Flathead Catfish Nesting Structure and Fry Habitat Project
Along the Rock River
Completion Report
Natural Resources Injury Assessment Restoration Project (2nd of 3)
December 2015

Beginning on December 7, 2015, and finishing on December 11, 2015, 20 structures were installed at three locations on the Rock River (Photo collage, Figure 1). No mussels were detected throughout the project areas during the searches completed prior to placing the artificial habitat structures. Ten structures were installed at the Sauk Valley Community College site and five structures were installed at the Dixon and Rock Falls sites.

The Rock River flows in a southwesterly direction from southern Wisconsin through northwest Illinois until emptying into the Mississippi River in Milan, Illinois. The structures consisted of multiple habitat niches to accommodate both the mature catfish and their juveniles. Structures were developed in cooperation with, and ultimately approved by, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). One field modification was made at the request on IDNR Fisheries Biologist Karen Rivera, which was to place an 80lb concrete bag inside the culvert pipe.

Initially, the structures were fully assembled by a diver on the river bottom; however, due to flow conditions at the Dixon and Rock Falls sites, installation methods were modified to include pre-assembly on the boat deck and placement completed by the diver with assistance from the on-board davit (Photo collage). All structures were placed with the open-end facing riverward and capped-end placed toward the bank. GPS coordinates for each structure and buoy were recorded using an on-board Lowrance Structure Scan.

Based on mapping previously provided by the IDNR, and information presented at the kickoff meeting on December 7th, 2015, an onboard depth finder and GPS were used to accurately locate the areas where the spawning structures were to be placed. At each site, upstream and downstream extents were delineated and a regulatory buoy was placed and attached to a 400 pound concrete weight via chain (Photo 1). All chains were approximately 1.5 times the water depth to accommodate for changes in river depth.

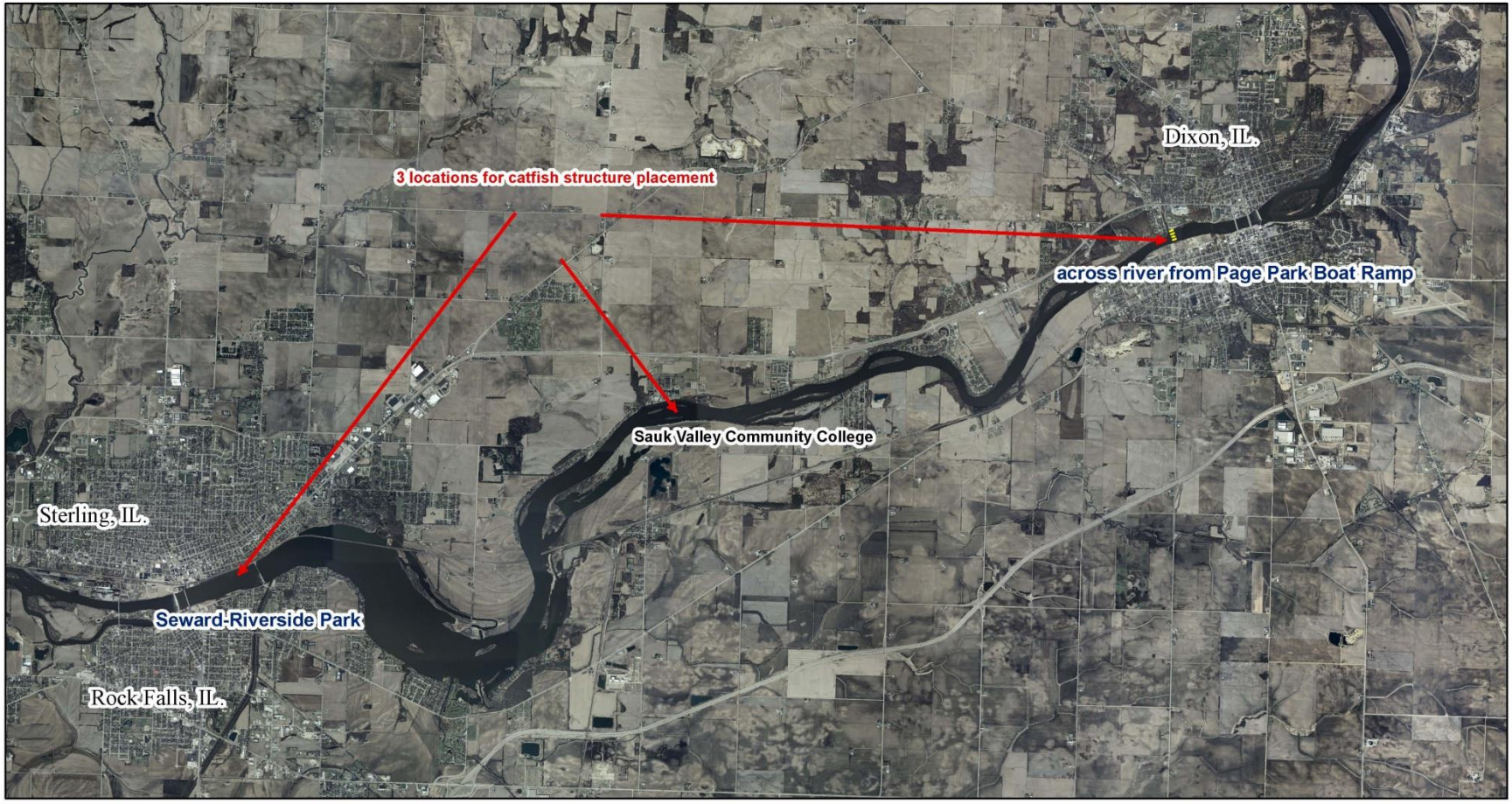

Figure 1. Three locations for catfish nesting structure installation along the Rock River

Photo collage

Photo 1.