

IDNR stocks Alligator Gar as part of reintroduction program

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Ancient species stocked this week at Powerton, Sanganois, Lower Kaskaskia and Horseshoe Lake

SPRINGFIELD, IL – The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Division of Fisheries this week stocked 1,600 alligator gar (each 12 to 14 inches in length) into four waters in the state as part of an IDNR Alligator Gar Reintroduction Program.

The alligator gar, which were raised from fry at the IDNR Jake Wolf Hatchery in Mason Co. and a cooperating private hatchery operated by Exelon Corporation, were stocked at:

- Powerton Lake, a land-locked lake south of Pekin at Powerton Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area (Tazewell Co.);
- Sanganois State Fish and Wildlife Area, a backwater of the Illinois River south of Beardstown (Cass Co.);
- Horseshoe Lake at Horseshoe Lake State Park (Madison Co.), an old oxbow lake of the Mississippi River in the Metro East;
- A backwater lake of the Lower Kaskaskia River near the Kaskaskia River Fish and Wildlife Area (St. Clair Co.)

Prior to stocking, the fish received electronic tags that will allow biologists to track and monitor them.



Alligator gar, a fish native to Illinois, are being reintroduced in an attempt to restore this very large predator to waters of Illinois where it once thrived. Prior to the start of the Illinois reintroduction program, the last known catch of alligator gar in Illinois was in the Cache River basin in southern Illinois in 1966.

Alligator gar can grow up to 8 feet in length and weigh more than 300 pounds. If the project is successful, alligator gar will make for a very strong sportfish, and more importantly, they will add to the biodiversity of the ecosystems in which they are found.

“Reestablishment of an extirpated species doesn’t happen very often, but we have an opportunity with the alligator gar, so we are going to take it,” said Dan Stephenson, chief of the IDNR Division of Fisheries. “We don’t know if we will be successful in bringing them back to a naturally reproducing species, but we are going to try. The stocking programs will continue for years to come, and we will monitor the populations over time to see if we are having success in establishing them once again in Illinois waters.”

For those worried that alligator gar would be detrimental to popular sportfish species, biologists say the alligator gar is an opportunistic predator that mostly targets shad and non-game fish.

“Contrary to some reports, the IDNR is not stocking alligator gar in an attempt to control Asian carp,” Stephenson noted. “They will have no effect on Asian carp, but they are a large, interesting, unique species that once swam in southern Illinois waters. We would like to see them there again.”

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