



Big year ahead for Corps Lake white bass

by Lee Keck

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Anglers fishing at Illinois three big Corps of Engineer reservoirs will likely have one of the best year's ever pursuing white bass, according to fisheries biologists for these waters.

At Lake Shelbyville, for instance, white bass fishing is almost always good, even during poor years. This year, however, Lake Shelbyville fisheries biologist Mike Mounce says the action could even be better than normal.

"The white bass population on Lake Shelbyville appears to be rebounding and stabilizing since the population crash in 2012-13," Mounce said. "In fact, the body condition has also slightly improved over the past year."

Apparently, the catch rate has also significantly improved over the past several years.

"Last year's sampling resulted in a catch of 236, compared to 74 in 2016 and 166 in 2015," he explained. "And, the size structure has also improved."

Mounce says the average fish should measure 10 inches, with the larger ones measuring better than 12 inches.

"The fishing white bass fishing reports were much improved over 2017," he added. "And, things are looking even better for 2018 regarding the number of fish and the sizes available."

Biologists are also saying white bass remain abundant and exhibit a good population structure at Carlyle Lake.

"The overall catch rate was 29 fish per hour of electrofishing," said IDNR Carlyle Lake fisheries biologist Fred Cronin. "This is about the same as the numbers from our 2016 survey." And, fishing for this species was good in 2017.

"Multiple year classes were collected in 2017, including some young-of-the-year," he added. "This indicated a successful spawning effort for these fish."

Right now, he says 52 percent of the stock is 12 inches or greater in length. This, he feels, should provide good fishing opportunity.

"The fish are in good condition, and a 13-inch fish should weigh about a pound," he added. "He is also looking for good action to come from this lake again this year."

Perhaps the most interesting news comes from Rend Lake in southern Illinois.

Here, where white bass were almost non-existent a few years ago, is now developing into a good fishing water for this species.

“The number of white bass collected in the fall of 2017, increased significantly,” said IDNR Rend Lake biologist Shawn Hirst. “Reproduction has been above average the past few years and white bass fishing was good throughout most of 2017.”

Hirst is expecting the good fishing to continue the coming year, as well.

“Anglers can expect the catchable population in the coming year to be largely comprised of fish 12- to 16-inches in length and many weighing more than a pound,” he added. “A smaller group of fish six- to eight-inches in length will also contribute to the creel.

With this bright outlook, anglers will only need to prepare for the big catch. Now is the time to check supplies and their sharpen fillet knife.