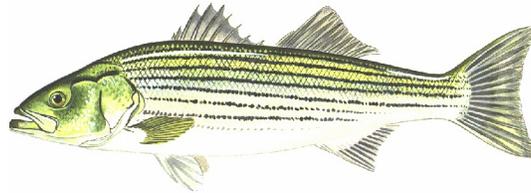


STATUS OF THE STRIPED BASS/HYBRID STRIPED BASS FISHERY



**ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF FISHERIES**

MARCH 2009

STATUS OF STRIPED BASS/HYBRID STRIPED BASS FISHERY IN ILLINOIS REGION I

DISTRICT 2: ROCK ISLAND, HENRY, BUREAU, LASALLE, LEE, AND WHITESIDE COUNTIES

LASALLE LAKE - The 2,058 acre cooling lake in LaSalle County was opened for public fishing in 1987. Striped bass hybrids were initially stocked in LaSalle Cooling Lake in 1990 at five per acre. The cooling lake is stocked with striped bass hybrids almost annually at 5 - 10 fish per acre, depending on availability.

The striped bass hybrids have done very well in LaSalle Lake. The lake has a strong gizzard and threadfin shad population for the striped bass hybrids to feed upon, and as a result, rapid growth occurs. A creel conducted in 1996 reported striped bass hybrids ranked third in harvest behind only channel catfish and white bass. The lake has a fair population of striped bass hybrids between 7 and 11 pounds. A die-off of larger striped bass hybrids occurred in July of 2000 and 2001 when the water got too warm.

Remember when fishing LaSalle Cooling Lake that it is a perched lake and gets very rough when the wind picks up. LaSalle Lake has a daily creel of 10 fish of which up to three can be over 17 inches.

LAKE GEORGE - Lake George is a 167 acre lake in Rock Island County. The lake receives approximately 200 man-hours per acre fishing pressure. Striped bass hybrids were first stocked into Lake George in 1997 and have been stocked annually since then at 12 to 18 fish per acre.

The striped bass hybrids were stocked in Lake George because someone had stocked gizzard shad in the lake in 1990 and their population exploded. The fish have been purchased by Mississippi Valley Muskie, Inc. In 2006 Jake Wolf Fish Hatchery stocked 5,000, 2 inch fish. The 1997 stocking is averaging between 6 to 8 pounds. The 1998 year class are averaging between 4 and 6 pounds. The 2008 trap net survey resulted in the collection of 5 striped bass hybrids between 5 and 7 pounds and the fall electrofishing survey resulted in collection of 4 hybrids between 5 and 6 inches. The striped bass hybrid population is doing well in Lake George.

The Lake has a 17 inch minimum length limit and a one fish per day creel limit.

STATUS OF STRIPED BASS/HYBRID STRIPED BASS FISHERY IN ILLINOIS REGION 2

DISTRICT 9: GRUNDY, KENDALL, WILL, AND KANKAKEE COUNTIES

HEIDECKE LAKE - Located in Grundy County just southeast of Morris and under an hour's drive from the Chicago metropolitan area, Heidecke Lake offers diverse angling opportunities including a variety of temperate bass. Impounded in the late 1970's, Heidecke Lake previously served as a cooling reservoir for Midwest Generation's Collins Station, a fossil fuel peaking plant. However, this generating station was decommissioned at the end of 2004 and subsequently demolished which has eliminated thermal loading and any current which was created by the circulation of cooling water through the plant.

