

Searching for Big Bass

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You hoping to catch a big bass next year? One that is large enough to occupy a spot on your den wall?

Perhaps you might even have aspirations of landing the next state-record bass. Where and when do you go to fish for really big bass?

According to Illinois Department of Natural Resources fisheries biologists, numerous lakes, rivers and ponds throughout the state offer potential for landing a bragging-sized bucketmouth. In fact, several of state's finest bass fishing waters can be found right here in southern Illinois.

According to biologists, downstate Illinois anglers are fortunate to have so many fine bass fishing waters in this part of the state. We have two major rivers, several state and federal lakes and numerous city-owned reservoirs all within a short drive and offering quality fishing for largemouth bass.

Oddly enough, the biggest waters don't always yield the largest bass. While the Mississippi and Illinois rivers annually produce numerous big bass, it is the many lakes and ponds in our area that offer the greatest potential for the largest fish.

Here, life is somewhat easier than in the rivers. Without the constant current associated with rivers and streams, lake bass tend to be less stressed and more likely to grow to a larger size.

Early season anglers will find the artificially heated power plant lakes like Coffeen, Baldwin, Newton and Sangchris good bets for big bass. The warmer water found in these lakes offer a longer growing season allowing the fish to reach a large size rather quickly.

It is not unusual to hear of bass over seven pounds coming from these heated waters. Even ten-pound bass are a possibility from most power plant lakes.

Still, these lakes are not our biologist's top picks for really big bass. Oddly enough, they say lakes with reputations for providing only marginal bass fishing often yield the largest fish.

In fact, it is some of our poorer bass waters that actually hold some of the largest bass. Fewer bass generally mean less competition for food and fish tend to grow quite large under those conditions.

As another general rule, lakes with large populations of stunted bluegill also hold big bass. This large forage base provides predator fish like largemouth bass with an unlimited source of food.

Marginal bass fishing waters also see less angling pressure. This allows the fish to grow to a larger size before being caught by fishermen.

These same biologists say some of the city-owned lakes like Gillespie Old City Lake and the Carlinville Lake Number 1 in Macoupin County, Lake Jacksonville in Morgan County and Montgomery County's Glenn Shoals Lake are also good choices for anglers seeking really big bass. Population samplings often reveal the potential of big bass in these waters. They say there is no reason to think that there wouldn't be more big fish like that in this lake.

Also mentioned were the hundreds of privately-owned farm ponds throughout the state. These small ponds and lakes often produce some of the largest bass.

However, like all good bass waters there is a limit to the number of big fish they contain. It takes many years for a largemouth bass to reach a trophy size.

To protect this resource, anglers would be wise to release most of the big fish they catch.

When do you go to catch really big bass? The answer to this question is during the next few months. This is when most really big bass are caught.