

**ILLINOIS
STATE REPORT
June 2009**

Marc Miller, Acting Director
Illinois Department of Natural Resources
One Natural Resources Way
Springfield, IL 62702-1271

Fish and Wildlife Highlights

2008 Deer Season Harvest

Hunters in Illinois harvested a preliminary total of 188,425 deer during the 2008-09 seasons, including all methods and special hunts – archery, muzzleloading, firearm season, youth hunts, late-winter and special CWD seasons. This was a 5.6 percent decrease compared with the preliminary harvest total of 199,671 in 2007-08.

2008 Chronic Wasting Disease

The number of CWD-positive deer identified in Illinois fell for the third consecutive year, with 30 positives found. This compares to 38 in 2007, 42 in 2006, and 51 in 2005. More than 7,000 deer were tested (second highest test total), although Illinois discontinued testing of fawns taken in hunting seasons prior to January because of their low likelihood of infection.

Urban Deer Population Control

Deer population control permits issued to 14 land management agencies and municipalities resulted in the removal of 2,046 deer from 28 sites in northern Illinois during the winter of 2008-09 – and 63,844 pounds of venison being donated to charitable organizations.

Joint Deer Management Task Force

The Illinois General Assembly formed a Joint Task Force on Deer Population Control in 2008 to examine and make recommendations on ways to manage the Illinois deer population. The task force adopted a measurable objective for deer population change, with the starting goal as the mean of the highest and lowest deer vehicle accident rates per billion miles travelled (between 1994 - 2007) for each county and statewide. The main recommendation was to extend the late-winter deer season from three to nine days, with over-the-counter availability of permits for open counties. The proposed regulation changes the late-winter season to a seven-day split season, with four days at the end of December and three days in mid-January.

2009 Spring Turkey Harvest

Hunters in Illinois harvested a preliminary total of 15,488 wild turkeys during the 2008 spring turkey season, compared with a total harvest of 15,792 in the spring of 2008.

2008 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 the state indicated that 51,166 hunter days accounted for a harvest of 50,692 ducks (24 percent lower than the five-year average). Anecdotal information from Canada goose hunters suggests that the north and central zones had average hunting and the former southern quota zone was better than the most recent five-year average.

Avian Influenza Sampling

Illinois participated in nationwide avian influenza surveillance projects administered by USDA-Wildlife Services and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, taking samples from 16 species of waterfowl at 22 sites throughout the state. There were 473 samples were taken from hunter-harvested waterfowl and 387 from live-trapped ducks and gulls. In addition, active mortality event surveillance was conducted during spring migration in four important migration corridors. IDNR plans to continue both avian influenza surveillance projects in 2009.

On-line Trapper Education Course

First-time trappers under the age of 18 are required to complete a trapper education course before purchasing a license. Part of this requirement can now be met by completing an online course at www.trappered.com. Students must then complete a half day of hands-on training where they will hone skills like making sets and preparing furs for market.

2007-08 Upland Harvest

Although upland hunter participation and harvest continues to decline, nearly one-fifth of licensed Illinois hunters pursued at least one species of upland game during the '07-08 season. Estimates indicate that 51,847 hunters harvested 1,120,739 doves, 49,054 hunters took 243,874 rabbits, 35,961 hunters bagged 102,822 pheasants, 24,614 hunters harvested 188,710 quail, and 349 hunters took 524 grey partridge during the season.

Chicago Waterway Electric Barrier System

The original demonstration electric barrier in operation since 2002 in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal was rehabilitated and restored to full operation in October 2008. On April 8, 2009, Barrier IIA was energized and is now operating, providing redundant protection. During the summer of 2009, an additional electrical sensitivity study will be conducted to refine the level of voltage needed to improve the function of the two existing barriers and help in the design of Barrier IIB. Further safety testing at higher voltage levels will also be conducted. The barrier system is now operated as a single project and at full federal expense.

