



**Illinois**  
Department of  
**Natural Resources**  
Division of Fisheries

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# A Beginner's Fishing Guide





## Good Fishermen:

1. Good fishermen help protect the outdoors. They don't litter — that includes not throwing away gum wrappers or orange peels and picking up all leftover bait, bait containers, fish remains and other trash.
2. Good fishermen respect other people's privacy and territory. They fish quietly so they don't frighten fish or disturb people. And they don't crowd someone out of a fishing spot.
3. Good fishermen always practice safe fishing. They are careful when casting and pick up all fish hooks. If they get a fish hook caught in their skin, they get help taking it out.
4. Good fishermen buy and carry a fishing license if they are 16 years old or older.
5. Good fishermen know the size and number of fish it's legal to keep. Limits provide more chances for more people to catch fish.
6. Good fishermen release fish right away if they don't plan to eat them.

# How Do I Get Ready To Go Fishing?

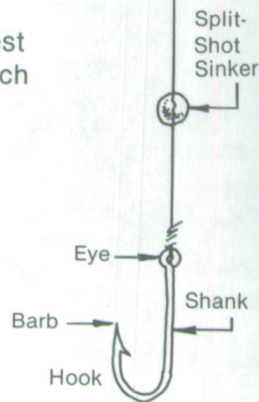
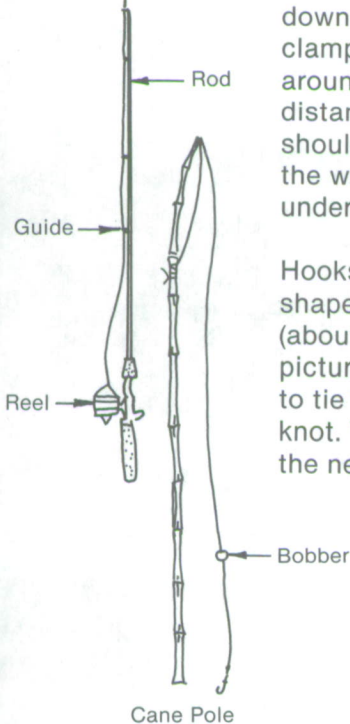


The line must be strong — 6 to 10 pound test weight. If you're using a cane pole, the line should be as long as the pole plus your arm's length. If you're using a rod and reel, carefully thread the line straight through each guide on your rod.

Using pliers, fasten a split-shot sinker to the line about 6 inches from the end. Sinkers are lead weights used to keep the bait on the bottom.

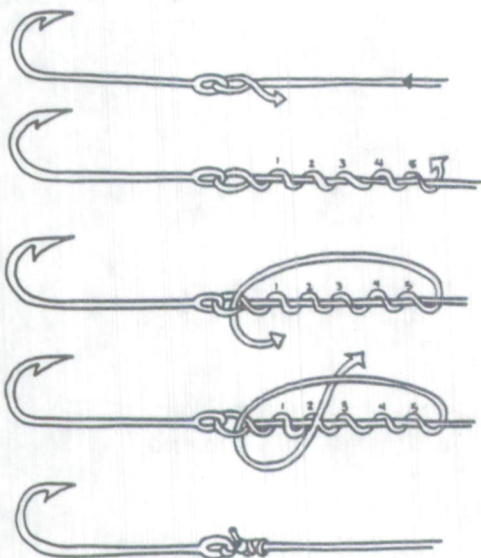
Attach the float, or bobber, by pushing down on the button of the float and clamping it to the line. Wrap the line around the hook on the float. The distance from the sinker to the float should not be more than the depth of the water. The float will move or go under the water when a fish is biting.

Hooks come in different sizes and shapes. A hook with a long shank (about the size of the one in this picture) would be good to use. It is best to tie the hook on to the line with clinch knot. You will learn to tie this knot on the next page.



# Can I Tie A Clinch Knot?

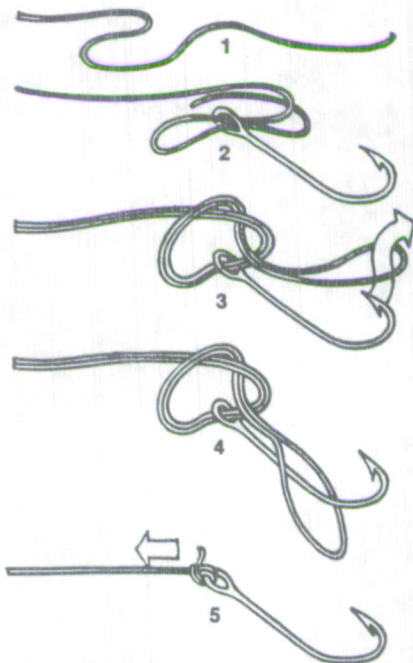
SURE! HERE'S HOW.



