

**From Evercarp to Evergreen -
A healthy and record winning fisheries is alive and well in Bloomington thanks
to strong partnerships.**

Story By Mike Garthaus

A quiet lake in central Illinois is producing some monster fish—one state record to date and the potential for many more.

In 2001, a 9.68-pound saugeye (a hybrid cross between a female walleye and a male sauger) was caught on Bloomington’s Evergreen Lake and surveys conducted by Department of Natural Resources (DNR) biologists showed saugeye weighing in at more than 12 pounds—and muskie also over the current state record.



State record saugeye caught at Evergreen Lake by Dan Murphy on December 7th, 2001

What makes these statements so impressive is the change in the fisheries at Evergreen Lake. When Evergreen Lake was constructed in 1970 to serve as a second water source for the city, the fisheries was dominated by common carp, bullhead and minnows, earning it the local nickname of “Evercarp Lake.”

The local fisheries biologist reported in 1974: “Carp are present in uncountable thousands per acre and are already severely stunted and over-crowded.

The only good, fishable population in the lake is the largemouth bass, and their days are numbered.”

How does a lake go from earning an unflattering nickname to having a state-record saugeye and potential record muskie? The answer is cooperative efforts from fishing clubs, the McLean County Department of Parks and Recreation, the City of Bloomington, and IDNR.

The Bloomington-Normal Bass Club was the first club to step up and help improve the lake’s fisheries. High densities of carp interfered with largemouth bass spawns to the point they could not produce enough young to maintain a bass fishery.



In 1988 and 1989, Mother Nature produced a severe drought that dropped water levels in Evergreen Lake to record-low levels, killing many gizzard shad and common carp, and some catfish. Low water also prohibited bass from spawning and two year classes went missing from the population.

During the low-water period, terrestrial vegetation grew on the exposed lake bottom, providing an enormous amount of quality habitat once rains eventually filled the lake. That vegetation helped produce more sport fish and hold newly stocked fish.

In the spring of 1990, the city, county and bass club increased their

bass-stocking efforts, releasing more than 4,800, 2- to 8-inch bass. That same year, DNR stocked 7,000, 2-inch bass. The high number of fish stocked, combined with quality cover, helped jump start a quality bass fishery.

The enormous prey base of carp, gizzard shad and suckers in Evergreen Lake



provided ample support for a muskie fishery, and in 1990, 161, 8-inch fish were released. An annual stocking program was initiated in 1996 through

the state hatchery system. Supplemental stockings occurred with the support of the Illini Muskie Alliance (1998 purchase of 400, 17-inch muskie) and the South Side Muskie Hawks (1999 purchase of 143, 20-inch muskie). These muskie were given a pelvic fin clip.

To produce a trophy fishery, muskie must remain in the population for many years—an estimated 17 years to reach the size of the current state record. To achieve this standard, high length



43 pound muskie collected during spring netting survey

limits prohibit removal of young muskie, and creative techniques are applied to offset a natural tendency of muskie—to escape the lake over the spillway.

In the fall of 2004, a barrier was placed at the effluent of the catch basin designed to keep muskie in the catch basin for rescue and return to the lake.



Personnel from the county parks and recreation department spend many hours—often in the heat of the summer—preparing the area below the spillway for the recovery. DNR uses electrofishing to collect trapped fish, then numerous volunteers help transport the fish to a hatchery truck. A successful muskie rescue takes numerous people, and without the

cooperative effort, hundreds of muskie, if not thousands, would have died over the years.

Saugeye also are rescued from the catch basin. The first state-record saugeye from Evergreen Lake was actually taken from the basin, and the current record was caught by a bank



12.7 pound saugeye collected during spring netting survey

angler near the boat slips at Comlara Park.

Saugeye were stocked in Evergreen Lake as part of a seven-state cooperative study under the Walleye Technical Committee of the American Fisheries Society. The study focused on determining the effect saugeye had on panfish populations. The initial stocking was in 1992 and contained 34,300, 1.5-inch saugeye. Annual stockings have taken place since 1992.

Numerous state-record saugeye remain in Evergreen Lake. On occasion during the spring, DNR biologists surveying the lake find—and release back into the lake for the next lucky angler—a new potential state record.

DNR relies on the McLean County Department of Parks and Recreation and volunteers to help conduct fish surveys at Evergreen Lake. The McLean County Sportsmen have funded summer interns for both the county and DNR, increasing the amount of work accomplished by both groups and allowing many projects to be completed.



McClean County Sportsmen Summer Intern assisting with electrofishing surveys

The latest, and potentially biggest, cooperative project is to increase the quality aquatic habitat in Evergreen Lake. The Central Illinois Muskie Hunters, Muskies, Inc., Gander Mountain, City of Bloomington, Wired2Fish, and DNR

**EVERGREEN LAKE
HABITAT IMPROVEMENT
PROJECT**

This project will establish aquatic and shoreline vegetation for the improvement of fish habitat and lake water quality.

Funding and resources have been provided By the Central Illinois Muskie Hunters, Muskies Inc., Gander Mountain, City of Bloomington, McLean County Dept. of Parks & Recreation & the Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources.



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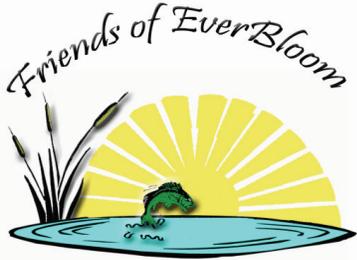
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raised funds to initiate a project in 2004 to provide quality sport fish habitat and reduce bank erosion, with the end result of an improved sport fisheries. Information learned from this project will be utilized to manage other lakes.

Without the efforts of countless volunteers, fishing clubs and agencies, Evergreen Lake would

still be known as Evercarp Lake. More than 30 years ago, the Bloomington-Normal Bass Club became involved in an effort to help produce a fishery everyone can enjoy and several groups have joined the effort over the years. It takes active management to sustain quality fishing and it takes cooperation with angling groups and volunteers to put management into action.

The Friends of EverBloom was established to continue the important role of involving volunteers with the management of the natural resources at Evergreen Lake.



Each time you fish a quality fishery on a public lake, remember all the effort and cooperation needed to reach that goal. A quality fishing experience is waiting for you on Evergreen Lake—not Evercarp Lake.