Heidecke Lake has produced state records for both pure and hybrid striped bass (12 records total) and receives annual stockings of striped bass hybrids to maintain the population of this popular and hard-fighting sport fish. Pure striped bass have not been stocked since 1994 and though unsubstantiated reports of pure stripers being caught surface from time to time, none have been collected by IDNR for several years. The 2008 fall survey, while producing good numbers of hybrid striped bass, fell short of the excellent collection of 2006 in which a record number of hybrids were captured by either electrofishing or gill netting. Interestingly, the capture of hybrid striped bass by gill netting fell to its lowest point in many years and this methodology failed to produce fish even at a minimum rate of one per net night. Conversely, electrofishing catch rates were the highest they have ever been and this gear type accounted for the capture of more than 97% of the total number of hybrid striped bass collected. More than 63% of the fall collection was comprised of legal size fish with close to half of those meeting or exceeding what is considered "memorable" size (20 inches). Over the years the stocking rate for hybrid striped bass has held steady at ten fish per acre. Fewer were released in 2007 and the stocking rate declined by 49% which could have a negative impact on angling success in the coming years. Hybrid stripers were the second most frequently caught fish in the 2006 angler creel survey and were the top species kept by anglers, who harvested a total of 10,352 pounds (5.3 pounds/acre). The average size hybrid striper harvested weighed 2.26 pounds (which is roughly a 17 inch fish).

Heidecke Lake also supports a naturally reproducing white bass population which factors in to the total "striped bass" anglers creel. Not unlike most species, the number of white bass collected in the fall 2008 survey declined from 2006. Still, fair numbers of quality size fish were present and close to 9% of those captured in the 2008 survey met or exceeded 15 inches, which is considered a very good white bass.

Based on the results from the 2008 survey, yellow bass appear to be in decline. Collected in record numbers in 2006, the number of yellow bass present in the 2008 survey decreased by 6 times. The average length for yellow bass in the 2008 survey (7.6 inches) was nearly 2 inches less than the previous survey and below the long-term

average. In 2006, yellow bass ranked in the top ten for species caught by anglers (at an average weight of 0.41 pounds) and were also the fourth-most common fish species harvested (0.21 pounds/acre). Approximately 38% of the yellow bass which were caught in 2006 were harvested.

To facilitate better utilization of the resource, anglers are allowed to keep a total of 10 "stripers" per day, three of which may exceed 17 inches. This category includes pure and hybrid striped bass as well as white bass. Yellow bass are not included and have no protected size or daily creel limits. Heidecke Lake is open to fishing from April 1st until ten days prior to the opening of the North Zone waterfowl season. The lake is open daily from 6:00 a.m. and closes at sunset. A concessionaire located at the boat ramp offers bait and tackle as well as boat and motor rentals. Heidecke Lake is a partially perched cooling lake and can become very hazardous in windy conditions. Water level fluctuations can restrict boat access to the north side of the lake due to restricted clearance beneath the trestle. There are no boat motor horsepower restrictions but boats must have a working gas-powered motor. The bank fishing area access is located at the eastern side of the lake and is handicapped accessible, featuring a barrier-free fishing pier.

STATUS OF STRIPED BASS/HYBRID STRIPED BASS FISHERY IN ILLINOIS REGION 3

DISTRICT 10: CHAMPAIGN, DEWITT, FORD, IROQUOIS, LIVINGSTON, MCLEAN, PIATT, AND VERMILION COUNTIES

CLINTON LAKE - This was one of the first lakes in the state to receive hybrid striped bass. Hybrid striped bass were first stocked in 1978, followed by pure striped bass in 1991. During the 2007 electrofishing survey, pure stripers were collected at a rate of 2.5 per hour. The pure stripers ranged in length from 17 inches to 32 inches. During the 2007 electrofishing survey, hybrid striped bass were collected at a rate of 0.1 per hour. Fishing below the spillway at Clinton Lake gives anglers a great chance at a nice striper. A large number of stripers escape the lake and stay in the catch basin area. White bass were introduced into Clinton Lake by an unknown source, but are producing an excellent fishing opportunity. The fishing regulation for white bass, striped bass, and hybrid striped bass is a 10 fish daily creel with a 3 fish 17" or longer daily creel limit. This allows anglers to harvest white bass. Major access areas have bulletin boards with area rules, fish creel and size limit regulations and other visitor information posted. All state boating, hunting, fishing and park regulations remain in full force where applicable. Various portions of the lake are designated as no-wake, electric motor only, or no boat areas for safety and security reasons. Areas closed to public access include: the water intake area for the power plant, the spillway and dam areas east of the spillway, and the discharge flume (ditch). Boats and fishermen are not allowed in designated swimming areas when swimming is permitted. Please pay special attention to such areas designated by the maps, posted signs, and buoys. The entire portion of the lake between the DeWitt County Highway 14 Bridge and the Illinois

