



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Public reminded live red swamp crayfish are highly invasive, illegal to possess in Illinois

Commonly used for crawfish boils, possession and sale can lead to fines and penalties

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) is reminding the public and seafood distributors that importing and possessing live [red swamp crayfish](#) (*Procambarus clarkii*), also known as crawfish or Louisiana crawfish, is prohibited by law in Illinois.

“Red swamp crayfish compete aggressively with native species for food and habitat, and they’ve been known to cause structural damage to property. In fact, they are considered one of the most invasive species of crayfish in the world,” said **Illinois Conservation Police Officer Brandon Fehrenbacher, who oversees the IDNR Office of Law Enforcement Invasive Species Unit**. “These crayfish spread by escaping from live crawfish boils and from fishermen illegally using them as bait.”

IDNR crayfish regulations only prohibit the importation or possession of live species. IDNR does not issue special permits for live crawfish boils. Instead, Illinois residents should order frozen or steamed crawfish for their needs.

Any individuals and businesses that import, sell or possess live crawfish in Illinois are subject to fines and penalties [under state law](#) (515 ILCS 5/5-25). Penalties and fines range from a petty offense with a fine of \$195 to a Class 3 felony with fines and restitution totaling tens of thousands of dollars. Illinois is one of many states, including Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan, that prohibit the sale or possession of live red swamp crayfish to prevent the spread of aquatic nuisance species.

Red swamp crayfish are highly invasive and harmful to the environment if released. They burrow into the soil around dams, irrigation systems, and levees and can cause severe and costly structural damage. Red swamp crayfish destroy nesting and nursery grounds of aquatic species, compete with other fish and crayfish species for food and resources, and prey on the eggs of other aquatic life.

IDNR maintains an approved species list identifying species approved for aquaculture, transportation, stocking, importation and possession in Illinois. There are four native crayfish species listed on the approved list that are legal to import and possess alive: White River crayfish, papershell crayfish, northern crayfish, and devil crayfish. However, these species are not commonly used by the food industry.

Questions about crayfish possession can be directed to the Illinois Conservation Police at DNR.lawreception@illinois.gov or to the IDNR aquatic nuisance species program at DNR.aquaculture@illinois.gov. To learn more about protecting Illinois waterways from the spread of invasive species, visit <https://www.transportzero.org/>.

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