

**ILLINOIS
STATE REPORT
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Fish and Wildlife Highlights

Illinois Asian Carp Rapid Response Actions

The Division of Fisheries conducted four rapid response actions in the Chicago metropolitan area in FY2010. The first in early December 2009, below the electric barrier in the Chicago Sanitary and Shipping Canal, was conducted requiring a complete eradication of all fish species for a 5.5-mile reach of the canal. More than 400 personnel from the IDNR, USFWS, Forest Preserve District of Cook County, Indiana DNR, Canada, USDA-Aphis, USEPA, Wisconsin DNR, Michigan DNR, USGS, USACE, USCG, contracted commercial fishing crews and two environmental contracting companies carried out the operation entitled *Operation Silver Screen*. This action was carried out under an Incident Command structure and protocol. Nearly 100,000 pounds of fish were removed from the waterway. One Asian carp was recovered. IDNR and other agencies conducted a second rapid response action in the South Branch of the Chicago River near Bubbly Creek using nets and electrofishing. In late May 2010, a third rapid response included application of a fish toxicant and deployment of commercial fishermen in the Little Calumet River near the O'Brien Lock and Dam, six miles from Lake Michigan. This 2.6-mile operation removed more than 130,000 pounds of fish with no Asian carp collected. As with the first operation, numerous agencies were involved under an Incident Command structure. A fourth rapid response followed in June 2010 and continues into FY2011 in Lake Calumet and the Calumet River. This response utilizes IDNR personnel working with commercial fishermen, the USFWS and research/academic institutions. As part of the effort, commercial fishermen netted a single Asian carp in Lake Calumet in late June, triggering an extensive netting and electrofishing response in the lake and river to its mouth at Lake Michigan. To date, no additional Asian carp have been found. Participating agencies and institutions are also working just below the Lockport Lock and Dam downstream of the electric barrier to remove as many Asian carp as possible to lessen the possibility of them breaching the barrier. These actions will continue as needed to ensure Asian carp do not establish a breeding population in Lake Michigan.

2009-10 Deer Season Harvest

Hunters in Illinois harvested a preliminary total of 189,277 deer during the 2009-10 seasons, including all methods and special hunts – archery, muzzleloading, firearm season, youth hunts, late-winter and special CWD seasons. This compared with the preliminary harvest total of 188,425 in 2008-09.

2009-10 Chronic Wasting Disease

The number of CWD-positive deer identified in Illinois increased for the first time in four years, with 37 positives found in 2009-10 deer season sampling/testing. This compares to 30 in 2009, 38 in 2008, and 42 in 2007. More than 6,700 deer were tested. The increase in positives came primarily from deer taken

through sharpshooting (20 positives in 2010 compared to 10 in 2009), which may be attributed to increase effort in the core CWD areas this year.

Urban Deer Population Control

Deer population control permits issued to 14 land management agencies and municipalities resulted in the removal of 1,828 deer from 31 sites in northern Illinois during the winter of 2009-10 – and 51,300 pounds of venison being donated to charitable organizations.

2010 Spring Turkey Harvest

Hunters in Illinois harvested a preliminary total of 16,565 wild turkeys during the 2010 spring turkey season, compared with a total harvest of 15,490 in the spring of 2009.

2009 Waterfowl Season Harvest

The statewide duck harvest was 399,555 compared to a five-year average of 446,326, so the harvest was 11 percent below average. The statewide Canada goose harvest was 27 percent higher than the five-year average.

2008-09 Upland Harvest

Although upland hunter participation and harvest continue to decline, nearly one-fifth of licensed Illinois hunters pursued at least one species of upland game during the '08-09 season. Estimates indicate that 43,123 hunters harvested 997,917 doves, 40,077 hunters took 154,216 rabbits, 29,016 hunters bagged 103,399 pheasants, and 21,962 hunters harvested 151,170 quail during the season.