Route 48 Bridge is designated as a fish and water fowl refuge and is closed to all public use for the period of October 10th. Through March 31. The land portions of the site in this designated area will still be open for authorized hunting activities (except waterfowl) during this time period. As on all large lakes, Clinton Lake can become very rough when the wind exceeds 15 m.p.h. All boaters are advised to be aware of the weather. Although there is no horsepower or speed limit on Clinton Lake, shallow areas and underwater hazards do exist in numerous portions of the lake. Boaters should operate their craft accordingly.

LAKE BLOOMINGTON - Only a few individuals are collected during surveys, but anglers report catching hybrid striped bass. The hybrids collected during surveys are usually longer than 20 inches. The State Hatchery System stocks hybrid striped bass to sustain the fishery. The fishing regulation for hybrid striped bass on Lake Bloomington is a 17" minimum length limit with a 3 fish daily creel limit. Lake Bloomington has one boat ramp and charges an access fee. Boats are limited to 40 horsepower. For information on fees and Lake Bloomington call 309/747-2615.

DISTRICT 11: CLARK, COLES, CUMBERLAND, DOUGLAS, EDGAR, MACON, MOULTRIE, AND SHELBY COUNTIES

LAKE DECATUR - Is located on the east side of the City of Decatur, in Macon County. The lake covers 3,093 surface acres with a maximum depth of 22 feet and average depth of six feet. Public boat launching facilities are available with the City of Decatur (217-424-2837) collecting boating access fees. Statewide regulations are in effect, with no limit for fish under 17 inches, but a maximum of only three striped bass hybrids over 17 inches can be kept. A strong white bass fishery exists in this lake. Fishermen should keep in mind that a maximum of only three white bass over 17 inches can be kept as well, which can be easy to exceed.

Very few striped bass hybrids are collected from lake Decatur during fall surveys. Although fishing success was poor in 2008 due to excessive rains, an increased number of fishermen have reported catching them on the lake in recent years and a viable fishery exists below the dam for both hybrids and true striped bass. Since the likely source of the stripers is Clinton Lake, some if not most of the hybrids could be coming from this source as well. An angler creel survey conducted in 2006 found angler catch rates (0.03/hr.) to exceed stocking success goals, but harvest (0.20 lbs./acre) fell below standard goals. Fishing prospects in 2009 for striped bass hybrids on Lake Decatur are rated as fair. Fishing prospects for striped bass hybrids below the Lake Decatur spillway are rated as good, especially in spring.

LAKE MATTOON - Is located approximately eight miles southwest of Mattoon and about 1.5 miles northwest of Neoga, in Shelby, Coles, and Cumberland Counties. The lake covers 1,050 surface acres with a maximum depth of 31 feet and average depth of 11.4 feet. Public boat launching facilities are available and the City of Mattoon (217-234-3611) collects a boating access fee which covers Lake Paradise as well.

Statewide regulations are in effect, with no limit for fish under 17 inches, but only three striped bass hybrids over 17 inches can be kept.

Very few striped bass hybrids are collected from Lake Mattoon during fall surveys. Five striped bass hybrids were collected in the 2006 fall survey, ranging from 11 to 12 inches. An angler creel survey conducted in 2007 found angler catch rates (0.003/hr.) and harvest (0.15 lbs./acre) fell below standard stocking success goals. Anglers are catching a wide size range of striped bass hybrids and this fishery has recently been attracting anglers specifically fishing for hybrids. Fishing prospects for striped bass hybrids are rated as fair to good for 2009.

