

ILLINOIS
STATE
REPORT
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Overview

The Office of Resource Conservation within the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) is responsible for the management of Illinois' wildlife, fish, and forest resources, along with stewardship and restoration of natural lands. ORC manages fish and wildlife populations through hunting and fishing regulations based on scientific data. ORC also promotes the state's hunting and fishing heritage. Primary funding comes from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, supported by Federal Fish and Wildlife Funds, State Wildlife Grant Funds, Illinois Forestry Development Funds and Natural Areas Acquisition Funds. The Office also works with the Federal Government and other agencies to remediate lands contaminated by industrial discharges or accidental release of pollutants. The Office administers the state portion of Federal Farm Bill programs including the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and others. Regulation of state-endangered and threatened species is included among the responsibilities of the Office.

30x30

The IDNR serves as chair of the state's 30x30 task force established by the Illinois General Assembly. The initiative's goal is to protect 30 percent of the nation's land and water by 2030. With 70 percent of Illinois' land area in some form of agriculture, the state must be creative in finding ways to maximize land available for conservation purposes. At IDNR's request, the University of Illinois is building a land-cover tool that will help the agency model various scenarios, including buffering existing natural lands, developing roadside habitat, maximizing urban forest canopies and other possibilities.

Division of Fisheries

Fish Hatcheries

The IDNR operates three state hatcheries located strategically across the state including Jake Wolf Memorial Fish Hatchery, Little Grassy Fish Hatchery, and the LaSalle Fish Hatchery. In 2022, the hatchery system produced and stocked a total of 22,068,253 fish from 19 species.

Lake Michigan Program

Charter and non-charter recreational anglers last year expended 297,885 angler-hours to harvest 8,694 yellow perch and 56,704 trout and salmon from the Illinois waters of Lake Michigan.

Mississippi River

Recent appropriations for the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program have offered an alternative funding mechanism to implement ecosystem restoration projects throughout the Upper Mississippi River System and has resulted in many new projects that IDNR biologists are actively involved in, including the Lock and Dam 22 Fish Passage project intended to enhance fish passage via a large fish ladder. This will be the first fish passage structure ever built on the Mississippi River and will serve as an excellent learning experience for future fish passage projects.

Illinois River

In conjunction with the state hatchery system, stocked over 10.3 million sauger fry measuring up to 1.7 inches into the upper Illinois River in 2022. The upper Illinois River continues to be known for producing a world-class sauger fishery.

Region 1

A total of 10 locations were sampled within the Illinois portion of the Rock River and PFOS/PFAS contaminant samples were collected from sportfish composite samples at these stations. The surveys produced a high catch rate of Walleye, which are stocked annually, in addition to natural populations of Smallmouth bass, Channel catfish, Sauger, Flathead Catfish and Northern Pike. The Rock River also produced the certification of a new state and world record shovelnose sturgeon. Eighty-year-old Kash Gustafson, caught the shovelnose sturgeon on pole and line that weighed 11 pounds, 13 ounces. The fish was released alive back into the Rock River.

The Wetlands Initiative's Hennepin and Hopper Lakes at the Dixon Waterfowl Refuge is cooperatively managed with the IDNR Division of Fisheries. In 2022, the fish population was sampled in the spring with Largemouth Bass, Bluegill, Black Crappie, Bowfin, Northern Pike, Muskellunge, and Pumpkinseed Sunfish being collected. Particularly of interest, the muskellunge population is developing rapidly. The diverse aquatic vegetation at this site is also creating avian habitat that is currently renowned in the Illinois River Valley.

Region 2

In a cooperative project that has been conducted annually since 2007, artificial fish habitats were placed at various sites throughout Braidwood Lake in 2022. Since the project's inception, nearly 1,500 artificial habitats have been placed in the lake. Funding for this project is provided by Braidwood Generating Station and assistance is provided by the members of various bass fishing clubs.

Region 3

The Lake Shelbyville Fish Habitat Alliance (LSFHA) comprised of staff from the IDNR and USACE, local businesses, fishing clubs, and volunteers continues to enhance the quality of the Lake Shelbyville fishery for anglers and the economic benefit of local communities. To date, the LSFHA has built and placed over 1,800 cube structures (PVC/field tile cubes), over 350 artificial stumps, 420 porcupine balls, 18 rock reefs (380 tons of total rock), as well as raising and planting numerous aquatic/semi-aquatic plants.

Region 4

Nearly 1,300 children attended the 2022 Two Rivers Family Fishing Fair. This event included attractions such as the catch-and-release bluegill pond where young anglers can have their photograph taken with their catch, the popular One-Cast station where everyone wins a prize and bow fishing stations where children can shoot at moving targets in a pool or at a 3D target. The event is hosted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Two Rivers National Wildlife Refuge (administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), and Pere Marquette State Park (administered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources).

