks and mortality event surveillance was conducted in four important migration stop-over areas. IDNR plans to collect 200 samples from Canada geese during June 2008 and continue both avian influenza surveillance projects in 2009.

2008 Spring Turkey Harvest

Hunters in Illinois harvested a preliminary total of 15,792 wild turkeys during the 2008 spring turkey season (15,159 during the regular seasons plus 633 during the youth seasons), compared with a total harvest of 14,766 in the spring of 2007.

Illinois Wildlife Action Plan/State Wildlife Grants

The implementation of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan continues through the work of the Illinois Fish and Wildlife Action Team, comprised of nine workgroups representing various agencies and NGOs helping guide conservation activities. Many of the plan's goals are being implemented through State Wildlife Grant program projects. Illinois is delineating boundaries for 31 Conservation Opportunity Areas, with specific critical habitat areas within each being defined to target resources for species in greatest need of conservation.

Farmland and Prairie Wildlife Partnership

Implementation of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan began with restoration of grassland and herbaceous wetlands in prairie landscapes a major goal. The project identified 22 focus areas with concentrations of highly erodible cropland, prior converted wetlands, and existing grassland. Restoration efforts began with the acquisition of four blocks of land to be restored to native grasslands and small wetlands. Through the USDA State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) program for converting cropland to wildlife habitat, Illinois may enroll up to 20,600 acres within the focus areas.

Conservation Stewardship Program

The Conservation Stewardship Program was enacted in 2007 to encourage Illinois landowners to maintain unimproved land and protect wetland, woodland and prairie habitat. The program offers reduced valuation for property taxes as an incentive to landowners who prepare a conservation management plan for the parcel and commit to maintaining and managing that habitat. To date, more than 950 property owners have enrolled more than 28,000 acres.

Habitat Team

The Illinois Habitat Team provides technical assistance, seed, plants, equipment, and labor to private landowners to establish and manage wildlife habitat. In 2007, the team seeded 607 acres of native grasses and forbs; 485 acres of cool season grasses and legumes in fields; sprayed 545 acres for site prep, weed, and invasive plant control; mowed 204 acres, and conducted prescribed burns on 366 acres of native grasses and forbs. Nearly 130 landowners with more than 1,800 acres were assisted with grassland habitat efforts to help achieve goals in the Illinois Fish and Wildlife Action Plan. In 2008, the team will restore 500 acres at the new IDNR Saybrook Habitat Area through WHIP contracts with the NRCS.

Illinois Natural Areas Inventory Update

An update of the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI) initiated in 2007 continues with the hiring of regional ecologists and training for 2008 summer field work. The project will use new technologies and techniques to update the original INAI completed in the mid-1970s. Remote-sensing and on-the-ground methods will be used to identify sites that best represent the natural communities that existed in pre-settlement Illinois. The INAI is used by IDNR and other state and local agencies to guide decisions on land acquisition and management priorities to complement the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan.

Fish Illinois Website

The IDNR Division of Fisheries and Illinois Natural History Survey manage a user-friendly web site providing recreational anglers and boaters with important fishing information. It recorded nearly 5.7 million hits during the 2007 fishing season at www.ifishillinois.org

Illinois Fish Hatchery System

IDNR fish hatcheries produce and stock fish statewide to meet management needs and provide quality fishing. Three facilities produce more than 30 million fish annually, including largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, channel catfish, rainbow trout, brown trout, Coho salmon, Chinook salmon, muskellunge, walleye, sauger and striped bass. All testing results for potential VHS fish disease have been negative.

Illinois Urban Fishing Program

The Illinois Urban Fishing Program teaches non-anglers and children to fish through free clinics that include on-site fishing in stocked ponds. The program was initiated in Chicago in 1985 and has operated statewide since 1994. During the last year, the program held or sponsored a total of 2,306 programs for 84,377 participants. In addition, approximately 90,010 pounds of channel catfish and 136,010 hybrid sunfish were stocked.