CHARLESTON SIDE CHANNEL LAKE - Is located approximately three miles southeast of Charleston, in Coles County. The lake covers 330 surface acres with a maximum depth of 16 feet and average depth of 7.7 feet. Free public boat launching facilities are available. There is a no wake regulation in effect on the entire lake. A 17 inch minimum length limit with a three fish daily creel limit is in effect.

Many anglers have reported catching hybrids from 2 to 12 pounds with fish up to 15 pounds collected during fish population surveys. Fishing is especially good in spring when fish congregate near a pumping station in the south east corner of the lake. A strong fishery, attracting numbers of anglers, has developed. Two "Big Fish" Awards were submitted for hybrid striped bass in fall '04 by one angler. During the '08 fall stocking success survey, sixteen hybrids were collected, ranging from 7 to 13 inches. During the standardized fall survey in '07, the largest hybrid collected weighed 12.8 lbs., but should have exceeded 15 lbs. had it been in good condition. Fishing prospects for striped bass hybrids are rated as good to excellent in 2009, but tend to be dependent on the amount of pumping activity.

STATUS OF STRIPED BASS/HYBRID STRIPED BASS FISHERY IN ILLINOIS REGION 4

DISTRICT 12: ADAMS, BROWN, CALHOUN, HANCOCK, MORGAN, PIKE, AND SCHUYLER COUNTIES

PITTSFIELD LAKE - On April 7, 2008, a spring, gill netting survey was conducted on Pittsfield Lake. Two, 2.5 inch, monofilament gill nets (total of 350' in total length) were fished for 26 daytime hours, lifted and checked five times. A total of 116 striped bass hybrids were collected during the survey, establishing **2008** as the survey year with the most hybrids collected since the original, supplemental stocking in 1982. In 2007, 28 hybrids were collected; whereas, in 2006, 112 were captured.

In 2008, four consecutive year classes were identified in the collection; 3+ thru 6+. It is believed that the 1+ and 2+ year old fish were streamlined enough to pass thru the 2.5 inch, mesh gill nets and therefore avoided capture. Age 3+ striped bass hybrids

comprised nearly 41% of the collection (n=47) and averaged 19.7 inches in length. These individuals averaged 3.7 pounds in weight. Age 4+ individuals comprised 35% (n=40) and averaged 21.8 inches and weighed 5.6 pounds. The balance of the collection was comprised of 5+ (n=13 or 11%) and 6+ (n=16 or 14%). Age 5+ fish average 23.2 inches and weigh 6.4 pounds while 6+ year old fish average 25.2 inches in length and weigh 8.2 pounds.

Most striped bass hybrids are caught either by bass fishermen tossing spinner baits into schools of gizzard shad busting the surface or by catfishing anglers tight-lining chicken livers for channels or flatheads.

There is a 17 inch minimum on striped, white or hybrid striped bass on Pittsfield Lake. There is a three fish daily creel limit, singly or in aggregate for striped, white or hybrid striped bass. The City of Pittsfield has established Pittsfield Lake as a "NO WAKE" lake with a maximum of a 25 horsepower outboard motor. Any motors larger in horsepower **MUST** remove the propeller.

LAKE JACKSONVILLE - The Striped Bass Hybrid population in this heavily fished impoundment is difficult to evaluate. Annual fall surveys have failed to produce sufficient numbers to properly evaluate the population. Lake Jacksonville is a well-utilized largemouth bass fishery and it appears that most hybrid striped bass are caught incidentally by bass fishermen throwing silver minnow-look-a-likes. The main forage is gizzard shad in Lake Jacksonville; however, strong, annual spawns do not always occur.

