

**ILLINOIS  
STATE REPORT  
JUNE 2015**

Wayne A. Rosenthal, Director  
Illinois Department of Natural Resources  
One Natural Resources Way  
Springfield, IL 62702-1271

## **Fish and Wildlife Highlights**

### **Illinois Asian Carp Actions in Northeastern Illinois**

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), as a partner in the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee, continues to work above and below the Corps of Engineers' electric barrier to monitor and prevent the upstream migration of Asian carp on the Illinois River and in the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS). No bighead or silver carp have been collected or seen on the Lake Michigan side of the electric barrier since efforts were heightened in 2010. Only one bighead carp has ever been collected in this area, and that one was in spring of 2010. Some highlights (as of Jan 2015) from our coordinated Asian carp efforts are as follows:

- A total of 70,882 bighead carp, 191,031 silver carp, and 1,718 grass carp were removed by contracted netting. The total weight of Asian carp removed was nearly 3.0 million pounds. Over 1,360 miles of gill/trammel nets have been fished with efforts ongoing.
- 769 hours of electrofishing and 326 miles of trammel/gill net deployed at fixed and random areas (lakeside of electric barrier) from 2010-2014.
- Efforts in 2014 further intensified below the electric barrier and continue through current efforts where Asian carp have and have not been found, while maintaining seasonal intensive surveys above the electric barrier.
- For further details regarding ongoing efforts: [www.asiancarp.us](http://www.asiancarp.us)

The Council of Great Lakes Governors (and Premiers; CGLG) have supported these efforts to provide at-the-ready resources when needed, including a mutual aid agreement which has been exercised once in Lake Michigan for a European ruffe response, and once in Lake Erie as a grass carp response. Illinois has listed all of the remaining species from the CGLG least-wanted species as injurious or regulated species in Illinois.

### **Community Outreach and Resource Enhancement (formerly Urban Fishing) Program**

The Community Outreach and Resource Enhancement Program sponsored 1,766 fishing programs with 83,832 participants. In addition the 137 "Access to Fishing" loaner sites throughout the state loaned out fishing equipment 14,281 times.

### **Lake Michigan Program**

Recreational anglers expended 464,437 angler-hours to harvest 54,636 yellow perch and 94,896 trout and salmon from the Illinois waters of Lake Michigan last year.

## **IDNR Fish Hatchery System Report**

The IDNR owns and operates three state hatcheries: Jake Wolf Memorial Fish Hatchery, Little Grassy Fish Hatchery and the LaSalle Fish Hatchery. In FY14, the system produced and stocked into state and public waters a total of 28,366,447 fish, including black crappie, bluegill, brown trout, channel catfish, coho salmon, Chinook salmon, largemouth bass, muskellunge, northern pike, rainbow trout, redear sunfish, sauger, striped bass, striped bass hybrid, smallmouth bass, steelhead, walleye, and walleye-sauger hybrids.

## **Chicago Area Waterway Habitat Improvement Project**

IDNR Fisheries and the Friends of the Chicago River are partnering to improve fish habitat in the Chicago Area Water System (CAWS). The CAWS is a network of largely manmade channels built for storm/wastewater conveyance and commercial barge traffic. The habitat project is being funded through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Chi-Cal Rivers Fund, and involves placement of 400 habitat structures at six sites. The specially fabricated concrete pipes provide a cavity for channel catfish spawning and nearshore structure for sunfishes and minnows. IDNR has stocked nearly 200,000 channel catfish fingerling in the past two years.

## **Flathead Catfish Management on the Fox River**

In 2009, IDNR Fisheries initiated a study of Fox River flathead catfish to determine basic population characteristics and evaluate the need for harvest regulation. The Fox River is a heavily fished, small urban river in northeastern Illinois. After five years of sampling, a harvest regulation was established in 2014 to go into effect in 2015. The data indicated that, unlike larger rivers in Illinois, the Fox River had a relatively limited number of larger fish. Data from angler diaries also suggested larger fish were vulnerable to overfishing. The new regulation, the first for this species in Illinois, will limit harvest of larger individuals to one per day and limit daily creel to three per day.