1. Put the end of the line through the eye of the hook and bring it back toward the line.
2. Make five "S" twists around the line.
3. Take the end back toward the hook and push it through the first loop nearest the eye.
4. Bring the end back through the big loop.
5. Holding the hook and the line, pull the knot tight until it looks like the knot shown.

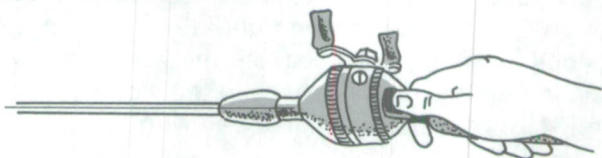
**"The PALOMAR KNOT"**  
is an easy one to tie.

1. Start with plenty of line.
2. Double the line and pass the end through the hook's eye.
3. Tie an overhand knot (like you were tying your shoe strings) but do not pull it tight yet.
4. Pass the hook through the loop.
5. Pull the loose end of line to tighten the knot. Trim the end. Leave at least 1/8 inch of your line at the knot.

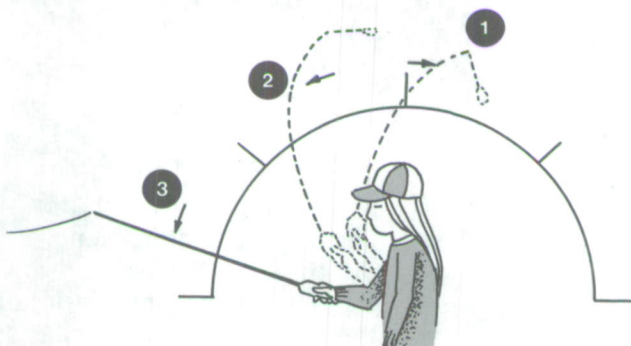


# Let's Go Fishing!

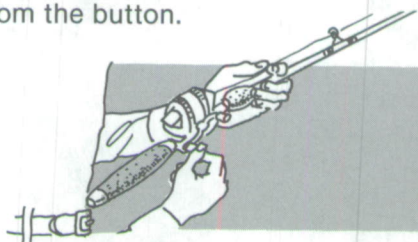
1. Your line is ready and your hook is baited. Before you cast, look behind you. Make sure no one is there. Check for trees and bushes. Make sure your hook isn't caught on anything and that the line isn't wrapped around the rod.



2. Press and hold the reel's release button.



3. Using your *wrist* action (not your whole arm), *gently* bring the rod straight up over your shoulder. Gently sweep the rod forward and release your thumb from the button.



4. Place your free hand in front of the reel with three fingers below the rod. Your thumb and forefinger will be on top.
5. Turn the reel crank forward until it clicks to keep more line from coming out. Reel your line in until your float begins to move. This takes up the slack in your line. Watch your float. When the fish bites, the float will move along the water or go under the water. Jerk the line hard enough to move the float and set the hook in the fish's mouth.

# What Do I Use For Bait?

## HOW DO I BAIT MY HOOK?

It is easy to stab yourself with a fish hook! Be very careful.

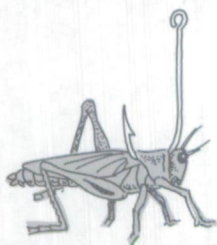
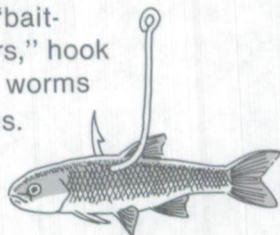
**Worms** are a favorite fish bait. The worm will wiggle. Hold it tightly at one end with your thumb and finger. Bring the hook down through one end of the worm until the worm covers the hook. Pull the hook down; don't try to push the worm on the hook. Worms are found in rich soil, under leaves in the woods, or in gravelly soil along streams. Keep them in a can with damp soil and in the shade.



When fishing for catfish or bass, hook worm like this. Leave the end free to wiggle.

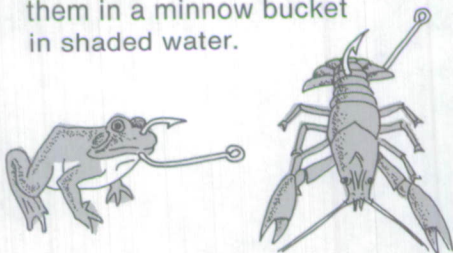


For sunfish and other "bait-stealers," hook bits of worms like this.