Habitat Team

The Illinois Habitat Team provides technical assistance, seed, plants, equipment and labor to private landowners and public-owned lands throughout the state. In 2009, the team seeded 570.3 acres of native grasses and forbs; 386.3 acres of cool season grasses and legumes; sprayed 763.1 acres for site preparation, weed and invasive plant control; mowed 693.2 acres and conducted prescribed burns on 759.0 acres of native grasses and forbs. Assistance to private landowners and state owned habitat areas resulted in 3171.6 acres of grassland habitat management. Additionally, more than 500 trees and shrubs were planted by the team statewide. The team also completed grassland establishment on 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 7 million hits during the 2009 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 2,268 programs for 90,048 participants. In addition, approximately 90,010 pounds of channel catfish, 133,010 hybrid sunfish, and 1,200 rainbow trout were stocked in areas utilized by the program.

Lake Michigan Program

Recreational anglers expended more than 530,000 angler hours to harvest nearly 262,000 yellow perch and 34,400 trout and salmon from the Illinois waters of Lake Michigan last year.

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. Fish population highlights are largemouth bass, black crappie and the establishment of state threatened redspotted sunfish and starhead topminnow populations.

Hennepin Hopper

IDNR and The Wetlands Initiative developed a plan for the rehabilitation of the 1,500-acre Hennepin Hopper Lakes, which had been returned to a floodplain lake system after having been farmed for many years. The restoration plan included the removal of the existing fish population which included high numbers of common carp and the restocking of game fish and sensitive native fish populations. The plan has been carried out successfully and the area will be open for public fishing soon. The fish stocked include muskie, northern pike, largemouth bass channel catfish and sunfish. Native fish reintroduced include redspotted sunfish and starhead topminnows.

Endangered Species Recovery/Management

IDNR continues efforts to restore the federally endangered Higgins' eye pearly mussels, which was 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 these surveys, and associated genetic analyses, were utilized to develop a management strategy. More than 6,000 state-endangered redspotted sunfish have been propagated in rearing ponds and stocked at the Emiquon Preserve since 2008. A stable population has been established at Emiquon and several hundred individuals were harvested and stocked into additional suitable habitats at Hennepin-Hopper Lake, Spring Lake and Banner Marsh in the spring of 2010. The project is being funded by the USFWS.

Kickapoo Creek Restoration Project

The second phase of a stream restoration project on Kickapoo Creek east of Bloomington-Normal in central Illinois was concluded early in 2010. Upon completion, the project will re-meander nearly two miles of stream channel and create several acres of wetlands. The project is producing favorable results with significant increases of fish species and species in greatest need of conservation, as well as nitrate reduction. Kickapoo Creek is a high quality stream in the Sangamon River basin.

Illinois High School Association State Bass Fishing Tournament

In 2009 Illinois became the first state to sanction competitive high school bass fishing. In 2010, 225 teams entered 19 sectionals, with winners advancing to Carlyle Lake on May 7-8. Carthage Illini West High School won the title with a two-day total of 30 lbs. 5 oz.

Agency Highlights

Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

From 1998 through 2009, Illinois made available \$61 million for CREP in state funds, leveraging \$352 million in federal support for environmental restoration in the Illinois River basin. Since 1998, approximately 126,500 acres have been enrolled in the program. Conservation practices include 64,132 acres of grassland, 36,636 acres of wetlands and 25,382 acres of trees restored 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. The 2010 state budget is providing \$45 million over the next three years to expand the eligible CREP area and enroll the remaining 105,500 acres available under Illinois' CREP program. The program is expected to re-open to new enrollment in both the Illinois and Kaskaskia river basins in 2010.

Illinois River Basin Restoration

The recommended priority projects of the Illinois River Basin Restoration Comprehensive Plan are being used to design and construct critical restoration projects that will restore backwater lakes, fish passage, recreation opportunities, water quality, and critical habitats for fisheries in the Illinois River Basin. The USACE has received funds to construct the first critical restoration project: the Peoria Upper Island Project, which includes 55 acres of dredging and creation of a 21-acre lake. Another project, Waubonsie Creek, is proceeding through design and will utilize federal stimulus funding to address removal of dam debris and enhance and stabilize streambanks.

