

New Illinois laws may affect hunters, trappers and fishing enthusiasts

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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SPRINGFIELD - Four state laws going into effect this year may affect some of the favorite hobbies of Riverbend residents, including hunting, fishing and trapping.

Senate Bill 2410, sponsored by **Neil Anderson (R-Moline)**, amends the state **Wildlife Code**, allowing a resident youth under the age of 18 may apply to the **Department of Natural Resources (DNR)** for a **Youth Trapping License**. That license extends

limited trapping privileges. Under this law, minors would not be able to trap or carry a hunting device, including, but not limited to a firearm, a bow and arrow and/or a crossbow unless the youth is accompanied by parent, grandparent or guardian over the age of 21 with a valid **Illinois** trapping lesson. At the age of 19 years, or when a youth chooses to trap alone, he or she is required to complete a trapper safety course approved by the DNR before obtaining a license.

Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Director of Communications Ed Cross said the law would encourage young Illinois residents to learn the methods of trapping and pass them to future generations.

"Now we're giving people under 18 the chance to have that experience," he said. "We want our younger residents to have that same experience and pass it down for generations to come."

Illinois Senate Bill 3003 also amends the state's Wildlife Code. It was sponsored by **Bill Cunningham (D-Chicago)**. It combines current provisions for deer, turkey and combination hunting licenses to Illinois landowners residing in Illinois who own at least 40 acres of Illinois land and wish to hunt upon their land only, resident tenants of at least 40 acres of commercial agricultural land where they will hunt and bona fide equity shareholders of a corporation, bona fide equity members of a limited liability company or bona fide equity partners of a general or limited partnership which owns at least 40 acres of land in a county in Illinois who wish to hunt on the corporation's, company's or partnership's land only, meaning the law would apply to members of hunting clubs.

Cross said this law is one of many methods the IDNR is working with both outdoor enthusiasts and the State of Illinois to save money.

"Before, we would allow owners and residents who had control of 40 or more acres to apply for permits without fees for turkey and deer," he said. "Now we are combining them together as opposed to having them separate. We're cutting expenditures and sending a deer and turkey permit. Anything we can do to save money, we will do for both outdoor enthusiasts and the State of Illinois."

Two additional laws taking effect in Illinois in 2017 involve fishing. One, which has gained a lot of traction on social media, is what is being referred to as the "pitchforking catfish" law, or, as it is known in the law books, **House Bill 5788**, sponsored by representatives **Charles Meier (R-Highland)** and **Tim Butler (R-Springfield)**. The law allows people using spearing methods of fishing, such as bowfishing, underwater harpooning and, yes, pitchforking to harvest catfish through this method. Previous to this law, which does not take effect until April 1, 2017, people partaking in such methods may face penalties if they even accidentally nabbed a catfish.

Cross said the pitchforking language commonly referenced in the bill is archaic and refers to simpler times. In olden days, desperate farmers would take to the creeks to pitchfork fish in shallow waters during times of hunger or boredom. Cross said this new law would in no way, shape or form affect the population of catfish in Illinois waterways.

"If you really want to go out and try it, you can (after April 1, 2017), but talk about a needle in a haystack, catfish hardly ever come up to the shallow waters."

The new law applies only to certain public Illinois waterways. Cross said the portions of the river near **Pere Marquette State Park** would be allowed, as would several waterways connected to the **Mississippi River**.

An additional fishing law taking effect this year is **House Bill 5796**, which amends the **Fish and Aquatic Life Code** to remove fish catching limits from people fishing from their own private ponds and lakes. The bill was sponsored by representatives Meier and Butler as well as representatives **Patricia Bellock (R-Westmont)** and **Grant Wehrli (R-Naperville)**.

Cross said fishing limits still apply for public waterways and advised over-fishing private ponds and lakes could deplete fish populations in those bodies of water, but the IDNR will not enforce catch limits for those.