**Grasshoppers and crickets** are good summer bait. Hook them through the collar that is just behind their necks. The hook should be slipped under this collar so that the point is exposed. This keeps the insect alive and will attract fish. Grasshoppers are found in tall grass and are kept best in a small wire cage.

**Minnows** used for bait are usually 1 to 3 inches long. Put the hook through the very top of its back, just in front of the fin, so the minnow can swim. You will probably want to buy your minnows. Keep them in a minnow bucket in shaded water.



**Doughballs** are the best bait for carp. These are easily made from flour, bread, cornmeal, or wheaties dampened with water and honey. Form in a tight ball. Press on small hook.



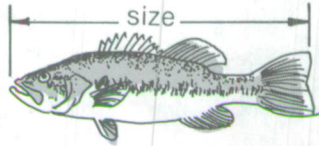
Live **crawdads** and small **frogs** are good bass bait. Crawdads are found under rocks in the water. Hold them along the back, so you won't get pinched, and push the hook through the tail. Hook small frogs, which are found along the shore, through both lips or a leg.

# I Have A Fish!

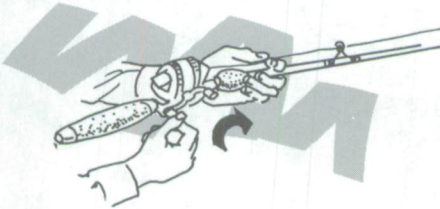
## What Do I Do Now?



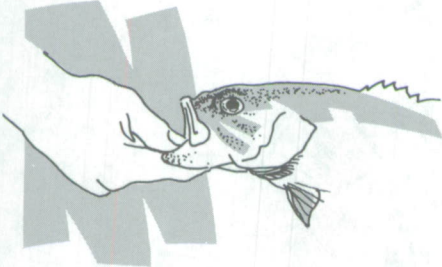
“Set the hook.” This refers to the method of forcing a hook into a fish’s mouth. In most cases, one sharp snap of the rod it all that is needed.



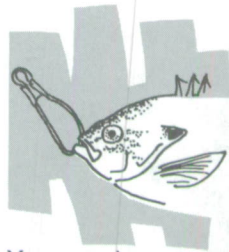
Is the fish large enough to keep? Will it be used for food? If not, *carefully* release the fish in the water. Handle the fish as little as possible. A fish that you catch and release carefully can be caught again someday when it is bigger.



Keep your line tight and your rod tip up. Slowly reel in the fish.



Hold the fish tightly. Put your thumb inside the lower lip and forefinger outside. To remove the hook, push it down and turn it so it comes out the way it went in.



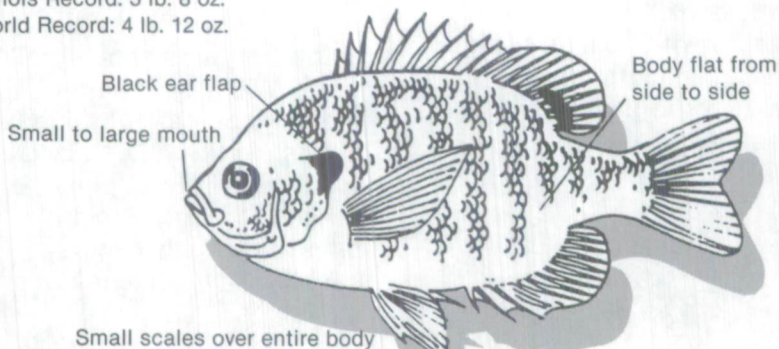
You can keep your fish alive by threading a stringer under the chin and through both lips. Let the fish swim in the water. Tie the other end of the stringer tightly to the bank. You can also use wire fish baskets to keep your fish alive.

# Sunfish

Most sunfish do not grow much larger than 10 inches long, but they fight hard and are fun to catch. There are several types of sunfish, each with slightly different body characteristics (see below). Sunfish are the most common fish caught and are the easiest to catch. Typical baits used are worms, crickets, grasshoppers and artificial flies. Very small hooks with live bait and bobbers are normally used by fishermen to catch sunfish. Sunfish are usually caught in and around brush or trees in the water and weed beds close to shore. Best times of the year to catch sunfish are the spring or fall, but sunfish are usually "biting" most of the year.