Wetland Birds Study

IDNR is using a 25-year dataset (1980-2005) of wetland bird abundance and distribution among 196 wetlands in northeastern Illinois to evaluate population trends and dynamics. Research also includes aerial photography and GIS to quantify wetland structure and changes in surrounding land use to evaluate the potential influence of hydrologic change and vegetative structure on wetland

bird abundance. Staff found that of the 12 species analyzed, seven were experiencing significant population declines. Population declines could not be attributed to wetland loss since none of the wetlands were destroyed. The data suggest that development near wetlands appears to be altering hydrology, resulting in wetland degradation and widespread population declines of wetland-dependent birds.

Habitat Team

The Illinois Habitat Team provides technical assistance, seed, plants, equipment and labor to private landowners and state-owned lands. In 2008, the team seeded 495 acres of native grasses and forbs; 792 acres of cool season grasses and legumes; sprayed 552 acres for site preparation, weed and invasive plant control; mowed 1,084 acres and conducted prescribed burns on 323 acres of native grasses and forbs. Assistance to private landowners and state habitat areas resulted in 1,959 acres of grassland habitat management. The team also established 258 acres of grassland at the newly acquired addition to Saybrook Pheasant Habitat Area.

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 6.7 million hits during the 2008 fishing season at www.ifishillinois.org.

Illinois Fish Hatchery System

The Illinois fish hatchery system last year produced almost 39 million fish, including: Chinook salmon, coho salmon, rainbow trout, steelhead trout, brown trout, muskellunge, northern pike, walleye, walleye-sauger hybrids, sauger, striped bass, striped bass hybrids, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, bluegill sunfish, redear sunfish, channel catfish, and blue catfish. Testing for VHS found no positives for those species currently on the APHIS list of affected species.

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. During the last year, the program held or sponsored 2,100 programs for 79,613 participants. In addition, approximately 91,710 pounds of channel catfish, 117,210 hybrid sunfish, and 1,200 rainbow trout were stocked.

Lake Michigan Program

Recreational anglers expended more than 523,400 angler hours to harvest nearly 272,000 yellow perch and 34,000 trout and salmon from the Illinois waters of Lake Michigan last year.

Forked Creek Dam Removal

Leonard's Dam was removed on Forked Creek in Wilmington, Illinois in December 2008, opening up nearly 100 miles of stream to the Kankakee River. The structure, built in the early 1900s, blocked a number of migratory species. The project was funded by USFWS Fish Passage Program with matching funds from the IDNR and Openlands.

Big Rock Creek Fish Passage Ramp Repair

A full dam ramp installed on Big Rock Creek (Fox River) in 2005 that monitoring studies indicated had successfully passed fish, including migratory redhorse species and channel catfish, was damaged by ice and high flows in 2007. In August 2008, the ramp was repaired with funding from the USFWS and Chicago Wilderness. The ramp is again fully functional and has survived several high water events. The problems with this ramp highlight the benefits of full dam removal.

Yorkville Dam Denil Fish Ladder Monitoring

A Denil fish ladder was installed on the Yorkville Dam, located on the Fox River. High water and debris problems throughout the season hampered monitoring efforts, but one successful net set captured 13 shorthead redhorse and several bluegill, demonstrating that the structure can pass fish. Modifications are planned to reduce debris blockage.

Emiquon

IDNR and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) are restoring a diverse native fish community at the Emiquon Preserve, a TNC floodplain lake restoration project near Lewistown on the Illinois River. The marsh opened for fishing to the general public on April 20, 2009.

Endangered Species Recovery/Management

IDNR continues efforts to restore federal-listed endangered Higgins' eye pearly mussels, which were stocked in the lower Rock River as part of a federal and state partnership. Planning continues on recovery of clubshell and riffleshell mussels. Statewide surveys for the endangered redspotted sunfish revealed only two stable populations. Results from the surveys and genetic analyses were utilized to develop a management strategy. Redspotted sunfish were propagated in rearing ponds in 2008 and more than 4,000 were stocked into rehabilitated backwater habitat along the Illinois River at the Emiquon Preserve. The project is being funded by the USFWS. Illinois also hosted a series of workshops on survey techniques for the endangered eastern massasauga rattlesnake.