## **Dam Removal Update**

In the past 10 years, 25 dam projects have been completed in northeastern Illinois, including 22 removals and three fish passage projects. Fishery evaluations have been completed on a number of these projects and have clearly established the benefits of dam removals. Many miles of stream habitat have been reconnected and fish have rapidly recolonized areas where they were previously absent due to dams. Through the IDNR Statewide Dam Removal Initiative, two dams on the Des Plaines River were removed in 2014, and five others are in the design phase for removal, eliminating all barriers on the upper river. Two dams on the Fox River are also in the early stages of study. The Army Corps of Engineers and the IDNR have initiated a feasibility study for remaining dams on the Fox River as part of the Section 519 Ecosystem Restoration Program.

## **2014-15 Deer Season Harvest**

Hunters in Illinois harvested a preliminary total of 145,720 deer during the 2014-15 seasons, including all methods and special hunts. Male to female sex ratio was 53:47 (41.7% antlered; 58.3% antlerless) in the total harvest. There were 20 fewer late-winter season (antlerless-only) counties open compared to last year. The prior year's harvest was 148,615 (51:49 male to female ratio), and the Illinois record harvest of 201,209 occurred in 2005-06.

### **Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)**

The number of CWD-positive deer identified in Illinois was 71 during 2014-15, which is an increase in the number of cases from 2013-14. More than 7,800 deer samples were submitted for testing statewide. Kankakee and Livingston counties have been added to the list of CWD counties, stemming from hunter-harvested deer. Hunter-harvested deer accounted for 39 positives, while deer taken by IDNR sharpshooters accounted for 24 positives. The cumulative number of CWD cases in Illinois is 538, with 77% of those found in the original four counties: Winnebago, Boone, McHenry, and DeKalb.

### **Urban Deer Population Control**

A total of 40 Deer Population Control Permits (DPCPs), not including permit extensions for additional time and/or deer, were issued to 10 natural resource management agencies, municipalities, arboretums/botanic gardens, federal research facilities, and homeowner associations in six northern Illinois counties during winter 2014-2015. Permittees were authorized to remove 1,650 white-tailed deer via sharpshooting; 1,338 (81%) deer were actually collected over the five-month period (November 2014-March 2015). All usable deer carcasses (1,331) were processed and donated to charity; resulting in approximately 62,180 lbs. (31.1 tons) of processed venison being donated to a minimum of 14 charities.

### **Deer Removal Permits (DRP)**

A total of 164 Deer Removal Permits (DRPs) were issued in 54 counties in 2014, down 100 permits and three counties from the previous calendar year. Three permits authorized hazing of deer only; 161 DRPs authorized the lethal removal of 1,234 deer, and resulted in the collection of 754 animals (61%). Excessive deer damage to corn and soybeans accounted for 66% of the DRPs issued during 2014. DRPs were also issued for deer-related damage to orchards/fruit trees and specialty crops (e.g., strawberries, peas, pumpkins, flowers, etc.), as well as due to the public safety threat posed by deer on or near runways and taxiways on active airports.

### **Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD)**

Following significant EHD outbreaks in 2012 (2,968 deer in 87 counties) and 2013 (1,220 deer in 63 counties), EHD was of little significance in Illinois in 2014 with 10 reports were received totaling 13 deer in 10 counties. Good precipitation and moderate summertime temperatures statewide appeared to minimize the expression of EHD this past year.

### **2015 Spring Turkey Harvest**

Hunters in Illinois harvested a preliminary total of 14,999 wild turkeys during the 2015 spring turkey season, including the youth seasons, compared with a total harvest of 13,514 in 2014. The state-record harvest of 16,605 turkeys was set during the spring of 2006. The preliminary two-day 2015 youth season total harvest was 896, up from the 2014 youth harvest of 781, but well below the record 2012 harvest of 1,300. The number of Illinois counties open to spring turkey hunting remained at 100 of the 102 counties statewide.