Region 5

Fisheries managers worked cooperatively with both Federal partners, municipalities, and private entities to place fish habitat structures at 16 lakes in southern Illinois. Most notably, approximately 640 structures were constructed and placed in Rend Lake with the Assistance of the Army Corp of Engineers and the Sesser-Valier Outdoorsmen Club. Approximately 80 cedar tree structures were constructed and placed at 12 sites in Crab Orchard Lake with the assistance of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Blue Heron Boat Club.

Aquatic Nuisance Species Program

The IDNR continues to be a major partner in the Invasive Carp Regional Coordinating Committee, and continues to work above and below the Corps of Engineers' electric barrier system to monitor and prevent the upstream migration of invasive carp on the Illinois River and in the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS). Contracted harvest efforts continue to suppress densities of invasive carp above the Starved Rock Lock and Dam. ILDNR and USACE responded to the Lake Calumet area with a reconnaissance team of electrofishing boats and contract fishers in August of 2022 in response to an angler reported siting of a silver carp. On August 4, 2022, an adult silver carp was found and collected by gill netting and electro-fishing crews from the ILDNR and the USACE. The capture triggered the Invasive Carp Regional Coordinating Committee's (ICRCC) Contingency Response Plan (CRP), which provides direction for coordinated on-the-water action in the event an invasive carp is discovered in unexpected locations, including in the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS). This is only the third Invasive carp to have been found upstream of the electric dispersal barriers since intense actions began in 2010 despite continued and intensive monitoring in the CAWS.

- Contracting with commercial fishers has removed 14,000,000 pounds of invasive carp from below Starved Rock since late 2019.
- An award-winning rebranding effort was launched the summer of 2022 to establish the Copi brand for consumer related products to enhance utilization of invasive carp as a food fish.

Mississippi and Ohio Basin

- The IDNR is coordinating with neighboring states to achieve management and control of invasive carp in the Mississippi and Ohio River drainages.
- A program modeled off the Illinois River contracting with commercial fishers for the harvest of invasive carp was launched on the Wabash River in 2022 and is expanding to the Ohio River from McAlpine Locks to the Mississippi River in 2023.
- A program to support removal via payments to processors for local pickups of invasive carp has resulted in almost 13 million pounds of invasive carp removed so far in 2023.
- A new program to support removal via payments to processors for local pickups of invasive carp has resulted in almost 2 million pounds of invasive carp removed so far in 2022.

Division of Wildlife Resources

2022-2023 Deer Season Harvest

Hunters in Illinois harvested a preliminary total of 158,010 deer during all 2022-2023 archery and firearm seasons that concluded Jan. 15. The total preliminary deer harvest for all seasons compares with a total harvest of 146,438 deer for all seasons in 2021-2022. During the 2022-2023 deer seasons, hunters took 45.04% females and 54.96% males.

- Archery deer hunters took a preliminary total of 69,557 deer during the season that began Oct. 1 and concluded Jan. 15. The total archery harvest during the 2021-2022 season was 66,630 deer.
- Youth deer hunters harvested a preliminary total of 3,339 deer during the three-day Illinois youth deer season Oct. 8-10, compared to 1,847 in 2021.
- Traditional firearm season hunters took a preliminary total of 76,854 deer during the firearm season Nov. 18-20 and Dec. 1-4. This compares to a harvest of 70,456 deer taken during the 2021 firearm season.
- Muzzleloader hunters harvested a preliminary total of 2,856 deer during the muzzleloader-only season Dec. 9-11, compared with a harvest of 3,046 deer during the 2021 muzzleloader season.
- Late-winter seasons: The 2022-2023 late-winter antlerless-only and special chronic wasting disease (CWD) deer seasons concluded Jan. 15 with a combined preliminary harvest total for both seasons of 5,404 deer. Season dates for the seven-day late-winter and CWD seasons were Dec. 29-Jan. 1 and Jan. 13-15. During the same seasons in 2021-2022, a total of 4,504 deer were taken.

Sixteen northern Illinois counties were open to the special CWD season, which is used to assist in slowing the spread of chronic wasting disease in the Illinois deer herd. And 24 counties were open for the late-winter antlerless season in 2022-2023. Counties that are at or below their individual deer population goal for two consecutive years may be removed from the late-winter season.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)

We are still compiling results from FY23. During the period of July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022 (FY22), IDNR staff collected and submitted 9,886 tissue samples statewide from white-tailed deer, yielding a total of 218 CWD cases in 19 northern Illinois counties from 8,340 testable samples.

