



# FOX CHAIN O' LAKES FISHERIES FACT SHEET

The Fox Chain O' Lakes are unique from other major bodies of water in the state in that they were formed by glaciation thousands of years ago. Composed of 9 major lakes interconnected by channels, the Fox Chain O' Lakes is classified as a public navigable waterway managed under the authority of the Department of Natural Resources and the Fox Waterway Agency.

**LOCATION:** 50 miles northwest of Chicago on Rt 12 near Fox Lake, and near Antioch west of Rt 59 on Rt 173.

**AREA:** 7110.0 acres - Lake Catherine 149.5 acres; Channel Lake 348.5 acres; Lake Marie 585.0 acres; Bluff Lake 92.4 acres; Grass Lake 1451.4 acres; Petite Lake 234.5 acres; Fox/Nippersink Lake 2376.8 acres; Pistakee Lake 1715.7 acres.

**STATUS OF THE SPORT FISHERY:** The Division of Fisheries has been actively monitoring the status of Fox Chain O' Lakes fishery for over 40 years (1954 to present). Between 30 and 40 fish species inhabit the Fox Chain O' Lakes system or roughly 15 to 20% of the 200 fish species found in Illinois. Two species have voluntarily established themselves in the Fox Chain O' Lakes; **yellow bass in 1973**, and **freshwater drum in 1992**. The following is a brief summary of the major sport species based on general fish population surveys conducted by the IDNR between 1954 and 2001.

**Largemouth Bass** - With the initiation of the annual fingerling stocking program in 1991 bass density increased 150% between 1990 and 1995. However, since 1995 the population has remained stable at approximately 16 to 17 bass per hour of electrofishing effort. Stock structure analysis indicates the quality of the fishery has remained strong with 72 % of the bass collected over 12 inches and 20% of the sample exceeding 14 inches. An average of 55,000, 3 to 5 inch fingerlings, have been stocked annually since 1991. Smallmouth bass are present and appear to be increasing as reproduction has been detected and will help their expansion.

**Bluegill** - Bluegill relative abundance has increased to 32.8% of the catch in response to the dramatic decline of yellow bass population. Their abundance is similar to numbers in 1954 (the good old days) and should continue as all sizes of year classes were detected. Approximately 64% of the bluegills collected were at least 6 inches long.

**Crappie** - Both black and white crappie occur in the Fox Chain O' Lakes. Crappie numbers and size structure are gradually improving as a result of sustained reproduction and recruitment. The average size black crappie in the survey was 8.0 inches long though population indices indicated that over 33% of the catch exceeded 10 inches.

**Yellow Bass and White Bass** - The yellow bass decline continued from it's high of 54% of the catch in 1988 to 4.3% of the catch in 2001. This dramatic restructuring of the population has reduced competition with other species and benefited the overall fishery in the Fox Chain O' Lakes. Ice fishermen enjoyed the fast paced action of the late 1980's and early 1990's but their over-abundance was not sustainable and resulted in poor condition (a starvation state) which opened the population up to naturally occurring pathogens and the massive die offs.

**Walleye** - In 2001 a record number of walleye were collected for brood stock (n=1,515) use. This was the second consecutive year over 1000 fish were collected for Hatchery use and only the third time in 17 years it has occurred. The expansion of the walleye population is in response to refined hatchery techniques, and better survival and recruitment of 2 inch fingerling to adulthood. The abundance of harvestable, slower growing male walleye in this system made up the bulk of the catch. In 1996 a 14 inch minimum length limit and 18 to 24 inch protected slot limit was established to facilitate male harvest and increase female abundance and size. Walleye from the Fox Chain O' Lakes were transported to the Spring Grove Resource Centers' hatchery facility for egg collection then returned to the Chain as a renewable resource. In 2001 male walleye averaged 14.7 inches and 1.0 lbs.. Female fish averaged 20.5 inches. Approximately 350,000 two inch fingerlings and 8.3 million fry were stocked in the Chain to maintain this high quality walleye fishery.

**Yellow Perch** - Since 1992 perch have experienced moderate fluctuations in abundance, while the quality of the fishery has improved dramatically as proportionally the percentage of perch greater than 8 inches has increased to 27% of the catch.

**Muskie** - The Fox Chain O' Lakes acts as a secondary brood source for State Hatchery System. To date the largest fish collected was 47.25 inches long and weighed approx. 28 pounds. Proportionally, the number of fish exceeding 42 inches has increased from 0% prior to 1993 to 11% in 2001. This trend should continue in accordance with the trophy regulation (48" minimum length limit) established 1997 and biennial stockings to maintain the fishery. Approximately 2,100 fingerlings are stocked every other year to maintain the muskie fishery. If a fish is caught with a tag near the dorsal fin record the length, tag number, location and date and call 815/675-2385 to report the catch. Over 925 muskie have been tagged since this program began in 1987.

**Northern Pike** - Northern pike are maintained by natural reproduction and their abundance tends to increase following spring floods which create favorable spawning conditions. Ice fishermen target northern pike more than other segments of the fishing public.

**Channel Catfish** - Catfish abundance has reached levels above their historic range and should remain relatively stable. The quality of the fishery has improved significantly as the percentage of fish greater than 16 inches has increased from 5% in 1986 to 60% in 1995 and 69% in 2001. The average size channel catfish collected in 2001 was 17.9 inches up from 16 inches in 1997.

**FISHING REGULATIONS:** Includes the Fox River from the Illinois state line to McHenry Dam. Trot line fishing is permitted.

Species	Daily Creel Limit	Minimum Length Limit
Largemouth bass	6	14"
Smallmouth bass	See site Specific Information	
Walleye*	2	14" to 18"
Muskie**	1	>24"
Northern Pike	1	48"
	3	24"

\*18" to 24" protected slot limit (no possession)

\*\*Includes the Fox River to Rt. 176 (Burton's Bridge)

**TAGGED FISH:** Please report tagged muskie to the Department of Natural Resources phone number listed below.

**FEES:** The Fox Waterway Agency requires an annual user fee for watercraft utilizing the Fox Chain O' Lakes and the Fox River from the Illinois state line to Algonquin Dam. Please contact them for their annual fee schedule and application.

**PHONE NUMBERS:** Illinois Dept. Of Natural Resources, Region 2 Office - 847/608-3100  
Fox Waterway Agency - 847/587-8540

For further information consult the 2003 Illinois Fishing Information Booklet, The Illinois Fishing Guide, and the Fox Chain O' Lakes Access Areas and Fishing Guide.