



Crab Orchard Lake

Fisheries Fact Sheet

Crab Orchard Lake is a 6965-acre impoundment located in the Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge between Marion and Carbondale in Williamson County Illinois. The Crab Orchard Lake fishery is cooperatively managed by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Largemouth bass: The bass fishing forecast for Crab Orchard Lake is very good. The proportion of largemouth bass larger than the 16-inch minimum size limit has been more than 20% since 2004, and the fall 2014 survey produced a sample in which 22% were larger than 16 inches. Of these, 10% were also larger than 18 inches. Largemouth bass abundance in the 2014 sample increased slightly compared to the previous year, as 133 fish were collected per hour, and the management plan goal was easily met. Body condition of largemouth bass in Crab Orchard Lake has remained excellent. Improvements in the Crab Orchard bass population in recent years can be at least partially attributed to a combination of more stringent harvest regulations, increased bass fingerling and threadfin shad stocking, habitat enhancement (through fish attractor installation and vegetation planting), and establishment of a spawning refuge area with artificial spawning substrates. The Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge is also limiting each bass club to one fish-off event per year to reduce angling pressure and angler conflicts.

Bluegill: The quality of Crab Orchard Lake bluegill met or exceeded the management goal for the eleventh year in 2014, and bluegill body condition easily met the goal for the seventeenth year in a row, indicating another good forecast for bluegill anglers. The proportion of bluegill larger than six inches was 47%, and the component over seven inches was 13%.

Channel catfish: Crab Orchard Lake channel catfish quality and body condition, similar to previous years, were excellent, and 70% of the fish collected were larger than 22 inches in length.

Crappie: The percentage of both black and white crappie larger than 8 inches remained relatively high in 2014 (41% and 78%, respectively). The percentage of white crappie larger than ten inches in length was very good at 37, while 7% of black crappie in the sample achieved that size. Body condition of both types of crappie were similar to the previous year and met the management plan goal.

White bass: Crab Orchard Lake white bass were not well represented in the fall 2014 survey, but the fish that were collected ranged in size from 4 to 15 inches, and 86% were larger than 10 inches, while 28% exceeded 12 inches. White bass body condition easily fell within the management plan goal range.

Regulations in effect: Largemouth bass -- 16 inch (38 cm) min length limit, 3 per day creel limit. No other size or creel limits are in effect. Consult the Illinois Fishing Information booklet for additional regulation information.

Fees: A user permit is required to access the Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge, and a special use permit is required for competitive events. Information may be obtained by calling the refuge visitor center at 618-997-3344.

Additional Fisheries Information may be obtained by calling IDNR District Biologist Chris Bickers at 618-993-7094.