Environmental Management Program

The EMP is a USACE 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. Rice Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area on the Illinois River is currently under pre-design, and will initiate construction the end of 2010.

Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program

With the passage of the 2007 WRDA, the USACE 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 was used as the template for goals and objectives developed in the NESP Program for the Illinois River. Federal and state agencies are meeting regularly to develop guidelines and resources to implement projects once funding has been established.

Kaskaskia Basin Water Quantity Study

The IDNR Office of Water Resources in the spring of 2010 announced a new Water Quantity Study for initiation in the Kaskaskia River basin. IDNR has selected Southwestern Illinois Resource Conservation and Development (SWIRCD) as the local entity responsible for initiating the study process through the formation of a Regional Water Supply Planning Group. The SWIRCD will receive \$94,000 under an agreement with IDNR to conduct the study, the third of its kind in Illinois under an initiative begun in 2006. The other two basin studies include an 11-county area of metropolitan Chicago and a 15-county area in central Illinois covering the Mahomet aquifer system.

Landowner Incentive Program

The Illinois Landowner Incentive Program has been extended through September 2011. There are 61 projects underway in the Lower Sangamon River watershed and the Alton Bluffs area including: hill prairie restoration, wetland enhancement, oak/hickory forest enhancement, sand prairie restoration and sand forest enhancement. Projects will enhance or restore more than 3,600 acres of unique habitats in these areas. There are also several new projects being developed as the program allocates the remaining USFWS funds over the next year.

Conservation Stewardship Program

The Illinois 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. More than 2,140 landowners have enrolled 78,442.46 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 the beginning of the program in 1996, it has been instrumental in acquiring over 5,600 acres of land, restoring 65,561 acres of habitat and 329,292 feet of stream shoreline. To date, nearly \$33 million has been awarded in grants and another \$37 million provided as match for 929 projects.

The Illinois Nature Preserve System

In 1963, the State of Illinois established the Illinois Nature Preserves System as a network of high quality native communities and habitats for rare and endangered species permanently and legally protected through dedications and registrations. The system is administered by the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission and is staffed by IDNR personnel. During FY 2010 legal protection for 17 tracts of land totaling 5,370 acres was approved by the Commission, Governor and landowners. Owners include the IDNR, forest preserve districts, not for profit land trusts and private individuals. The dollar value of the protected land is \$55.6 million based on conservative estimates of the fair market value of the land. These lands were permanently protected through dedication as nature preserve or registration as a land and water reserve (conservation easement held by IDNR and INPC) without further state acquisition costs. There are now 350 dedicated nature preserves in 83 counties totaling 48,413.156 acres and 159 land and water reserves in 65 counties totaling 45,248.524 acres.

Endangered Species Protection Board

In October 2009, changes resulting from a required five-year review of the Illinois List of Endangered and Threatened species became official. The total number of species on the state's list remains at 483

species, with 14 species removed, 14 new species added, and the listing status changed for nine species. The previous list included 144 animals and 339 plants and updated list includes 151 animals and 332 plants.

Natural Resource Damage Assessment Program (NRDA)

The NRDA program serves the public's interest in protecting and restoring natural resources and the services they provide that are injured by releases of hazardous substances or petroleum. The goal of the NRDA process is to restore impacted natural resources. Natural Resource Restoration Trust Funds are used in implementing restoration projects throughout the state, including stream, wetland, prairie, savanna, and forest restorations. To date, a total of 20 restoration projects associated with the NRDA program have been designed and implemented in Illinois. The NRDA program is exploring restoration alternatives for eight additional projects, wherever possible seeking matching funds to implement larger scale projects which benefit the resources of the area to a greater degree.

Campsite Reservation System

IDNR contracted with ReserveAmerica for online reservation services for campsites, cabins, group campsites and picnic shelters. The system was scheduled to launch in July 2010. Campsite reservations through the new online system involve 67 of Illinois' state parks and other sites managed by the IDNR. The new reservation system was being implemented to replace a phone or mail-in system for campsite reservations.