

Restocking Ponds After the Winter Fish Kills of 2013-2014

The winter of 2013-2014 was a record breaker in many respects. One record broken may be the number of ponds and small lakes that experienced fish kills due to the snow covering the ice for an extended length of time. When sunlight cannot penetrate the ice, oxygen cannot be produced by algae and plants that survive through the winter. Depending on the maximum depth of the pond, oxygen may soon be depleted and a fish kill will occur. Deeper ponds initially have a greater volume of oxygen and are more likely to sustain fish. But even some of these ponds are experiencing winter kills. Ponds that have experienced winter fish kills in the past are likely to have done so again this winter.

It is often difficult to determine the full extent of a winter fish kill and pond owners may not see all of the fish that have died. Some may have decayed to the point that they will not float. Small fish may not float either, especially bass. In some cases the last spawn of bluegill ($\frac{3}{4}$ -1" long) from summer 2013 can survive in these low oxygen environments. It is often imperative to assume that all of your bass have died and get them restocked as soon as possible in spring 2014. Even if your bass did not die, it is easier to correct an "overpopulation" of bass than an "overpopulation" of bluegill.

The best stocking advice you can get is directly from your Illinois Department of Natural Resource county biologist for your specific pond, especially if species are present other than what is listed below. For ponds in Grundy, Kendall, Kankakee and Will Counties contact Rob Miller at 630/553-6680. If you cannot get in touch with your biologist prior to this spring's fish sales, a general suggestion is to restock the following: (all the smallest size fish) 50 largemouth bass per acre, 300 redear sunfish per acre, 40-100 channel catfish per acre (optional), and about 5 lbs. of fathead minnows per acre. Larger bluegill (3-5") can be stocked in fall if the pond owner finds out that they did not survive. It is important to follow up in spring 2015 with another 50 bass per acre, but the larger size (5-7") should be stocked then. If bass fry are not observed in summer of 2015, it may be wise to stock another 50 per acre in spring 2016, again, the larger size.

Redear may not do well in northern Illinois, where pumpkinseed sunfish are the ecological equivalent. Grass carp should only be restocked if vegetation was a problem previously. Crappie or hybrid sunfish should not be restocked without consulting your district biologist for suitability or timing of the restocking. Other species should only be stocked under the direction of your county fisheries biologists.