DSITRICT 13: CASS, CHRISTIAN, MASON, LOGAN, MENARD, AND SANGAMON COUNTIES

LAKE SANGCHRIS - Striped bass population surveys have been remarkable in their variability. For several years prior to 2002 the spring gill net surveys produced very few fish. In 2002 however the sample yielded the second highest catch rates since the inception of the program in 1983. That was followed in 2003 by one of the poorest catches. In 2004 and 2005 the catch peaked at the third and second highest catch rates respectively. It is very difficult to get consistent data due to sampling biases. The 2006 survey produced a good number of fish, none over 20 pounds however. Two strong year classes were present. The younger class ranged in size from 3-5 pounds. The older class ranged from 10-15 pounds. We assume they are still there and growing but the 2008 striped bass gill net survey didn't bear that out. We collected only one fish over 12 pounds. A very strong year class of one year old fish was seen ranging from 3-5 pounds and the three year olds ranged from 6-8 pounds but only four fish were collected over 10 pounds, none over 13 pounds. So the older year classes from the 2001 and 2003 stockings are not showing up in the population surveys. They may (and should) still be there but they are not being collected and there are no angler reports of larger fish being caught. Over the past ten years several strong year classes

have been seen as 1 and 3 year-olds but seem to disappear after that. There have been no reports of fish kills so even though the lake gets very hot in the summer there have been no significant die-offs. It's anybody's guess as to where the larger fish are.

The striped bass population has done well over the years with alternate year stockings of 10 - 2" fingerlings per acre on the odd years. Due to hatchery production limitations however, Lake Sangchris did not receive any striped bass fingerlings in 2007 but received a make-up stocking in 2008. The 2009 stocking will bring the numbers back into line and we will return to the alternate year on odd year stocking regimen. The spring 2009 survey should be interesting and, we hope, productive. Currently the 2001 year-class should be larger than 20 pounds with one other strong year class at 10-12 pounds followed by a younger cohort in the 7-10 pound range. Two other factors to consider are the gizzard and threadfin shad populations. Neither is dependable in their spawning activities and that significantly affects the striped bass growth rates.

DISTRICT 14/15: GREENE, JERSEY, SCOTT, MACOUPIN, AND MONTGOMERY COUNTIES

OTTER LAKE - A mere 8 Striped Bass Hybrids were collected during the March 2008 netting evaluation. This value dropped dramatically compared to 2007 (75), and plummeted well below the 5 year mean catch of 52. The reduction in densities are most likely due to: 1) This species has only been stocked 6 years since 1998 (6 of 10 years - 60 %). 2) Two one hundred year flood events occurred over the last six years. Spillway escapement was definitely a major problem during these high water episodes. 3) A more liberal regulation was put in place to allow harvest of White Bass in this water body (3 Striped, Hybrid or White Bass >17" ; 10 fish per angler per day). This rule will be modified if densities remain depressed. 4) Environmental conditions (weather / water temperatures) during our sample were not ideal.

The fish captured measured 18.5" to 28.3", and weighed 3.0 lbs to 15.6 lbs in total weight. 4 individuals (50%) exceeded 5 lbs, and 2 (25%) topped 10 lbs in weight. For 2007, I would rate this population below average.

DISTRICT 17: CLINTON, MONROE, RANDOLPH, AND WASHINGTON COUNTIES

BALDWIN LAKE - Baldwin Lake received a stocking of 20,000 2" hybrid striped bass in July of 2006. Prior to this, the lake had not been stocked since 2002. Recruitment was excellent from the 2006 stocking. We collected 23 hybrid stripers during our survey. The fish ranged in length from 20 to 23 inches and had an average weight of 5.2 lbs. The largest hybrid weighed 6.6 lbs. As a general rule, hybrid striped bass in Baldwin grow very fast and disappear from the population once they reach 6 or 7 pounds. This is probably a result of mortality from an accelerated life cycle due to thermal lake conditions, and/or from excessive heat during summer months which may affect the larger bass. Overall, the population is in good shape with decent numbers of fish available to the angler. I would rate fishing for this species in 2009 as good. A 17 inch

minimum length limit/3 fish/day applies. Contact the site office (618 785-2555) for park opening and closing times.