- Disease prevalence in CWD counties for adult deer harvested by hunters was 4.42%. The prevalence rate for hunter-harvested adult males (5.4%) continues to be higher than that of adult females (3.5%).
- Counties that produced the highest number of hunter-harvested CWD positive deer included Stephenson (27), Jo Daviess (20), and McHenry (20) along the Wisconsin border and Grundy (20). These were followed by LaSalle (14), Carroll (13), Kendall (11), Ogle (7), Boone (5), and Livingston (5).
- Prevalence of infection in adult deer removed by IDNR sharpshooting and hunter harvest were 4.1% and 2.1%, respectively. Thus, targeted removal of infected deer by sharpshooting continues to be an effective method for managing CWD across northern Illinois.

2021-2022 Turkey Harvest

Fall 2022

- Hunters in Illinois harvested a statewide total of 802 wild turkeys during the 2022-2023 fall archery turkey season. The total compares with a statewide turkey harvest of 683 in 2021-2022 and a five-year average of 723 birds harvested. Hunters harvested a statewide total of 267 wild turkeys during the 2022 fall gun turkey seasons. The total compares with the 2021 harvest of 245 wild turkeys and a five-year average of 296.

Youth 2023

- Youth turkey hunters harvested a preliminary total of 1,309 birds during the 2023 Illinois youth turkey season March 25-26 and April 1-2. In 2022, a total of 1,258 turkeys were taken.

Spring 2023

- Turkey hunters harvested a preliminary statewide total of 16,121 wild turkeys during the 2023 Illinois Spring Turkey Season. This year's preliminary harvest total compares with the 2022 statewide turkey harvest of 13,701.

Bobcat Hunting

The 2022-2023 Illinois bobcat season concluded Feb. 15 with 367 bobcats harvested by hunters and trappers. A total of 198 (52%) of bobcats were taken by hunting, while trapping accounted for 169 (44%) of the harvest. Sixteen (4%) were salvaged by permit holders from circumstances such as roadkill. Hunters and trappers in Pike County reported 24 bobcats, which was the most for any county this year. There were 6,200 bobcat lottery applicants in 2022, and 1,000 permits were issued for the season. The bobcat harvest from the 2021-2022 season was 290, with 23 salvaged.

Division of Natural Heritage

Illinois Wildlife Action Plan The Department received notification that the minor revision of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan (IWAP) submitted on September 30, 2022 was accepted by the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on January 25, 2023. This revision updated our list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) to reflect changes in the state-listing status associated with the 2020 update by the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board and incorporated native flora as SGCN for the first time.

The IDNR continues to support work assessing Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) including state-listed species and efforts to enhance and restore Threatened and Endangered species habitats using Projects funded through the State Wildlife Grant Program (SWG).

Of the twenty-nine Formula SWG Projects that were active during the past year, ten submitted final reports. Collectively these Projects provide information about over 40 state-listed wildlife species including fish, amphibian, reptile, bird, mammal, crayfish, and insect species. These efforts also established new state records for two prairie dependent cicadas and 22 aquatic insect species.

We currently have four active SWG projects designed to conduct habitat management work on high-quality natural areas and habitats for SGCN. State and Federal funding totaling \$3,930,771 will support these efforts by the end of calendar year 2026. Habitat management associated with these Projects has already targeted habitats in grasslands, woodlands, and wetlands for turtles, snakes, birds, bats, and invertebrate SGCN.

Two Competitive Multi-State State Wildlife Grant Projects were also active during this reporting period. These Projects are being cooperatively conducted with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and other partners in Illinois and Iowa and focus on monitoring and stewardship actions benefiting Blanding's Turtles and at-risk bat species in both states.

Endangered Species

- A statewide partnership with the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives was formally initiated in early 2022 to increase summer bat roosts across Illinois' landscape. Thus far, 20 telephone poles wrapped in artificial tree bark have been placed at 6 state owned/managed sites. The Federally endangered Indiana bat has already been documented using a subset of these structures.
- The second phase of a demographic evaluation of federally listed mussels in the Kankakee River of Illinois and Indiana commenced in the spring of 2022. This study is the first in decades to include both the Indiana and Illinois portions of the Kankakee River and could improve interstate management of associated Federally-listed mussels.
- 2022 winter hibernacula surveys in southern Illinois revealed some of the largest remaining concentrations of Tricolored bats since the onset of White Nose Syndrome (WNS).
- The Department's updated three-phase recursive recovery process resulted in 35 Species Status Assessments during 2022. IDNR species leads will now be preparing Recovery Planning Documents to identify and prioritize conservation actions.

Rare Plant Initiative

The Department embarked on the second year of a project with the Illinois Natural History Survey to develop updated status ranks for Illinois' 330 listed plant species and 34 non-listed plant species of greatest conservation concern. The novel ranks, indicative of rarity and trend, have now been imported into NatureServe's Biotics 5 for use statewide but also reinforcing national and global ranking of these plant species. The project's focus is now on rare plant species habitat with inadequate protection and the development of a threats matrix to support the Division's effort to alleviate pressure to these species where possible.