### **2014 Waterfowl Season Harvest**

Illinois experienced cooler and wetter conditions than average in 2014, which led to highly variable wetland conditions and waterfowl food resources across the state. Similar to 2013, freeze up came earlier than normal in 2014, with significant ice cover developing across much of

the state by mid-November, but snow cover was especially light across the state into January, and warmer temperatures in the southern half of the state thawed most wetlands within a few weeks. For the second consecutive year, an early freeze-up appeared to affect abundance and duration of stay for many duck species along portions of the Illinois and Mississippi rivers, with peak counts occurring earlier in migration than normal. Duck abundance in the southern half of the state appeared to be above average for most areas from November through January. Duck harvest on 26 state-managed hunting areas increased approximately 2% from 2013, but was similar to the five-year average. Hunters at these sites made 62,630 trips, and averaged 1.05 ducks per trip. This was an increase in hunter trips from 2013, but a decrease in hunter success, though within the five-year average. Statewide Canada goose harvest was likely average compared to recent years. December was mild, but cold and snow in mid-January pushed geese out of northern wintering locations and into downstate areas where they may be more susceptible to harvest. Goose counts in many areas were greater than recent averages.

### **2013-14 Upland Harvest**

The 2013-14 survey estimated that 14,940 hunters shot 20,613 wild pheasants in Illinois, compared to the 2012-13 totals of 17,427 hunters that shot 29,396 wild birds in the 2012-13 survey. The 2013-14 quail survey estimated that 10,779 hunters shot 51,628 wild quail compared to 11,266 hunters who harvested 47,175 quail in the 2012-13 survey. Estimates from 2013-14 indicate that 40,281 hunters harvested 803,159 doves (up 45.8%). The number of rabbit hunters in 2013-14 was also up 12% (37,066) from the previous year and they harvested 142,401 rabbits (up 22%).

## **Agency Highlights**

### **Feral Swine**

USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Wildlife Services (APHIS-WS) and IDNR have removed 458 feral swine in Illinois since 2009. Significant progress was made in the two known breeding populations of feral swine in Illinois with known populations to include a lone boar in each area. Trapping (261 feral swine removed), shooting (145 feral swine removed, utilized for small groups and as a follow-up to trapping efforts), and aerial control (52 feral swine removed) are the methods utilized. APHIS-WS efforts are currently directed toward follow-up of citizen reports of feral swine; no additional populations have been confirmed. Legislation passed in 2014 allows the IDNR to regulate feral swine in Illinois; importation, possession, and commercial take of feral swine are prohibited. Feral swine hunting is limited to firearm deer seasons, and landowners are required to obtain a no-cost nuisance animal removal permit from the IDNR to remove feral swine from private property.

### **Illinois Recreational Access Program (IRAP)**

Utilizing a grant from the USDA, the IDNR created the Illinois Recreational Access Program (IRAP) so that outdoor enthusiasts have more places to go. IRAP has leased over 12,200 acres of private land in 29 counties, creating over 330 opportunities on over 11,300 acres for youth turkey hunting during spring youth season and regular season segments 3 and 4. For other small game, nearly 2,000 acres have been leased for squirrel hunting, 500 acres for quail hunting, and 70 acres for rabbit hunting. There are 55 daily access permits for pond and riverbank fishing,

several boat launch sites, and more than 4,200 acres for birding, hiking, and outdoor photography activities. IRAP has written habitat management plans on 68 properties, in cooperation with IDNR, USDA and SWCDs, on qualified leased private property. These plans are specifically written to provide a diverse habitat to improve Wildlife Action Plan targeted species. In 2014 – spring 2015, IRAP completed 1,866 acres of nonnative invasive species control, 1,000 acres of timber stand improvement, 35 acres prairie planting, and 280 acres of prescribed burning.

### **Endangered Species**

The updated list of Illinois Endangered and Threatened Species was posted by the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board on May 19, 2015. The first Illinois list was published in 1981. Since then, there have been seven 5-year reviews and revisions of the entire list, as well as some administrative and editorial revisions, resulting in the current list of 480 endangered and threatened species.

[http://www.dnr.illinois.gov/ESP/ESPB/Documents/2015\\_ChecklistFINAL\\_for\\_webpage\\_051915.pdf](http://www.dnr.illinois.gov/ESP/ESPB/Documents/2015_ChecklistFINAL_for_webpage_051915.pdf)

### **Illinois Habitat Team**

The Illinois Habitat Team Program provides technical assistance, seed, plants, equipment and labor to private landowners for wildlife habitat establishment and improvement. In 2014, the team seeded 220.7 acres of native grasses and forbs; 298.4 acres of cool season grasses and legumes; sprayed 170.5 acres for site preparation, weed and invasive plant control; mowed 125.2 acres for weed control, fire break maintenance and seed bed preparation; and, conducted prescribed burns on 305 grassland acres.