STATUS OF STRIPED BASS/HYBRID STRIPED BASS FISHERY IN ILLINOIS REGION 5

DISTRICT 18: CLAY, EFFINGHAM, FAYETTE, JEFFERSON, MARION, AND WAYNE COUNTIES

FORBES LAKE - The fishery for hybrid striped bass appears to be doing fairly well, although surveys conducted in both spring and fall produced reduced numbers of fish. Two year-classes were observed, most abundant were fish ranging from 19 to 20 inches in length and the largest collected was 20.7 inches in length at 4.5 pounds though considerably larger fish are caught by anglers. Since reproduction is not expected 10,179 fingerlings were stocked.

DISTRICT 21: ALEXANDER, JACKSON, PERRY, PULASKI, AND UNION COUNTIES

CEDAR LAKE - Cedar Lake is located five miles southwest of the City of Carbondale in Jackson County off of Route 51 South. The striped bass regulations on this lake are as follows: 17 inch minimum length limit and 3 fish daily creel limit. There is also a 10 HP motor limit on this lake. Because of the difficulty in sampling striped bass in this Lake, little information is available on Cedar Lake's striped bass population. During spring 2006 gill netting, one 8 pound striped bass was collected. Another attempt to sample striped bass will be made during spring and/or fall of 2009. Anglers have caught striped bass from this lake up to 23 pounds.

Stocking History (since 1990)

| Year | Number | Size |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| 1990 | 17,500 | 1.0" |
| 1992 | 10,000 | 1.5" |
| 1993 | 8750 | 1.5" |
| 1994 | 8000 | 1.5" |
| 1996 | 8750 | 2.5" |
| 1997 | 8750 | 1.5" |
| 2002 | 6000 | 2.0" |
| 2005 | 14,542 | 1.5" |
| 2007 | 4550 | 2.8" |
| 2008 | 8750 | 1.2" |

DISTRICT 22: FRANKLIN, JOHNSON, MASSAC, AND WILLIAMSON COUNTIES

Crab Orchard Lake - Crab Orchard Lake is a 6965-acre federal impoundment located in Williamson County approximately one mile south of Carterville. Striped bass hybrid fishing prospects for the 2009 season are projected to be poor. A federal striped bass hybrid stocking program for Crab Orchard was stopped in 1991 due to their apparent negative influence on the white bass population, and individuals from that program have not been collected for a few years. After IDNR entered into a cooperative fisheries management agreement with USFWS in 1998, the lake was submitted as a candidate for state-provided striped bass hybrids and received 25,000 2-inch fish in 1999 (3.6/acre), 14,000 in 2001 (2/acre), and 1650 in 2003 (0.2/acre). These fish exhibited good growth due to the presence of abundant gizzard and threadfin shad, and hybrids ranging in length from 9 to 25 inches were collected in the fall of 2004. However, no hybrids have been collected during the fall surveys of 2005 through 2008. **Important Note:** A flood event in spring 2008 removed a portion of the Crab Orchard Lake spillway escapement barrier, and USFWS staff plan to remove the rest of the barrier rather than rebuilding it. Since striped bass hybrids are very prone to escapement over the Crab Orchard Lake spillway, and these fish are normally available in very limited quantities for stocking statewide, the decision was made to permanently remove Crab Orchard Lake from the stocking priority list in 2008. Anglers can, however, look forward to enjoying a Crab Orchard Lake white bass population that is presently in good condition.

A portion of Crab Orchard Lake east of Wolf Creek Road is closed to boat traffic October 1 to March 15 to reduce disturbance of resting waterfowl. All fishoffs and tournaments are required to be pre-registered with the refuge, and all anglers must purchase a refuge user pass. Write USFWS, Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge, 8588 Rt. 148, Marion, IL 62959 or call 618/997-3344 for information.