

2013 Lake Shelbyville Fishing Prospects

Lake Shelbyville is located in Shelby and Moultrie Counties in east-central Illinois. This lake has a surface area of 11,100 acres, with a maximum depth of 67 feet, and an average depth of 18.9 feet. Numerous public boat launching facilities are available, with a fee assessed on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (217/774-3951) developed access area boat ramps, and free access on state park or Corps' gravel boat ramps. An annual fish attractor project is coordinated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in coordination with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources in early March.

Largemouth Bass – **good** – Recent large floods and a few well-timed smaller flood pulses have resulted in excellent natural recruitment of largemouth bass. It appears that strong year classes have been or will be recruited to the lake from spawns in 11 of the last 12 years, including 2012. Recruitment through fall of the 2012 year class of largemouth bass appears to be especially good, in the upper part of the lake. The strong year classes produced should sustain this fishery for many years.

This lake has become a very popular tournament destination due to the high quality of the fishery. Fishermen reported catching good numbers of bass both below and above the size limit through the early part of the 2012 season. Totals weights in the 20+ lb category were required to win most early tournaments. These results compare very favorably to other large reservoirs in Illinois. One tournament recorded 43 limits of five fish brought to the scales from 68 entries (63%). The largest bass weighed into the larger tournaments ranged from 4.8 to 6.9 lbs.

The later part of the summer saw tournament results drop off significantly. The Bassmaster Elite Series Tournament experienced very poor fishing results with the body condition of the largemouth bass looking very poor at that time. The reason for the poor body condition in both white bass and largemouth bass is unexplained, as shad density was very high throughout 2012. Samples are being analyzed for pathological reasons for the poor body condition and low activity levels that resulted in poor catch rates. Body condition looked somewhat improved when the fall survey was performed, although some of the bass were still very thin.

The number of bass, age 1+ and older, collected in the 2012 fall fish population survey (34/hr) was much lower than recent surveys. It is difficult to determine if this is due to population changes, or due to the loss of near shore cover due to recent floods pushing wood above the waterline, or due to weather related effects on fish location. Collection rates were highest in the Kaskaskia Arm of the lake. The largest bass collected during the 2010 fall survey was 20 inches and weighed 4.5 lbs. The largemouth bass fishing prospects for 2013 remain good to excellent for numbers and good to excellent for size.

There has been a recent attempt to establish a foundling population of smallmouth bass in Lake Shelbyville from the Kaskaskia River population. Although anglers are seeing and catching a few of the stocked smallmouth bass, there is no indication of natural recruitment. Fishing prospects for smallmouth bass are poor due to low stocking densities and a lack of natural recruitment. Anglers are encouraged to release any smallmouth bass caught, immediately.

Crappie – **very good** – Recent floods have boosted both the growth rate and recruitment of crappie in Lake Shelbyville. The warm winter of '11-'12 resulted in unprecedented catch rates of crappie from the lake in recent years. Angler catch rates and size structure remained good throughout the summer and fall. Evidence of increased recruitment was observed in high catch rates of black crappie by anglers through the summer.

The catch rates of white crappie in the fall survey were poor (44 total), while catch rates of black crappie average (173 total). The size structure of the white crappie collected was good, with 44% being 10 inches or longer. Only 10% of the black crappie collected were 10 inches or longer, with a large percentage between 8.5-9.5 inches. Body condition was slightly above average for white crappie and slightly below average for black crappie.

The usefulness of the size limit will finally be tested if normal water conditions are experienced over the next two years. It would be ideal if anglers would target the more abundant black crappie as their primary fish for the five crappie less than 10 inches that can be harvested. This would help thin the black crappie population and help encourage better growth rates. Unfortunately, the tendency is for fishermen to harvest the crappie just under 10 inches, which may not result in enough harvest of the smaller black crappie to reduce competition and improve growth rates. The fishing prospects for crappie remain excellent for 2013.

White Bass – fair to good – The white bass population is faring equally well with recruitment as other species, however, body condition as measured by relative weight ($W_r = 72$) in fall 2012 was very poor, indicating potentially reduced growth rates for late 2012 and possibly into 2013. The reason for the poor body condition in both white bass and largemouth bass is unexplained, as shad density was very high throughout 2012. In comparison the body condition of white bass at Rend Lake was much better with an average W_r value of 92.

Previous growth and recruitment has been very good, with 85% of the fish collected in the fall survey exceeding 11 inches and about 40% exceeding 12 inches. Body condition in summer of 2013 will determine the quality of this fishery to anglers. This will be affected by feeding activity in fall and the success of the shad spawn in spring 2013.