### **Illinois Wildlife Action Plan**

IDNR is in the process of reviewing and conducting a major revision to the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan. The focus of the revision is to improve connections between desired species outcomes and the habitat actions that facilitate these outcomes. To support this focus, Illinois is creating a companion implementation guide that will refine and provide more detail to specific parts of the original text. Campaign leads are drafting revisions of the Plan and meeting with or receiving comments from campaign teams and partners. Campaign drafts of will be available for review on the IDNR website during the summer of 2015, with the final Wildlife Action Plan revision due in October.

### **Wildland Fire Programs**

IDNR staff managed 9,450 acres in 152 units with prescribed fire during the last burn season. Seven introductory wildland firefighting classes were held for IDNR staff and volunteers. Eleven IDNR staff completed advanced wildland fire training classes at the Midwest Wildfire Training Academy. Twenty-three wildland fire classes were presented to the volunteer fire departments. A total of 72 fire departments were represented with 274 firefighters completing the classes. Forestry provided volunteer fire departments with a small equipment grant. A total of 26 departments received grant funds for a total of \$245,000. Through federal excess equipment programs, IDNR acquired approximately \$300,000 of surplus equipment, including a fire engine put on loan to the Northern Bureau County Firefighters Association. IDNR provided a 20-person crew to assist in wildland firefighting efforts in the State of Idaho.

### **IDNR Nursery Program**

For FY15, the IDNR Nursery Program produced 990,000 bare-root trees and shrubs in 27 different species. Additional nursery production included 1,000 containerized trees and shrubs in 12 different species; 15,000 containerized prairie forbs and grasses in 38 different species; 60,000 prairie forb and grass plugs; 1,500 pounds of cleaned prairie forb seed in 32 different species, and 5,000 pounds of cleaned prairie grass seed in five different species.

### **Illinois Forestry Development Act (IFDA) Forest Management Program**

IFDA requires landowners to have a current IDNR-approved forest management plan. These comprehensive plans define forest resources that are present, current condition, needs of the forested area for long term forest health, and recommendations. Illinois has approximately 602,540 enrolled acres engaging 10,753 forest landowners. As a result, approximately 15% of non-industrial private forest land in Illinois is being managed for long term forest health. Recommended forest improvement practices include afforestation, reforestation and forest stand improvement.

### **Illinois Forest Legacy Program**

The Forest Legacy Program is a partnership between the IDNR and the USDA Forest Service to identify and acquire environmentally important forests. Conservation easements are the main tool used for protecting these important forests. The IDNR Division of Forestry maintains eligibility to complete up to three projects per year. Illinois has seven Forest Legacy Properties within its borders totaling 558 acres.

### **Urban and Community Forestry Program (UCF)**

The UCF program administers the Tree City USA, Tree Campus, Tree Line and Growth programs. Communities received education and recognition for their local forest management programs. Illinois has been ranked first for the number of Tree Campuses in the nation since program began. Illinois has 170 Tree Cities, 10 Tree Campuses, 35 Growth Award winners, and one Tree Line Award winner.

### **Forest Utilization Program**

IDNR licensed 358 timber buyers, with an additional 745 authorized agents. Seventy-five sawmills are currently operating in the state. Sale of forest products from private forests exceeded \$26 million. The total economic value of the forest products industry to the state exceeded \$23 billion.

### **Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)**

The Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a State Incentive Program combined with the USDA Federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CREP provides long term environmental benefits by allowing 232,000 acres of eligible environmentally sensitive lands within the Illinois River and Kaskaskia River watersheds to be restored, enhanced and protected over a period of time from 15 years to perpetuity. Since CREP was established in 1999, 1,384 easements have been placed, protecting 89,200 acres. Currently, the CREP team is working on 84 new CREP easements which would add another 6,433 acres to the state's total effort.