Natural Areas

· The Department completed a broad update to the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI) Standards and Guidelines, a guiding document to support biodiversity conservation by sustaining sensitive terrestrial and aquatic natural communities and rare species habitat in Illinois. The update includes a grading system to identify high quality stream natural communities using multiple taxa, and guidelines for identifying boundaries of suitable habitat for endangered stream species. Additionally, quantitative criteria for identifying unusual concentrations of mussels and coolwater stream communities are established.

· To support the implementation of the revised Standards and Guidelines, the Department initiated a comprehensive review and analysis of INAI boundaries and other related spatial data and began necessary corrections to assure alignment with legally established boundaries and natural communities.

Illinois Nature Preserves Commission

The Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC) consists of nine members appointed by the Governor. Pursuant to the Illinois Natural Areas Preservation Act (525 ILCS 30/6), the Commission has certain powers and duties, including approval for dedication of nature preserves and registration of land and water reserves in the Illinois Nature Preserves System. The Commission, in partnership with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), protects lands in perpetuity for landowners such as the IDNR, forest preserve and park districts, not-for-profit organizations, corporations, land trusts, and

individuals. Lands protected include high quality natural communities, habitats that support endangered and threatened species, geological features, and archaeological sites.

The INPC is a public-private partnership that has been successful for 60 years and is supported by staff members employed by the IDNR. In calendar year 2022, the INPC permanently protected 13 sites, including 7 new or additions to nature preserves, 6 new or additions to land and water reserves. The total acreage dedicated was 523 and the total registered 2,030 acres. Adding these 13 sites into the Illinois Nature Preserves System brings the statewide, total number of dedicated Nature Preserves to 416 comprising approximately 62,362 acres; and the total number of registered land and water reserves to 204 with approximately 58,123 acres. Altogether, at the end of 2022, there were 620 sites comprising approximately 120,485 acres.

IDNR Nursery Program (Mason Nursery)

The Mason State Nursery produced approximately 1,020,000 native Illinois plants for landowners. These included about 60 species of wildflowers/grasses, and about 40 species of trees/shrubs. In addition, Mason Nursery harvested and cleaned 2,000 pounds of native Illinois wildflower/prairie grass seed for distribution to landowners for pollinator and monarch butterfly habitat. The nursery processed over 1,500 orders for this plant material.

Illinois Forestry Development Act (IFDA) Forest Management Program

IFDA requires landowners to have a IDNR-approved forest management plan. Illinois has approximately 9,956 forest management plans covering 564,000 acres. This equates to approximately 15% of non-industrial private forestland in Illinois being managed for wildlife, timber, recreation, clean water, carbon, and long-term forest health. Recommended forest management practices vary parcel to parcel.

Illinois Forest Legacy Program (IFLP)

The Forest Legacy Program is a partnership between the IDNR and the USDA Forest Service to identify and acquire environmentally important and threatened forests in Illinois. The Division of Forestry maintains federal eligibility, completing three projects/year within the threatened Illinois forest landscapes. Illinois has seven IFLP properties under easement totaling 558 acres.

Urban and Community Forestry Program (UCFP)

IDNR's Urban and Community Forestry Program assists communities, counties, townships, military bases, etc. with urban forest management. UCFP administers all the Tree City USA (TCU) programs in partnership with the Arbor Day Foundation and the USDA Forest Service. In 2021, UCFP reached millions of Illinois residents through DNR Forestry staff, including directing \$404,727 in USFS dollars to communities. With match, a total of \$1,050,889 was used for tree planting, ordinance revisions, inventory, and urban forest planning. Illinois is among the top three states in all TCU programs.

Illinois Forest Utilization & Marketing Program (IFUP)

DNR Forestry bonded/licensed 360 timber buyers and listed 749 total authorized agents. Seventy-five sawmills and a few dozen additional hobby mills are currently operating in the state. Verified sales of timber and products, primarily as hardwood logs from private forests, continue to exceed \$50 million

annually. The total economic value of the forest products industries in Illinois, including all primary and secondary sectors, exceeded \$22 billion in 2022. The IFUP partners with Stewardship and other forestry programs to expand the multiple-use philosophy of forest management which includes wildlife, timber, carbon, protected species, recreation, soil, and water conservation.

Wildland Fire Programs

IDNR staff conducted prescribed burning on approximately 4,173 acres statewide during the previous year. IDNR Forestry deployed one 20-person Type 2-IA crews to California and one four-person engine crew to Texas as assistance to other states. Illinois also has a representative on the NASF Wildland Fire Committee and a representative on the Big Rivers Fire Compact.