



Prospects hot for Corps Lakes Cats

by Lee Keck

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

“The average channel catfish at Carlyle Lake appears to have become even larger,” said fisheries biologist Fred Cronin. “The fish are now very abundant and composed of many different size classes.”

To say this year will be better than 2018 is to make quite a statement. Last year, catfish anglers enjoyed phenomenal success. Still, biologists must look to the future before making their predictions.

“We observed young fish weighing just under a pound, all the way up to some real monsters,” Cronin said.

He says 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.

“Some of the larger fish weighed seven, ten and 12.5 pounds,” he added. “And, the condition appeared to be good for all.”

Carlyle Lake is also famous for producing monster flathead catfish. Unfortunately, Cronin and his team did not pick up many of the flatheads. He said the flatheads appeared to be more scattered than normal.

But, he was not all that concerned about the missing flathead catfish.

“Flatheads typically exhibit exceptionally good reproduction and growth in Carlyle Lake,” he said. “And, we generally pick up many young fish during our surveys.”

He says 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.

“Our catch rate was even better than last year,” said fisheries biologist Mike Hooe.

Based on this information alone anglers should do better than last year.

“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 Continued to be good. Reproduction for this species has been excellent for several years.

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.