

STOCKING & MANAGING IOWA PONDS

Years of experimentation have shown three fish species are best suited for Iowa ponds. Largemouth Bass and Bluegill are the primary species stocked in ponds, and must be stocked in combination to provide a good fishery. Bluegill are an excellent panfish and serve as prey for Largemouth Bass. Channel Catfish are also recommended for pond stocking due to their popularity with Iowa anglers and opportunity they provide for excellent fishing. All three species are available from many private hatcheries in Iowa.

CORRECT STOCKING IS A MUST FOR GOOD FISHING

Some of Iowa's best fishing for Largemouth Bass, Bluegill, and Channel Catfish is provided by properly stocked ponds. Private hatcheries in Iowa have provided great success with the following rate in new or renovated ponds:

- 100/acre 3- to 6-inch Largemouth Bass
- 300/acre 3- to 5-inch Bluegill
- 100/acre 4- to 6-inch Channel Catfish

Hybrid sunfish should not be used as a substitute for a forage species such as bluegill, especially in new ponds. Bluegill reproduction provides the necessary forage (small bluegill) for predator species such as bass. Reproduction by hybrid sunfish is very limited and insufficient to maintain reasonable growth and condition for larger predators.

KEY TO POND MANAGEMENT: HARVEST BLUEGILLS, RELEASE MOST LARGEMOUTH BASS

Iowa ponds contain about 250 pounds of Bluegill per surface acre of water; therefore, this species will provide most of the fishing in a pond. Bluegill harvest can begin the second year after stocking. No limits are necessary for Bluegill in private ponds because they are plentiful.

Largemouth Bass populations in a balanced Iowa pond will reach 50-75 pounds/acre. Largemouth Bass should not be harvested until the third year after stocking. No more than 15 Largemouth Bass/acre over 14 inches in length should be removed annually. Greater harvest rates will reduce the quality of both Largemouth Bass and Bluegill fishing. Removal of too many Largemouth Bass may result in small Bluegills due to their prolific reproduction.

Channel catfish harvest can typically begin within 3 years after initial stocking. Harvest should not exceed 15 fish/acre and can be restocked once half the original population has been harvested. Large fingerling (at least 8 inch) should be stocked when introducing Channel Catfish into established ponds to escape predation by Largemouth Bass.



FISH SPECIES OTHER THAN LARGEMOUTH BASS, BLUEGILL AND CHANNEL CATFISH COMBO

Although the Largemouth Bass, Bluegill and Channel Catfish combination typically does well on its own, Fathead Minnows are sometimes stocked to provide initial prey for Largemouth Bass but they are not sustainable.

Walleye and Northern Pike can be stocked into ponds without harm, but they rarely reproduce in ponds and must be stocked periodically to maintain their populations. Walleye seldom grow large in ponds, but Northern Pike often do.

Black Crappie may be suitable in ponds larger than 5 acres, but should not be stocked until Largemouth Bass and Bluegill populations are well established.

White Crappie and Yellow Bass are not well suited for ponds because they usually produce little fishing, seldom grow to acceptable size in ponds due to excessive reproduction and compete directly with fish. Hybrid Striped Bass should also be avoided due to their direct competition with other species.

VEGETATION MANGEMENT AND GRASS CARP

The Iowa DNR does not stock Grass Carp into public waters and does not recommend them for stocking private ponds. Stocking Grass Carp often results in increased algal growth and near elimination of all aquatic vegetation. Once stocked, Grass Carp are difficult to remove and can live beyond 20 years.

PRIVATE AQUACULTURE UNITS LICENSED BY THE IOWA DNR TO SELL FISH IN IOWA

There are several aquaculture units licensed by the Iowa DNR that sell Bluegill, Largemouth Bass and Channel Catfish. You can find a current list of these licensed units at https://www.iowadnr.gov/Portals/idnr/uploads/fish/private_units_licensed.pdf

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U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St NW
Washington DC 20240

Although the DNR does not encourage stocking grass carp, they can legally be stocked into private ponds in Iowa. If Grass Carp are stocked into a private pond, the DNR recommends a conservative stocking of no more than 1-2 ten-inch fish per acre. Pond owners who opt to go this route should be patient as vegetation control may not be noted for 2-3 growing seasons.

Restocking should not occur until rooted aquatics become a problem. Often, additional fish are stocked because vegetation control is not apparent immediately. When this happens, the pond ends up with too many Grass Carp resulting in too little vegetation, poor water quality, and ultimately sport fishing suffers.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON POND MANAGEMENT, GO TO: WWW.IOWADNR.GOV/PONDS

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