Here's how DNR is enhancing outdoor programs for individuals with disabilities.

Getting Around

Story by Kathy Andrews
Photos by Adele Hodde

Mention taking a hike through a state park and most people visualize a wood-chipped trail meandering up and down hills, with wood-planked bridges spanning woodland streams.

But paved trails in state parks are becoming a common occurrence. As are boardwalks through wetlands. And ramped boat docks. And accessible fishing piers. And concrete camping pads.

Not only have structures been redesigned, but recreational programs have been revamped to allow disabled individuals a greater chance to experience Illinois' great outdoors.

Breaking down barriers—providing greater access to recreational activities and expanding lifestyle choices—has become the norm since the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990.

(Photo by Joe McFarland.)

"Congress enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 to eliminate discrimination against individuals with disabilities in the areas of employment, public accommodations, education, transportation, communication, recreation, institutionalization, health services, voting and access to public service," explained Gloria Williams, director of the Department of Natural Resources Office of Compliance, Equal Employment Opportunity and Ethics. "The ADA Amendments Act of 2009 broadens the coverage of "disability"

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 ensures that individuals with disabilities are not denied or excluded from activities, including outdoor recreation.

(Photo by Kathy Andrews.)

With accessibility barriers breaking down, Americans are provided greater access to recreational activities and expanded lifestyle choices.

and thereby brings more individuals under the protection of the law. Our agency is striving to ensure that individuals with disabilities are not denied or excluded from participation in any service, program or activity we offer."

"Illinois has set the national benchmark on programs for people with disabilities," said Ryan Storm, a field representative with Pheasants Forever. "Their disabled hunt program is a model for other agencies as far as the quality and quantity of programs offered."

While special, organized activities continue, DNR's goal is to make reasonable accommodations to enhance outdoor opportunities for persons with disabilities.

"Reasonable accommodations means making modifications or adjustments, including such things as making existing facilities used by employees and the public readily accessible to and useable by individuals with disabilities," Gloria Williams explained. "In some instances, this may require that a service or program be moved to an alternate, accessible facility."

Jay Williams, DNR disabled outdoor opportunities coordinator, works daily to help disabled individuals learn what Illinois has to offer.

"Illinois is an incredibly resource-rich state with so many great places to visit and outdoor activities to take part in," he said. "Helping disabled individuals discover DNR's programs and services lets some people participate in activities they once enjoyed, and others have the chance to delve into a totally new outdoor experience."

Fishing and Boating

Disabled fishing opportunities in Illinois range from accessible piers, places for bank fishing and fish-cleaning stations to organized fishing tournaments.

Tom Mansfield has served as tournament director for the annual Paralyzed Veterans of America bass tournament at Rend Lake—an event that draws nearly 75 boats and participants from 25 states—for many years.

"We team an able-bodied person up with each disabled angler," Mansfield said. "The first day they fish as a team, with cash prizes awarded. The second day only the disabled person fishes and the prize is a new Ranger boat.

"I've heard boat captains remark how their partner fished harder than they ever have," Mansfield continued. "You don't travel 1,500 miles for a boat ride, and the motivation of a new boat means you don't mess around."

The tournament also has a bank-fishing division.

Anglers interested in fishing a state lake lacking an established, accessible pier are advised to contact the site office at least 10 days prior to the desired fishing excursion and ask for reasonable accommodations.

Newly designed accessible boat docks, such as the one at North Point Marina, north of Chicago and the largest marina on the Great Lakes, demonstrates how access can be improved for anglers and the boating community.

Accessible piers enhance boating and fishing opportunities.

Riding in a specialized cart allows disabled hunters to participate in controlled pheasant hunts with their hunting party.

Hunting

Tremendous opportunities exists for disabled shooters, including organized shooting classics, game-specific state park hunts and controlled pheasant hunts using a special cart. Many sites have constructed accessible hunting blinds (dove, duck, goose, deer) or allow disabled hunters use of one of the many Huntmasters elevated blinds donated by organizations such as Safari Club International or the National Wild Turkey Federation. Other accommodations include a Standing Vehicle Permit, Disabled Hunter Site Access Permit and Crossbow Permit (see Reasonable Accommodations).

Camping

The Hoene family of Effingham visits a lot of state parks, relying on word-of-mouth recommendations for some of the best campgrounds in Illinois.

"We've participated in a number of organized disabled hunting programs and fishing tournaments and usually camp at the host park," explained Tari Hoene. "Quite a network of people involved in these activities has developed, and the friendships have become more important than the activity that initially brought us together."

Accessible campsites have paved pads, and Illinois has several accessible equestrian campgrounds.

As a camping alternative, visitors may want to book one of the 15 two-room rent-a-cabins at 10 Illinois state parks, most of which are accessible and can be approached via vehicle. These primitive cabins are equipped with one full-sized bed with mattress, two sets of bunk beds with mattresses, an electric heater, a drop-leaf table with chairs and ceiling fans. Showers, electricity, charcoal grills and picnic tables are available at the campgrounds. For a more upscale overnight at a state park, consider booking a room at one of the eight lodges (Cave-In-Rock SP, Eldon Hazlet SRA, Giant City SP, Illinois Beach SP, Pere Mar-

For nearly 20 years, construction projects at Illinois state parks have included accessible picnic shelters, picnic tables and campsites.

