



# **Prospects hot for Carlyle and Rend Lake catfish anglers**

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If predictions by Illinois Department of Natural Resource's fisheries biologists prove to be true, catfish anglers heading to either Carlyle or Rend Lake are likely to have one of their best years ever.

According to fisheries biologists, the channel catfish population at Carlyle Lake appears to have improved substantially over the past several years. The fish are now very abundant and composed of many different size classes.

To say this year will be better than 2017 is to make quite a statement. Last year, catfish anglers enjoyed phenomenal success. Still, biologists must look to the future before making their predictions.

They say they observed young fish weighing just under a pound, all the way up to some real monsters.

Apparently, results from the population survey show catfish in the two- to four-pound class were quite common. And, they also observed plenty of five- to six-pound fish.

In fact, some of the larger fish weighed seven, ten and 13 pounds. And, the condition appeared to be good for all.

Carlyle Lake is also famous for producing monster flathead catfish. Unfortunately, these are difficult to sample and the team did not pick up many of the flatheads. Flatheads appeared to be more scattered than normal.

But, they are not all that concerned about the missing flathead catfish.

Flatheads typically exhibit exceptionally good reproduction and growth in Carlyle Lake. And, the biologists generally pick up many young fish during the surveys.

Actually, Carlyle Lake flatheads should range between fish weighing less than a pound to those tipping the scales at more than 50 pounds.

The news from Southern Illinois Rend Lake may even be brighter. Here, biologists are predicting another fabulous year for anglers seeking channel catfish.

“Natural reproduction and recruitment continue to be very strong, and are responsible for maintaining the large population in the lake,” said fisheries biologist Mike Hooe.

He said the catch rate for channel catfish rose by 96 percent last year, increasing for the fifth straight year. The population is now at the highest level in more than a decade.

“The condition of these fish is fair and growth rates are good,” he added. “Channel catfish averaging one- to three-pounds should be abundant and larger fish up to six pounds common.”

He said the catch rate for flathead catfish also rose sharply in recent years to near record numbers. Reproduction for this species has been excellent for three years.

“As a result, much of the increase was comprised of smaller fish,” he explained. “Due to these large year classes of smaller fish, the size structure of the population may decrease in 2018, but should continue to provide good fishing opportunities.”

Anglers can expect large numbers of fish under five pounds, with occasional flatheads up to 20 pounds. Best of all, the large number of smaller fish should keep the population stable and provide excellent fishing in years to come.

Unfortunately, the news regarding Lake Shelbyville’s catfish is not nearly as bright. Here, fisheries biologists say relatively few channel catfish were collected in the 2017 population survey.

“Despite several recent long-duration summer floods, some coupled with turbid water, catfish recruitment at Lake Shelbyville and the Kaskaskia River above the lake has been poor,” he added.

He says reports of moderate catches have come from fishermen on occasion. However, the fishing prospects for channel and flathead catfish at Lake Shelbyville in 2018 are only fair.