## Bluegill

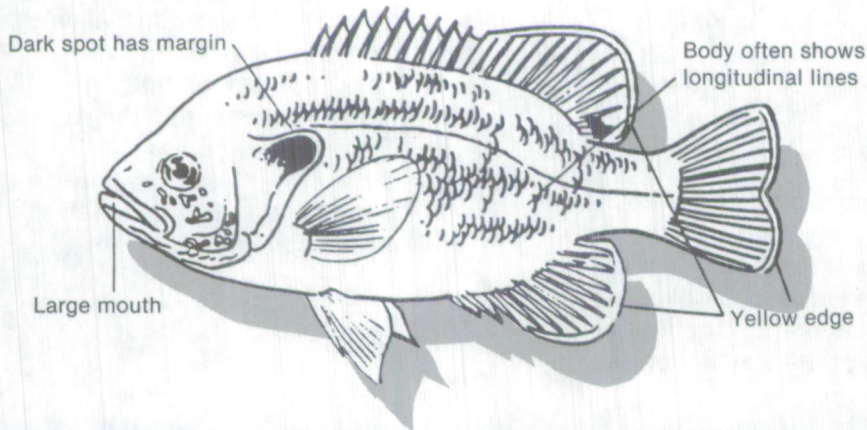
Illinois Record: 3 lb. 8 oz.  
World Record: 4 lb. 12 oz.



Good bait: Worms, Grasshoppers, Crickets

## Greensunfish

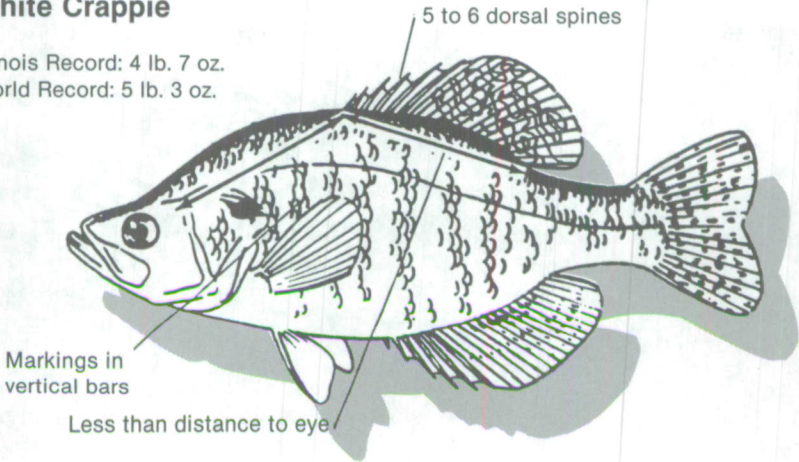
Illinois Record: 2 lb. 1 oz.  
World Record: 2 lb. 2 oz.





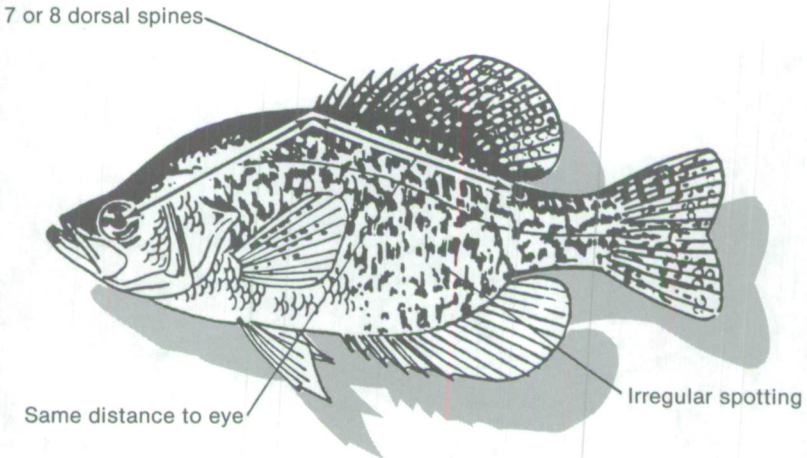
## White Crappie

Illinois Record: 4 lb. 7 oz.  
World Record: 5 lb. 3 oz.



## Black Crappie

Illinois Record: 4 lb. 8 oz.  
World Record: 6 lb. 0 oz.



Two species of crappie (black and white) occur in most large lakes, river lakes and many inland lakes within Illinois. Color patterns vary from dark splotches arranged in vertical bands on the white crappie to irregular dark splotches on the black crappie. Still fishing is the most common method used to fish for crappie. A small hook and lively minnow with a bobber and split shot weight or a feathered jig moved up and down are good ways to catch crappie.