Accessible rent-a-cabins

1 cabin each

Beaver Dam SP, Plainview, (217) 854-8020
Red Hills SP, Sumner, (618) 936-2469
Rock Cut SP, Loves Park, (815) 885-3311
Shabbona Lake SP, Shabbona, (815) 824-2106
Siloam Springs SP, Clayton, (217) 894-6205

2 cabins each

Chain O'Lakes SP, Spring Grove, (847) 587-5512
Eldon Hazlet SP, Carlyle, (618) 594-3015
Kankakee River SP, Bourbonais, (815) 933-1383
Hamilton County SFWA, McLeansboro, (618) 773-4340
Sangchris Lake SP, Rochester, (217) 498-9208

For further information visit dnr.state.il.us/lands/Landmgt/Programs/Camping/index.htm.

quette SP, Rend Lake Resort at Wayne Fitzgerrell SRA, Starved Rock SP, White Pines Forest SP) then enjoying the day exploring the scenic wonders of Illinois.

Park Day-use Facilities

Day visitors to Illinois state parks will find accessible picnic shelters and picnic tables designed with an overhanging table to allow wheelchair access. New and refurbished playgrounds provide hours of accessible playtime for young visitors. Paved trails and boardwalks provide scenic access to woodlands, prairies and wetlands at many facilities.

Reasonable Accommodation

Fairview Heights resident Bob Prescott participates in a number of organized hunts, but he also enjoys spending time in the woods by himself.

"DNR staff have been very helpful in providing reasonable accommodation for my turkey hunts at Turkey Bluffs State Fish and Wildlife Area," Prescott explained. "They have arranged to drive me into the woods—or permitted me to have a partner assist me in and out of the woods. When I'm squirrel hunting, I've been given a tag for my vehicle that acknowledges the right to park in that location."

Disabled hunters may contact a state site 10 days prior to a hunt date and ask for reasonable accommodations, which may include driving the hunter into the woods or special parking privileges.

After a physician has completed the required application form, an individual attesting to meeting specific criteria (specific permanent or temporary ambulatory restrictions, lung or cardiovascular disease) may qualify for a Standing Vehicle Permit. To hunt from a standing vehicle (includes ATVs) on a state area, a Disabled Hunter Site Access Permit must be obtained from the site superintendent.

Persons with a permanent physical impairment due to injury or disease, congenital or acquired, which renders them so disabled they are unable to use a conventional bow and arrow device may apply to hunt with a crossbow. The crossbow permit application must be submitted by their physician.

(Photo by Kathy Andrews.)

All application forms are available at dnr.state.il.us/do/index.htm.

For nearly 20 years, Illinois' state parks and recreational programs have undergone a transformation, creating additional opportunities for people with disabilities to enjoy the wilds of Illinois.

Breaking down barriers continues as new construction projects are approved and existing structures are revamped. In the meantime, the opportunity to request reasonable accommodation ensures that individuals with disabilities are not excluded from any service, program or activity offered by the Department of Natural Resources.

For detailed information on accessible facilities—campgrounds, trails, picnicking, fishing, restaurants, restrooms, boat ramps and more—at Illinois state parks, pick up a copy of the annual *Illinois State Parks* magazine. Copies are available at most DNR facilities, or by contacting the DNR Clearinghouse at www.dnr.state.il.us/publications/index.htm.

For an updated calendar of events for special hunts or fishing events, visit dnr.state.il.us/doo/index.htm.

FAQs

How does a person with a disability go hunting or fishing in a state park or fish or wildlife area?

Fishing—In addition to numerous accessible piers and places for bank fishing, DNR conducts fishing events throughout the state. For reasonable accommodation to fish within a state park, contact the site superintendent 10 days prior to your fishing excursion.
Hunting—Disabled hunters are exempt from a hunting license but, like all hunters, must go through the permit application process and obtain either a statewide or site allocation permit. After receipt of a permit, it is their responsibility to contact the site 10 days prior to the hunt date for reasonable accommodations.
Exemptions—Disabled veterans (resident or non-resident; 10 percent service-related), or those persons with a Class 2 or a Class 2A card are exempt from a fishing license and inland trout and Lake Michigan salmon stamps.

Possession of a Class P2 or Class P2A card exempts residents from a hunting license. Resident or non-resident disabled veterans are exempt from a habitat stamp. Class P2 or Class P2A card holders are not exempt from a habitat stamp.
Questions—Questions may be directed to Jay Williams, disabled outdoor opportunities coordinator at jay.d.williams@illinois.gov or call (618) 439-9111, ext. 257.

What is required for a person with a disability to camp in an Illinois state park?

Illinois residents who have a Class 2 or Class 2A disability are eligible for the following camping fee discounts:

- Class A, AA, A-P, B/E, B/E-P, B/S or B/S-P campsites: Monday-Thursday half the regular camping fee plus the $10 utility fee; Friday-Sunday full camping fee plus the $10 utility fee
- Class C or D campsites: no camping fee charged any day of the week

Illinois residents who are a disabled veteran or former prisoner of war are eligible for the following camping fee discounts:

- Class A, AA, A-P, B/E or B/E-P campsites: no fee charged any day of the week, however the $10 utility fee will be charged
- Class B/S, B/S-P, C or D campsites: no fee charged any day of the week

Questions? Further information is available at dnr.state.il.us/lands/Landmgt/Programs/Camping/discounts.htm.

Note: Class A = showers, electricity, vehicular access; Class AA = showers, electric, sewer and water hookup, vehicular access; Class B/E = electricity, vehicular access; Class B/S = showers, vehicular access; Class C = vehicular access or walk-in with showers; Class D = walk-in tent or primitive site; P = premium site.