

Fisheries Volunteer Group Information

Wherever fish populations are healthy and plentiful, volunteers—including fishermen—are holding the net.

Story By Trent Thomas and Mike Garthaus

The **Friends of Kickapoo Creek**, located in McLean County and subgroup of the Upper Salt Creek of the Sangamon River Basin C2000 Partnership, was formed to promote stewardship of the Kickapoo Creek watershed through advocacy, education and monitoring. Members have assisted DNR Fisheries personnel with several sampling events and have been instrumental in the proposal of a 2-mile, 80-acre stream restoration project to be implemented by developers east of Bloomington. Other activities include the planting of hundreds of trees along Little Kickapoo Creek at the newly built Bloomington-Normal Sewage Treatment Plant and the marking of storm sewer inlets to discourage injurious dumping practices.

The Illinois Smallmouth Alliance, a statewide organization dedicated to helping improve Illinois smallmouth bass fishing through conservation and education, has been an instrumental partner in the Kaskaskia River small-

mouth bass supplemental stocking project initiated in 2002. Each year, adult smallmouth bass are collected from the Kaskaskia River and transferred to a pond to spawn. In the fall, the pond is harvested and the adults and resulting fingerlings are stocked back into the river. Prior to being stocked, all the fingerlings are fin-clipped to identify them as stocked fish. ISA members have participated in all aspects of this project: assisting with the collection of the adults, pond harvests and fin-clipping. Identification of stocked fish is a critical part of this project, allowing the biologist to monitor stocking success, survival, growth rates and the contribution of natural reproduction to the population numbers. Fin-clipping every fish is a tedious and time-consuming activity and would not be possible without the volunteer help of ISA members.

In 2003, the **McLean County Sportsmen's Association** started a scholarship program for biology students at Illinois State University. A pro-

gram initiated to help students gain work experience in the field of fisheries, the scholarship recipient is required to volunteer with the Division of Fisheries for one summer. From 2003 to 2006, volunteers helped the district biologist conduct 31 public lake, 47 private pond and seven basin surveys, and numerous other fisheries projects. Without the assistance of volunteers, many of these surveys would not have been completed. Volunteering for the Division of Fisheries has given the scholarship recipients a better opportunity for a career in natural resources. The majority of the volunteers are pursuing a career in fisheries.



(Photo by Kathy Andrews.)



(Photo by Kerry Novak.)



(Photos by Brad Teddrick.)



From John Dyer teaching fishing at the Illinois State Fair (left) to Shabonna Lake anglers repairing a drawdown structure and groups placing habitat structure at lakes such as Coffeen, anglers often volunteer their time to improve their sport.