Walleye – good - Consistent stockings of fingerling walleye from the Fins & Feathers Nursery Pond and the IDNR's Jake Wolf and LaSalle Fish Hatcheries since 1994 have resulted in the development of a good to excellent walleye fishery. In recent years, knowledgeable fishermen have been able to catch limits of fish from April through mid-June. Some fishermen believe that July and August are the better months, but most reports of good catches are from earlier months.

Catch rates during the 2012 (24/hr), 2011 (35/hr), 2010 (18/hr), 2009 (64/hr), 2008 (19/hr), 2007 (34/hr), 2006 (11/hr.), and 2005 (24/hr.) stocking success survey all met or exceeded standard stocking success goals. The walleye collected in the 2012 stocking success survey ranged from 8 to 26+ inches, with the largest weighing 4.1 lbs. Like 2011, this sample was comprised primarily of age-0+ walleye. A fair number of walleye (35) with a wide size range were collected in the standard fall survey. The walleye collected in the standard fall survey ranged from 7 to 23+ inches, with the largest weighing 4.2 lbs. Unlike largemouth bass and white bass, the body condition of walleye was only slightly below average. The size structure was good with about 50% of the fish collected in the fall survey exceeding 15 inches. The walleye fishing prospects for Lake Shelbyville rated as good for 2013.

Sauger - fair - A relatively small number of sauger have been stocked annually from 2006 – 2011 in an attempt to produce a self-sustaining population. In 2010, 102,000+ sauger were stocked in the lake through production from the Fins & Feathers Nursery Pond and the IDNR's LaSalle Fish Hatchery. Catch rates during the 2012 (12/hr), 2011 (29/hr) and 2010 (25/hr) stocking success survey exceeded standard stocking success goals. In the 2012 stocking success survey, 17 sauger, ranging from 12 to 16 inches, were collected. Only one sauger was collected in the 2012 standard fall survey, 14 inches. The largest sauger collected in either survey weighed just 1.5 lb. A few reports from fishermen catching the occasional sauger have been received. Fishing prospects for sauger should be fair in 2013.

Muskellunge – fair- Pure muskellunge were first stocked in Lake Shelbyville in 1978. It wasn't until 1988, however, that somewhat consistent year-to-year stockings of 5,500 fingerlings per year were initiated from the IDNR's Jake Wolf Memorial Fish Hatchery. Although fisherman catch rates have been depressed since 2007, they have improved somewhat in 2011 and 2012.

Three "larger" muskie tournaments were held on Lake Shelbyville, in 2012. The catch as reported was distributed as 2 fish (LSMC Spring Tournament, April, 11 anglers, largest fish 38"), 13 fish (IMTT Fall Classic, Oct. 6th & 7th, 16 anglers, largest fish 41"), and 7 fish (IMTT Championship, Nov. 3rd & 4th, 26 anglers, largest fish 44").

Eleven muskies were collected in the 2012 fall fish population survey with the largest fish being 38". Five of these fish were young-of-the-year stocked this year from Jake Wolf Memorial Fish Hatchery. This is a greater catch rate than 2011, when only six fish were collected. Fishing prospects for 2013 are fair for numbers and size on the lake and good for size and number below the spillway.

Channel Catfish / Flathead Catfish – poor - fair – Only eight (8) channel catfish were collected in the 2012 fall survey with the largest being 29+ inches and 9.5 lbs. Only one flathead catfish were collected, 16+ inches and 2.0 lbs. Despite three recent long-duration summer floods, some coupled with turbid water, catfish recruitment in Lake Shelbyville and the Kaskaskia River above the lake has been poor. Reports of moderate catches are reported by fishermen on occasion. Fishing prospects for channel and flathead catfish in 2013 are poor - fair.

Bluegill – poor – Despite the effects of floods on improving the growth rates of other species, the growth rate of bluegill seems to have been unaffected. Although catch rates are good, the size structure of the bluegill population is poor with a very low percentage of bluegill exceeding 6.5 inches. Body condition is below average as well. Fishing prospects for bluegill and other sunfish (green sunfish and longear sunfish) on Lake Shelbyville is poor.

Other Species of Fish – Many other species of fish occupy Lake Shelbyville and are often underutilized by fishermen. **Yellow bass** are common, but rarely get any longer than 9 inches. They are very good to eat and some fishermen keep as many as possible for this reason. **Common carp** are abundant, and reach lengths of 26 inches and 8+ lbs. They are a common target of bow fishermen. When common carp are canned, they are said to make a good substitute for canned salmon. They are very good when smoked as well. **Freshwater drum** are abundant from 0.5 to 3 lbs. They are occasionally used to make poorman's shrimp, when filleted, sliced, and quickly boiled in water with a small amount of sugar added. A fishery for jumbo **bigmouth buffalo** (up to 20+ lbs) is becoming more popular. Despite being primarily planktivores, these abundant and large fish can be targeted with jigging spoons and put up quite a battle when hooked. They too can be canned or smoked and have a more mild flavor than carp.