

Great fishing!

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Noble County has 117 natural lakes, more than any other county in the Hoosier State. Noble County lakes are not all the same; each has a distinct feature or personality that sets it apart. You'll discover their unique character once you get to know them.

Bluegills are the most popular fish in Noble County lakes and can be found in every lake and are usually the most abundant. They are spunky fighters, and are at home in shallow areas of lakes and congregate in loose schools along weed beds. During June, when spawning season peaks, they crowd into dense schools over sand and gravel bottoms. Here males guard the nest and are easiest to catch. Because bluegills are so prolific, restrictive fishing rules such as size limits, creel limits, or a closed season, are not needed. Normally bluegills grow 6 inches long. A big bluegill is 8 inches long. Noble County hotspots for bluegill fishing stretch throughout the county. In the southwest are Big Lake, Bear Lake, and Crane Lake. On the western side are Smalley Lake and the Indian Village Lakes that include Druly, Gordy, Rider, and Village Lake. With their natural, undeveloped shorelines, the Indian Village Lakes appear much the same today as they did when Pottawatomi Indians first canoed and fished their waters.

In the center of the county, good bluegill fishing can be found at Chain O'Lakes State Park south of Albion. The best park lakes to try are Bowen, Long, Sand, and Rivir. To the north and northeast, Bixler, Sacarider, and Sylvan also offer good bluegill fishing. Once over-run with carp and suckers, fisheries biologists renovated and restocked Sylvan Lake in the mid-1980s and turned it into one of the best fishing lakes in the state.

If bluegills are the bread-and-butter fish of Noble County anglers, then largemouth bass are dessert. Bass are the largest members of the sunfish family. Their spawning activity peaks in the middle of May, so look for bass in weedy,

shallow, black-bottomed bays and channels. During summer, you can find them tucked under lily pads or cruising along the weedlines. Bass grow 3-4 inches each year up to age 4, after that they average about 2 inches larger per year. An 18-inch bass is a big bass, a 20-incher is a "hawg". Because bass populations can be over-fished, the size limit is 14 inches, the daily catch limit is five, and anglers are encouraged to release most of the bass they catch.

Loon Lake tops the list for bass fishing. Loon, located on the county line between Noble and Whitley Counties, contains more legal-size bass (≥ 14 inches) on a per acre basis than any other Noble County lake. Sylvan, too, has lots of bass as do the lakes in the West Lakes Chain near Rome City, including Jones, Steinbarger, Tamarack and Waldron. All are popular spots for bass fishing tournaments that draw anglers from throughout the region. Cree Lake north of Kendallville is another good bass fishing lake.

In addition to bluegills and bass, most shallow Noble County lakes contain good populations of crappies while the deeper lakes hold perch. Crappies are easy to catch; not so for perch. Crappies spawn in May around developing beds of lily pads and can be caught in shallow water throughout the spring and summer on minnows or tiny, colorful jigs, often in the same areas, day or night. Perch, however, spawn in early spring as soon as the ice melts away. They, too, feed on minnows and jigs, but stay close to the bottom and are hard to locate. Unlike crappies, perch move around during the day and do not feed at night. Most crappies caught by fishermen are 3-4 years old and 8-10 inches long. Perch grow more slowly, reaching 10 inches long by age 6.

Best bets for crappie fishing in Noble County are Bixler Lake in Kendallville, Skinner, Sylvan, and the West Lakes Chain.

Yellow perch hotspots include Crooked Lake, also located in the southwest corner of the county along the Noble-Whitley county line. The big ones are there and can be located



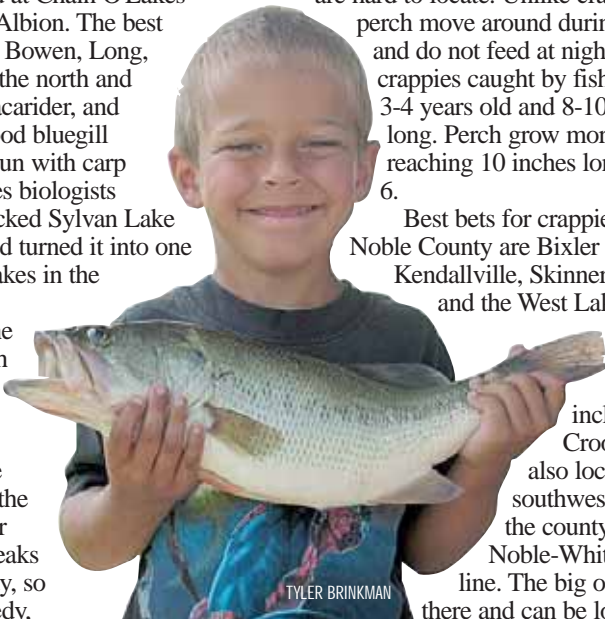
A Sylvan Lake walleye.

along the edges of several submerged islands. Crooked Lake also has the cleanest water in the county. It's not unusual to see objects more than 20 feet below the surface. Because it is so clean, Crooked Lake contains a naturally-reproducing population of ciscoes, a silver-colored, coldwater fish related to trout. As long as ciscoes remain in Crooked Lake, they will serve as a guide to how successful efforts are to protect all of Noble County's lakes.

Bluegills and bass, along with crappies and perch, are the mainstays of Noble County fishing, but we'd be remiss to leave out the others. Most lakes contain plenty of other sunfish, including redear, pumpkin-seeds, green sunfish, and warmouth. Although known locally as "mud bass", warmouth, as well as the others, are fun to catch and good to eat. Most Noble County lakes contain two kinds of catfish: brown and yellow bullheads. Bear and Big lakes are good spots for bullheads. Browns grow bigger, up to 16 inches long, usually bite on night-crawlers and despite their spines and slimy skin, make excellent filets.

The biggest sport fish found in Noble County lakes are pike and muskies. Pike grow up to 3-foot long and have a 20-inch minimum size limit, while muskies reach 4-foot long and must be 36 inches long to keep. Both are toothy predators that feed on suckers, small minnows, and help maintain balance among other fish in the lakes. Pike naturally reproduce but muskies must be stocked. Best fishing conditions are the early morning hours on hot, hazy summer days, or late fall before the freeze-up. Trolling with spoonplugs or other artificial lures is a sure-fire technique. The best Noble County lakes for pike fishing are the West Lakes Chain, while muskies are currently stocked in Loon, Skinner, and

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