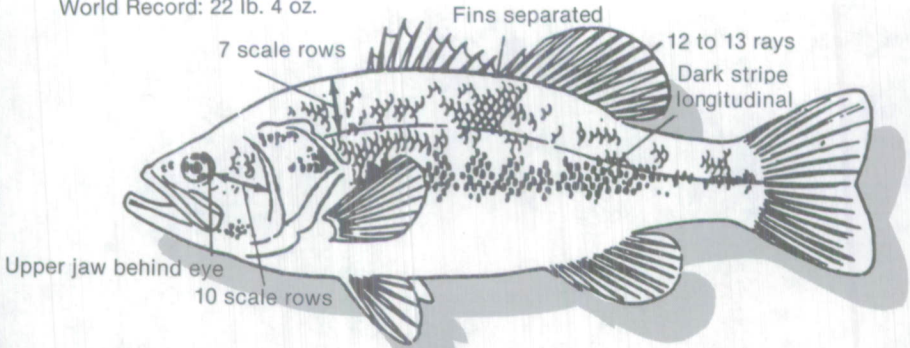
# Bass

## Largemouth Bass

Illinois Record: 13 lb. 1 oz.

World Record: 22 lb. 4 oz.

Good bait: Minnows, Grasshoppers, Crayfish



The largemouth bass, slough bass or black bass prefers warm and sluggish waters and thrives in weedy, mud-bottom lakes and ponds. Largemouth are easily recognized by their large mouth, upper jaw which extends behind the eye and dark stripes or blotches which extend the full length of the body. An adult largemouth is not finicky about its diet and will feed on many species of small fish, frogs, crayfish, worms, tadpoles and insects. Early morning or late evening is the best time to fish for largemouth bass.

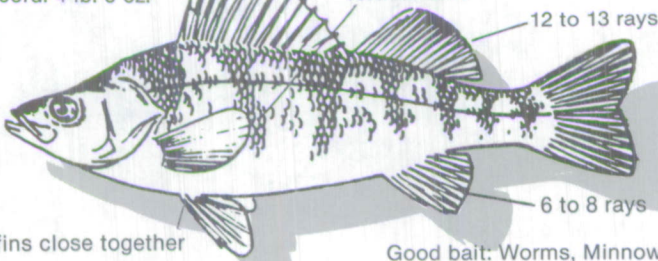
# Perch

## Yellow Perch

Illinois Record: 2 lb. 8 $\frac{3}{4}$  oz.

World Record: 4 lb. 3 oz.

6 to 9 dark vertical bars

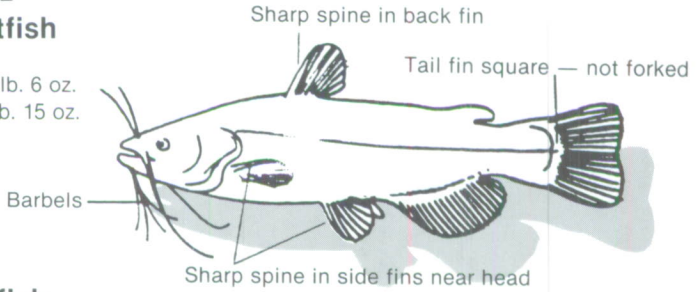


The yellow perch has numerous dark vertical bars on each side of the body. The lower fins are deep yellow or orange in color, and it has small teeth on its jaws. The yellow perch usually runs in schools in both deep and shallow waters. When an experienced fisherman catches one, he tries the same spot again for others. A majority of yellow perch are caught by fishermen using live bait, either worms or minnows, still fishing with bobbers. The body of the yellow perch feels much like sandpaper due to its scales which have tiny teeth on their surface.

# Catfish

## Bullhead Catfish

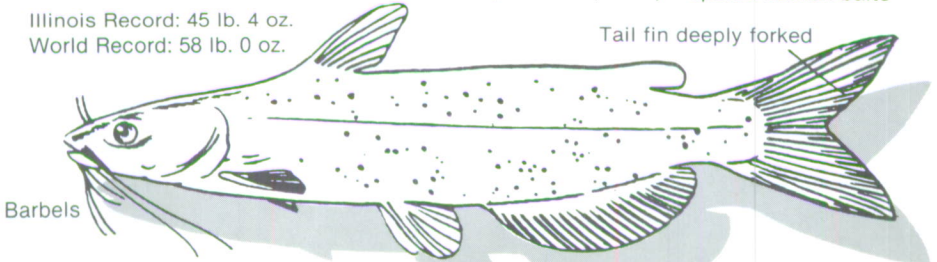
Illinois Record: 5 lb. 6 oz.  
World Record: 8 lb. 15 oz.  
(Black Bullhead)



## Channel Catfish

Illinois Record: 45 lb. 4 oz.  
World Record: 58 lb. 0 oz.