Lake Michigan Program

Recreational anglers expended more than 491,700 angler hours to harvest more than 316,000 yellow perch and 48,000 trout and salmon from the Illinois waters of Lake Michigan last year.

Driftless Area Habitat Projects

Illinois, Trout Unlimited, and the USFWS teamed up to complete the first stream habitat project in Illinois to be partially funded by the Driftless Area Habitat Initiative. Clear Creek in Apple River Canyon State Park was the site of a number of restoration practices, including vortex weirs, lunger structures, and toe protection. The completed project is being utilized by a number of species of fish

LaMoine River Watershed

IDNR contracted with the University of Illinois to target the Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to key subwatersheds to address specific resource concerns associated with cattle farms in the LaMoine River Watershed. CREP, other Farm Bill programs,

and funding from the Illinois EPA and Illinois Department of Agriculture are helping develop nutrient management plans, fence cattle from streams, restore riparian buffers, restore key wetlands, and provide permanent protection for high quality riparian areas. Three livestock operations have signed on with others awaiting approval and funding.

Evaluation of Fish Passage Structures

In spring of 2005, two fish passage structures were constructed on Big Rock Creek, a high quality tributary to the Fox River in northeastern Illinois. The project was funded by the USFWS National Fish Passage Program. Though dam removal was preferred, it was not an option due to owner preferences. On one dam, a ramp was constructed using 1,600 tons of rock, covering the width of the dam and reaching 70 feet downstream. The other passage structure consists of a natural-looking bypass channel lined with rock stretching 60 feet around the end of the dam. The ramp allows most species to pass and many fish were found living within the ramp structure, which resembles a large riffle. Monitoring of the bypass structure found 17 species using the channel, including target species channel catfish, which was not found upstream previously. Due to winter storm damage, USFWS agreed to fund repairs on the ramp. Monitoring of fish movement continues.

Fish Passage at Yorkville Dam

The Yorkville Dam on the Fox River was recently modified to enhance public safety. A Denil fish ladder was installed – the first of its kind in Illinois. The concrete channel, with baffles placed at regular intervals to provide current breaks and resting places for migrating fish, opened in March 2008 and will be monitored for fish passage effectiveness. Another part of the project includes a canoe and fish passage channel, lined with rock and concrete.

Chicago Waterway Electric Barrier System

IDNR and the Corps of Engineers entered into an agreement in November 2003 to construct a \$16 million Aquatic Nuisance Species Barrier to supplement a demonstration barrier to prevent the spread of Asian carp into the Great Lakes. The first half of construction was completed in March 2006. The WRDA authorized several Great Lakes projects, among them the completion and operation of the electric barrier at full federal funding. Asian carp monitoring is ongoing.

Emiquon

IDNR and The Nature Conservancy are restoring a diverse native fish community at the Emiquon Preserve, a TNC floodplain lake restoration project near Lewistown. The lake is now more than 1,900 acres and millions of fish, including both game and non-game species, have been stocked. TNC is working to improve access and resolving restoration issues so the site can be opened to the public in 2009.

Endangered Species Recovery

IDNR continues efforts to restore threatened and endangered species. More than 1,000 federal-listed endangered Higgins' eye pearly mussels were stocked in the lower Rock River last year as part of a federal and state partnership. Planning continues on recovery of clubshell and riffleshell

mussels. Illinois also hosted a series of workshops on survey techniques for the state-endangered eastern massasauga rattlesnake.

Agency Highlights

Shooting Sports and Recreation

IDNR development at the World Shooting and Recreational Complex located near Sparta in Randolph County includes the opening in April 2008 of new boat ramps allowing angler access to two fishing lakes. The complex hosts trap, skeet, sporting clays, cowboy action and other shooting sports events, including the ATA Grand American each August and U.S. Open Trap Shoot each May. The complex also features the largest public camping facility in Illinois.

