

**STATUS OF THE
STRIPED BASS/HYBRID STRIPED BASS FISHERY**

MARCH 2006

**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 hybrid 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 hybrid 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. The 1997 stocking is averaging between 6 to 8 pounds. The 1998 year class are averaging between 4 and 6 pounds. 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.

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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 which eliminated thermal loading and any current which was created by the circulation of cooling water through the plant. Due to the cessation of water circulation and the reappearance of zebra mussels, water clarity has markedly increased. This will likely result in the proliferation of aquatic plants in shallow-water areas. Rapid growth rates resulting in large size fish and their overall tenacity has made "stripers" extremely popular with fishermen. Heidecke Lake hosted state records for both pure and hybrid striped bass (12 records in all) for many years. While the density of large fish has decreased somewhat in recent years, catches of 10+ pound fish are not uncommon. Pure striped bass have not been stocked since 1994, while hybrid striped bass are generally stocked each year (approximately 20,000 fingerlings). During early spring 2005 sampling involving trap nets, hybrid striped bass from multiple year classes were collected with some regularity, ranging in size from 19.0 inches to 29.9 inches. These fish averaged 24.7 inches weighing 8.5 pounds. The intensive biennial fall survey which was last conducted in 2004 yielded a collection of hybrid stripers ranging from 7.9 inches to 28.9 inches averaging 17.6 inches and nearly three pounds. Heidecke Lake also supports thriving white and yellow bass populations and results from the 2004 fall survey showed an average size white bass to measure nearly 12 inches and weigh over $\frac{3}{4}$ pound. Yellow bass were the most numerous of the "stripers" which were collected during that survey and averaged nearly eight inches in length with an average weight of $\frac{1}{4}$ pound. While not common, pure striped bass in the 30- to 40-pound range have been routinely collected during IDNR sampling conducted in the vicinity of the discharge canal, likely drawn to the stronger water currents. With the closure of the generating station and the cessation of water circulation, it will be interesting to see how these fish react and if they move into areas which are accessible to anglers.

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 Central 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 perched cooling lake and can become very hazardous in windy conditions. 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.

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

CLINTON LAKE - This cooling lake for Illinois Power Co. is 4895 acres. This was one of

the first lakes in the state to receive hybrid stripers, being first stocked in 1978. The lake was also stocked with pure stripers starting in 1991. During the 2004 survey, pure stripers were collected at a rate of 1.3 per hour, all being less than 20 inches. These fish will quickly grow into the 20 to 30 inch range. 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. Several years ago 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 the 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 bank of water surface of 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 - The hybrid striped bass population in Lake Bloomington is still developing as a fishery. Only a few individuals are collected during surveys. The State Hatchery System stocked 1,778 two-inch hybrid striped bass in 1999; 3,175 in 2000; and 3,175 in 2001, 2002, and 2003. 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 reported caught in lake Decatur, but 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. One angler reported that he was catching hybrids in the Sangamon River above the lake in spring. Fishing prospects for striped bass hybrids on Lake Decatur are rated as poor. 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. Anglers are catching some larger striped bass hybrids, but this fishery is not attracting many anglers specifically fishing for hybrids. A fish kill below the spillway indicated that a wide size range of hybrids is present in the lake with fish over 20 inches observed. Fishing prospects for striped bass hybrids are rated as fair to good.

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. Fishing prospects for striped bass hybrids are rated as good to excellent, but tend to be dependent on the amount of pumping activity.

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

LAKE JACKSONVILLE - Most recent fish population survey data indicates that the striped bass hybrids collected exhibited average body condition. Slightly over 50 % of the hybrid striped bass collected ranged in length from 24 to 29 inches. Fish in the 24 inch length class weighed 6.5 pounds with 29 inch individuals weighing up to 13.0 pounds. The hybrids prefer gizzard shad as their forage in Lake Jacksonville. Unfortunately, good, annual shad spawns do not always occur. In years of poor shad spawns, the hybrids are not as robust. This species is somewhat overlooked in this lake. Tournament anglers target largemouth bass not the hybrids. This large, hard-fighting species has attracted a new "niche" of anglers pursuing these predators providing additional sport fishing opportunities.

PITTSFIELD LAKE - During the 2005 spring netting survey, striped bass hybrids comprised 5% of the collection. All of the hybrids collected ranged in length from 17 inches to 24 inches. The weight range was between 2.5 pounds to 7.5 pounds. The average individual measured 20.5 inches and weighed 4.9 pounds. During the summer of 2005, there was an exceptional gizzard shad spawn, probably the best in the last 4 years. Individuals in the 7 - 8 pound range will hopefully move into the 9 - 11 pound range in 2006. This supplementally stocked species provides anglers with an additional sport fish to pursue that has the potential to reach exceptional size. Most hybrids are caught while trolling spinners deep along the western shelf.

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

OTTER LAKE - Only 27 Striped Bass Hybrids were collected during the March 2005 netting evaluation. This value ranks low as compared to previous years. The mean CPUE since the spring of 1995 is 7.1 fish per net night. The 2005 CPUE is nearly one half of this (4.2 fish/nn). As well, the average CPUE from 1999 through 2004 is 13.1 fish per net night. The reduction in densities is twofold. Firstly, this species has only been stocked 7 years since 1994 (7 of 11). Secondly, two one hundred year flood events occurred over the last four years. Spillway escapement was definitely a major problem during these high water episodes. The fish captured measured 19.3" to 28.3", and weighed 3.2 lbs. to 15.4 lbs. 22 individuals (81.5%) exceeded 5 lbs., and 7 (25.9%) topped 10 lbs. in total weight. Due to overall densities being subpar, I would rate this population average for this time frame.

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

BALDWIN LAKE - Due to budget cuts, Baldwin Lake has not been stocked with hybrid stripers since 2002. As a result, the population of stripers has declined in numbers. We collected only one adult fish in our 2005 fall population survey. There have been some stripers caught by anglers, but the catch rate has definitely decreased. The good news is that Baldwin Lake is scheduled to receive a full stocking of 20,000 hybrids in 2006. So while fishing may be a bit slow in '06, by 2008, a substantial, desirable, population of this species should once again become established.

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

FORBES LAKE - The fishery for hybrid striped bass appears to be doing fairly well, as fish collected during the spring and fall 2005 surveys represented 4 year classes including young of the year fish. The most abundant fish were in the 13 to 18 inch and 20 to 22 inch

size ranges. The largest fish sampled was 22 inches and 6.2 lbs. Larger fish were frequently reported by anglers which were not observed, which ranged from 8 to 12 lbs. with a few in the 14 lb. class.

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. There is a 17 inch minimum length limit and 3 fish daily creel limit on this lake. There is also a 10 HP motor limit on this lake. Little information is available on the striped bass population of this lake. An attempt will be made during 2006 to sample the stripers during the spring. Most information is from anglers catches which range from 5-23 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"

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

CRAB ORCHARD LAKE - Crab Orchard Lake is a 7,000 acre federal impoundment located in Williamson County approximately one mile south of Carterville. Striped bass hybrid fishing prospects for the 2005 season should be good. 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 are rare today. However, after IDNR entered into a cooperative fisheries management agreement with USFWS, the lake was submitted as a candidate for state-provided striped bass hybrids and received 25,000 2-inch fish in 1999, 14,000 in 2001, and 1650 in 2003. These fish have 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. The long-term outlook for this fishery is also expected to be good. 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 fish offs 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.