

The Mackinaw River

Location:

The Mackinaw River originates in Ford County near Sibley, and flows in a westerly direction for 130 miles before joining the Illinois River downstream of Pekin. The associated watershed is an area of 1,138 square miles, and covers parts of 6 central Illinois counties. The majority of the river is in McLean, Woodford, and Tazewell counties, with the river flowing through only a few cities or towns, such as Colfax, Lexington, Goodfield, and Mackinaw.

Characteristics:

The Mackinaw River begins as a drainage ditch near Sibley, and begins to meander near Colfax, where a thin band of trees begin. Trees line most of the banks of the river all of the way to the Illinois River, with larger forests found in the middle reaches with frequent gaps due to agricultural fields. The Mackinaw varies in depth from 1-6 feet and has an average width of 70 feet. The water level is extremely variable, with frequent flooding in the spring, and is very nearly dry during times of prolonged drought. Major tributaries include Henline Creek, Turkey Creek, Money Creek, Sixmile Creek, Wolf Creek, Denman Creek, Panther Creek, Walnut Creek, Rock Creek, Mud Creek, Prairie Creek, Little Mackinaw Creek, Dillon Creed, and Hickory Grove Ditch. The Biological Stream Characterization rated all segments of Henline, Panther, and Walnut Creeks and the Mackinaw River from Denman Creek to Mud Creek, and upstream from Money Creek as "A" streams, Unique Aquatic Resource (the highest ranking possible). Two segments of the Mackinaw are recognized as Biologically Significant Streams due to the fish and mussel diversity.

Natural Resources:

The river is home to 66 species of fish, 31 kinds of mussels, and 9 species of crayfish. The Mackinaw is the only central Illinois site for a unique plant, the heart-leaf plantain, and uncommon wildflowers such as yellow lady's slippers and showy orchis can also be found. Many bird species nest along the river, from tiny warblers to Great Blue Heron rookeries. Wild turkey have become quite common. Mammals such as deer, raccoon, and beaver are common, and river otters are making a strong comeback. Three threatened and endangered species occur: the Illinois chorus frog, the western hognose snake, and the Illinois mud turtle.

Natural Areas:

Mackinaw River State Fish and Wildlife Area, ParkLands Nature Preserve, Mehl's Bluff, Manito Prairie Nature Preserve in Tazewell County.

ParkLands Ridgetop Hill Prairie, ParkLands Kenyon Preserve, ParkLands Wyatt's Ford Preserve, and The Nature Conservancy's Chinquapin Bluff's Preserve in Woodford County.

ParkLands Merwin Preserve in McLean County.

Recreation:

Hunting: public hunting at Mackinaw River F&W area, Evergreen Lake, ParkLands (deer, by lottery permit only)

Fishing: smallmouth bass, catfish

Canoeing: access at ParkLands property near Lake Bloomington and north of Carlock (Wyatt's Ford/JimFenis Canoe area), near Goodfield (Rt. 150 bridge), Mackinaw

Birdwatching/Hiking: all ParkLands preserves open to public, Evergreen Lake