Water Quantity Management Plan

Gov. Rod Blagojevich's three-year, \$5 million initiative for development of state and regional water supply plans includes an effort to develop comprehensive water quantity planning processes in regional pilot areas in northeast and east-central Illinois. The IDNR Office of Water Resources and Illinois State Water Survey are assisting the two Regional Water Supply Planning Groups in developing water demand forecasts and management options for meeting long-term water supply needs, including conservation strategies.

Kids' Fishing Pond

The Fish America Foundation and the American Sportfishing Association provided funding for the creation of a Kids' Fishing Pond at Lake Le-Aqua-Na State Park in northwest Illinois. When completed, children will be able to participate in beginner fishing classes, borrow fishing tackle, and enjoy a successful day of fishing at the park.

Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

The Illinois CREP has made available \$61 million in state funds to leverage \$352 million in federal support for environmental restoration in the Illinois River Basin. Since 1998, 127,134 acres of floodplain have been restored to native vegetation. More than 35,000 acres of cropland have been restored to wetlands. Landowners have enrolled 82,000 acres into state conservation easements and 74,800 of these acres are in permanent easements, ensuring long-term protection of floodplain and other environmentally sensitive land. The program was closed in November 2007 due to lack of funds. Despite high commodity prices, landowner interest in enrolling wetlands and floodplain areas remains strong. Future funding is anticipated.

Illinois River Basin Restoration

The Illinois River Basin Restoration Comprehensive Plan will be used to design critical restoration projects that will restore backwater lakes, fish passage, recreation opportunities, water quality, and critical habitats for fisheries in the Illinois River Basin. Illinois has an agreement with Indiana to include Kankakee River basin restoration initiatives for cost-share opportunities as part of overall Illinois River watershed protection efforts. The Corps of Engineers has received funds to

implement the first critical restoration project – the Peoria Upper Island project. If there is funding in FFY09, two projects at Pekin Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area will be initiated to restore wetland areas and reconnect the backwater area to the Illinois River.

Environmental Management Program

The EMP is a Corps of Engineers partnership with Illinois for habitat rehabilitation and enhancement projects and long term resource monitoring. Despite funding reductions, Illinois has maintained two field stations collecting data on water quality, fish, and vegetation to evaluate Illinois and Mississippi river resources. Habitat rehabilitation projects awaiting funding include Rice Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area and Lake Chautauqua Refuge on the Illinois River.

Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program

With the passage of the 2007 WRDA, the Corps of Engineers is authorized to begin implementing the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program (NESP) for the upper Mississippi River system. This new dual-purpose authority will integrate restoration of the river's important habitats with modernization of the navigation system.

Land Acquisition and Recreation

Illinois during the past year acquired 27 parcels totaling 7,508 acres at a cost of more than \$17.5 million. The acquisition program was assisted due to a special appropriation of the \$15 million Illinois Hunter Heritage fund specifically designated for land with hunting or fishing opportunity. Illinois expanded local outdoor recreation opportunities during the last year with approval of 146 new park and trail grant projects totaling nearly \$39 million, many of them matching grants providing support for more than \$97 million in recreation improvements.

Landowner Incentive Program

The Landowner Incentive Program is a partnership of IDNR, USFWS, and 24 soil and water conservation districts. The program is being implemented in two Conservation Priority Areas and focuses on restoration and enhancement of hill prairies, tall grass prairies, oak/hickory timber, natural wetlands, sand forest, sand prairie and high quality stream segments. To date, there are 32 projects restoring and enhancing 900 acres of critical habitats. Through a partnership with NRCS, a process using soils mapping and hydrological data has targeted areas for potential endangered Illinois chorus frog habitats.

Partners for Conservation

In August 2007, the Illinois Conservation 2000 Program was renamed Partners for Conservation and the program was formally extended to 2021. Since 1996, the program has assisted in the formation of 41 public/private Ecosystem Partnerships to develop plans and implement projects on a watershed scale with an ecosystem-based approach. The projects have acquired 5,500 acres of land, and restored 68,507 acres of habitat and 512,142 feet of stream shoreline.