Kickapoo Creek Restoration Project

The first phase of a stream restoration project on Kickapoo Creek east of Bloomington-Normal in central Illinois was implemented during the summer of 2008. Upon completion, the project will re-meander nearly two miles of stream channel and create several acres of wetlands. Kickapoo Creek is a high quality stream of the Sangamon River basin.

Illinois High School Association State Bass Fishing Tournament

Illinois became the first state to sanction competitive high school bass fishing. Initial interest and participation exceeded expectations with 217 teams participating in sectional tournaments on 18 lakes statewide. The top three teams from each sectional advanced to the state finals on May 8-9 at Carlyle Lake. West Frankfort High School won the title with a two-day total of 16.25 lbs.

Agency Highlights

Illinois Natural Areas Inventory Update

An update of the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI) initiated in 2007 continues. The project will update the INAI by using new technologies to complement and improve the techniques used in the original INAI in the mid 1970s. GIS capabilities and on-the-ground methods will be used to identify sites that best represent pre-settlement natural communities. Field and support staff has been hired and trained and evaluation methodologies developed. To date, 1,722 potential sites in 53 counties have been identified through a screening process. These will be further screened through initial field surveys. Seven sites are receiving detailed final field surveys and GIS mapping. The INAI contains high quality natural communities and listed species habitats that are critical components of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan.

Shooting Sports

IDNR and the Trap Shooting Hall of Fame and Museum are developing plans to locate the museum at the World Shooting and Recreational Complex located near Sparta in Randolph County. The complex has state-of-the-art trap, skeet, sporting clays, and cowboy action shooting facilities, and hosts the ATA Grand American each August and U.S. Open Trap Shoot each May. The complex also features two fishing lakes and the largest public camping facility in Illinois.

Water Quantity Management Plan

The three-year, \$5 million initiative for development of state and regional water supply plans and comprehensive water quantity planning processes in regional pilot areas in northeast and east-central Illinois is nearing completion. 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. Plans are now underway to initiate planning for at least one additional major river basin in the state.

Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

Illinois has made available \$61 million for CREP in state funds to leverage \$352 million in federal support for environmental restoration in the Illinois River basin. Since 1998, 127,134 acres have been enrolled in the program. So far, 64,132 acres of grassland, 25,382 acres of trees and 36,636 acres of wetland have been established through CREP. More than 82,000 acres have been enrolled into state conservation easements, with more than 90 percent in permanent easements, ensuring long-term protection of floodplain and other environmentally sensitive land. The program was closed to new enrollment in November 2007 due to lack of funds. A new capital bill is pending that would provide up to \$45 million for CREP over the next three years to reopen the program and to expand to other Illinois watersheds.

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 construct Phase 1 of the first critical restoration project: the Peoria Upper Island Project.

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 waiting for funding include Rice Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area on the Illinois River.

Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program

With the passage of the 2007 WRDA, the Corps of Engineers was authorized to begin implementing the 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. The Illinois River Basin Restoration Comprehensive Plan will be used as the template for goals and objectives developed in the NESP Program for the Illinois River.

Landowner Incentive Program

The Landowner Incentive Program will sunset in September 2010. There are 29 projects underway in the Lower Sangamon River Watershed including: hill prairie restoration, wetland enhancement, oak/hickory forest enhancement, sand prairie restoration and sand forest enhancement. They will enhance or restore more than 900 acres of unique habitats in the watershed. A second focus area known as the Alton Bluffs is an 11-county area that stretches along the Mississippi River, featuring hill prairies, barrens, glades, quality oak/hickory timber, and a variety of wetland habitats along the Mississippi and its tributaries. There are 23 approved projects which will restore or enhance more than 900 acres when management plans are completed and landowner contracts are signed.

Conservation Stewardship Program

The Conservation Stewardship Program began accepting applications in 2008, encouraging landowners to maintain unimproved land, offering the incentive of reduced valuation for property taxes. Landowners are required to prepare a Conservation Management Plan according to rules developed by the IDNR. Since January 1, 2008, more than 1,700 landowners have enrolled 66,516 acres into the program.

Partners for Conservation

Partners for Conservation 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. Since 1996, the program has been instrumental in acquiring 5,400 acres of land, restoring 67,567 acres of habitat and 512,492 feet of stream shoreline.