

N Illinois Non-Residents

Gary Garth

You don't have to live there to take a big buck in Illinois, but plan to beat the rush.

Illinois has earned bragging rights as a top whitetail destination. The state grows big deer and plenty of them.

Need proof? During the 2003–2004 season, 21 Illinois counties surrendered deer that qualified for the Department of Natural Resources' Big Buck Program (minimum firearm score 140 typical and 160 non-typical; archery/crossbow minimum score 115 typical and 130 non-typical). This healthy big-deer list included five counties (La Salle, Sangamon, Fulton, Kankakee and Knox) that produced 10 or more trophies in 2002–2003. La Salle topped the list, giving up 18 Big Buck qualifiers.

The Illinois DNR estimates the state hosts about 230,000 deer hunters each fall. The annual kill is slightly more than 100,000 whitetails. That equates to fairly good odds, but getting in on this fun requires some planning; Illinois sells over-the-counter deer permits only to resident bowhunters. Everyone else (resident firearm and non-res-



This whitetail is an example of the fine deer hunting to be had throughout Illinois.

ident firearm hunters and archers) must apply via lottery draw for the county they wish to hunt in.

Resident bow permits may be used statewide. Resident and non-resident firearm permits (modern gun and muzzleloader) are valid only in the county for which they are issued.

There are three Illinois deer permit lottery application deadlines (April, August and September), followed by a remnant resident-only, antlerless-only November drawing for a late winter hunt.

Illinois residents, naturally, are given the advantage in this process; the early drawing (April 30 deadline) was limited to resident firearm hunters. If you missed the April drawing, weren't selected or don't have Illinois resident status, the next application chance is coming up Aug. 13. Non-resident hunters (firearm and muzzleloader) and residents — including those who weren't drawn in the first lottery — can apply. The deadline is the same for modern gun and muzzleloader hunters, but separate applications are required.

At press time the application sequence for non-resident bowhunters was undecided. For the 2003–2004 season, out-of-state archers could apply by phone and did, en masse: The DNR sold out in one day. Hunters were unhappy with the process, and game officials were swamped with calls.

A final round of random daily drawings will begin Sept. 15 and continue through Nov. 5, or until a county's permit supply is exhausted. This will be open to both resident and non-resident gun hunters. However, hunters who wait until September to apply will be pushing their luck, cautioned Illinois whitetail specialist Dr. Paul Shelton. The earlier an application arrives, the

sooner it will go into the pot for the late drawing.

"If we have any permits left over for a county we will draw for them daily, and the sooner someone gets their application in the better," said Shelton. "It's almost a first come, first served situation."

Applications for the late winter antlerless hunt should be available by mid-October, and the tentative application deadline is Nov. 12. This hunt is open only to Illinois residents.

Illinois deer permit applications are available from all license outlets or through the DNR Web site. Residents can apply online, but non-residents are still required to print and submit their application through postal mail to the address on the permit form.

The Illinois Department of Conservation Deer Permit Office stands ready to answer any questions: call (217) 782-7305 or visit www.dnr.state.il.us.

Michigan Muskies

Dan Donarski

Here's when and how to take the supreme freshwater predator.

From the expansive flats of Lake St. Clair in the southeastern section of Michigan to the interconnected lakes of the Cisco Chain in the Upper Peninsula's western end, muskies rule the water. In the words of Don Miller,

■ Hunting

During the 2003–2004 season, 21 Illinois counties surrendered deer that qualified for the Department of Natural Resources' Big Buck Program.

■ Fishing

Whether you like to live-bait these water wolves, toss huge baits of plastic, metal or wood, or troll ridiculously fast, if you're after the supreme predator, then Michigan waters are where you want to fish.

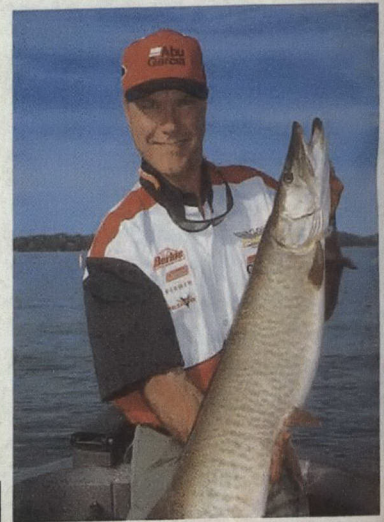
of Motor City Muskies, "There's the muskie, then there's everything else." Whether you like to live-bait these water wolves, toss huge baits of plastic, metal or wood, or troll ridiculously fast, if you're after the supreme predator, then Michigan waters are where you want to fish.

During the summer the best times to fish for muskie are early and late in the day or after dark. If a good storm is brewing, particu-

larly one bringing in cooler weather, so much the better.

During the fall there is a switch of sorts. Early and late in the day are still good bets; but, when the frost is on the pumpkin, don't discount the midday periods.

Remember that these fish are in a heavy feeding cycle and aren't at all afraid of the light. If there is any masochist in you, the fall night bite can be downright spectacular.



Inland lakes such as those in the Cisco Chain are famous for their huge fish.

Trolling is Miller's preferred method on St. Clair. Swim Whizz and Believer baits (huge wooden and plastic stickbaits) are the dominant lures used by anglers here. Perch patterns are the favored finish. Troll at 5 to 6 mph (yes, that fast), and work the 4- to 12-foot depths. Be sure one lure is placed back only 20 feet or so and is running right in the prop wash.

On the inland lakes, casting with a variety of glide baits, spinner and hard baits gets the nod. Magnum Shad Raps, Muskie Killers and the like will all work. In off-colored water, the color mantra, though debatable, seems to be "If it's not hot, it's not." In other words, work finishes like fire tiger and chartreuse. In clear water, natural finishes like sucker, whitefish and perch stand out.

Muskie pro Lance Christensen has two rules when casting. "First, don't watch the bait — always watch behind the bait. That's where you'll see the fish or the swirl. Second, always finish retrieves smoothly, no stopping, with a large figure 8 or a very exaggerated L-shape.

Nearly 75 percent of my fish strike while I'm ending the retrieve with these."