Good bait: Worms, Minnows, Liver, Prepared catfish baits



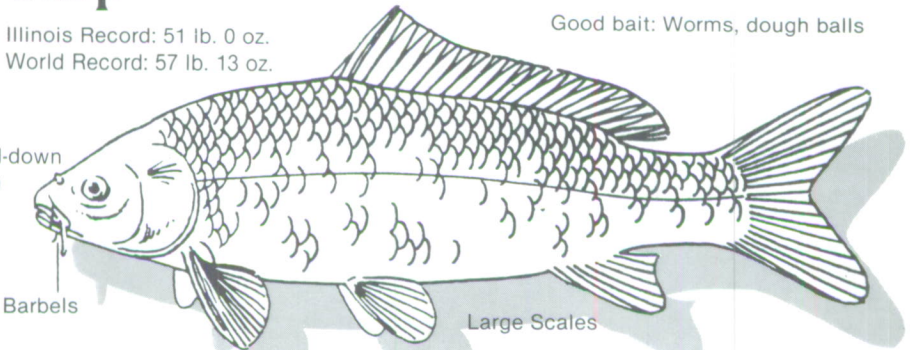
Catfish have “whiskers,” or barbels. They use these and their good sense of smell to find food. They do not have scales. You must handle catfish very carefully because of the sharp spines in their fins. You can catch them close to shore. Keep your bait close to the bottom where catfish usually feed.

# Carp

Illinois Record: 51 lb. 0 oz.  
World Record: 57 lb. 13 oz.

Good bait: Worms, dough balls

Small  
turned-down  
mouth



Carp grow to a large size and are strong fighters to catch. They usually feed on the bottom of rivers and lakes. Their small mouths require a small hook for your bait. They like to sniff the bait and sample it before they suck it into their mouths. Give them lots of time to take the bait. Carp are an important commercial fish in Illinois.

# Urban Fishing Information



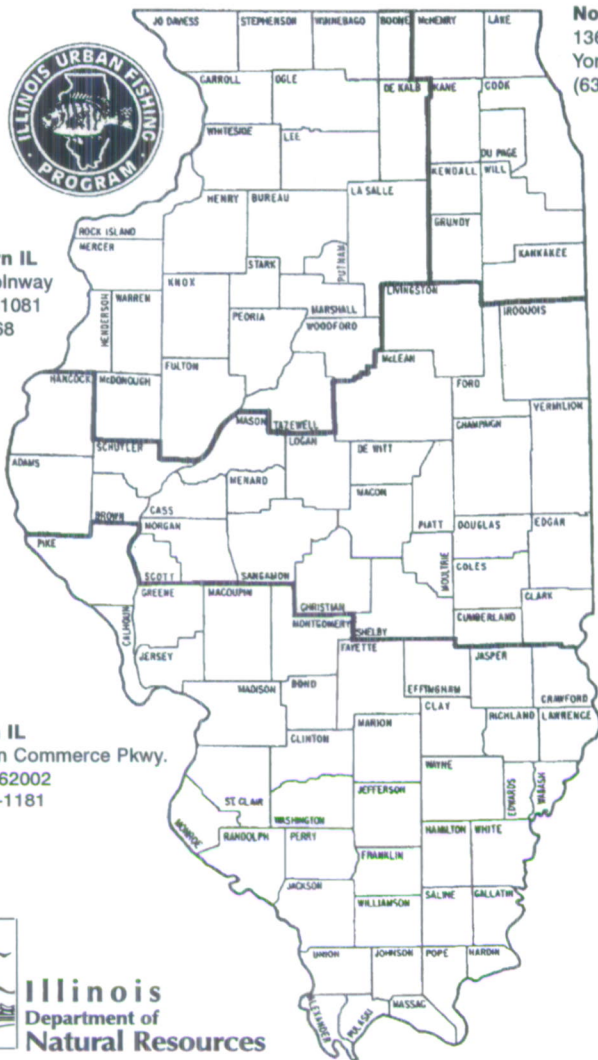
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