



2021 Tidal Bass Outlook

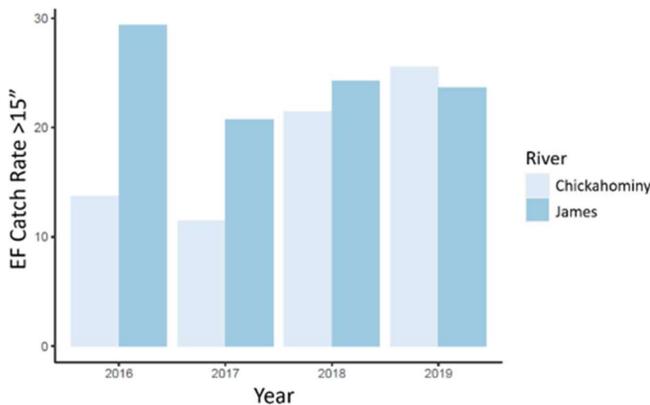


Electrofishing surveys produced some big fish from James River tributaries, with two coming in at 9.4 and 8.5 lbs (left), and a good range of sizes (middle); DWR Biologist Scott Herrmann holds up a Largemouth Bass on the left and an Alabama Bass on the right for comparison (right).

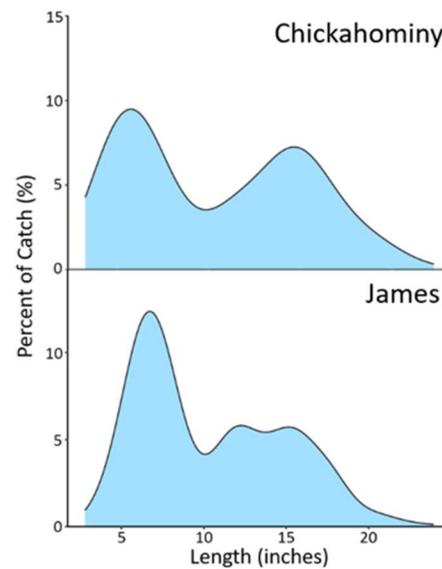
Background

Largemouth Bass fishing on tidal waters has been consistently good for the past several years. The Chickahominy River continues to be a popular destination for Bass anglers with plenty of opportunities to catch 4-5 lb. fish and the potential to land fish in the 9-10 lb. range. James River tributaries also offer excellent Bass fishing opportunities, with 8-9 lb. fish being caught in Herring and Powell Creeks. The Chickahominy tends to be a more stable system than the James during big rain events, allowing anglers to find a pattern that is productive when the James is more turbid.

The short-term outlook for the Largemouth Bass fishery is good. Catch rates for fish 15" or larger has been consistently increasing in the Chickahominy River since 2017. The James has fluctuated over the past five years but has been comparable to the Chickahominy over the past two years. In spring, when water temperatures are cooler, anglers should target fish feeding on the flats in a pre-spawn pattern. As water temperatures warm, fish will move into shoreline habitats with woody structure near



Electrofishing catch rates for fish larger than 15 inches. Bars show the number of >15" fish caught per hour in the James and Chickahominy Rivers from 2016 to 2019.



The peaks show the James and Chickahominy Rivers have good size distributions with plenty of large fish in both rivers.

channel drop-offs. Fallen trees and submerged logs and stumps are good places to target larger fish. Anglers should be aware that tides can produce strong currents in tidal rivers and tributaries. Many anglers prefer to fish during slack tide, the time around high or low tide when the current is not as strong.

Invasive Alabama Bass

Alabama Bass (*Micropterus henshalli*), have been illegally introduced into Virginia waters and represent a threat to the Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass fisheries. In other states where Alabama Bass have been introduced, they have outcompeted Largemouth Bass and hybridized with Smallmouth Bass causing declines in both populations. In the tidewater region, Alabama Bass have been found in Diascund Reservoir and the Chickahominy River. The James and Chickahominy Rivers are being sampled regularly but the help of anglers is critical in stopping the spread of these invaders.

Alabama Bass look similar to Largemouth Bass but can be identified by a few key features. Alabama Bass have smaller jaws that extend to the middle of the eye, whereas Largemouth Bass have jaws that extend past the eye. Alabama Bass also have a tooth patch on their tongue and distinct coloration. Anglers who think they have caught an Alabama Bass are encouraged to take a photo and a small clipping of the pelvic fin (stored in a dry envelope) and contact DWR with information on where the fish was caught.

DWR has instituted new regulations to help combat the spread of Alabama Bass. Alabama Bass are now listed on

Virginia's Predatory and Undesirable Species List, making live possession outside of the water body of catch unlawful. Violations of this new regulation are a class III misdemeanor. There are no bag or size limits set for Alabama Bass and anglers are encouraged to harvest those that they catch.

Monitoring & Management

DWR samples the James and Chickahominy Rivers annually in fall (Sept – Nov) using boat electrofishing and these data are used to detect trends in Largemouth Bass populations. Beginning in fall 2021, DWR will expand these sampling efforts into the Pamunkey, Mattaponi, and Rappahannock Rivers. An angler (creel) survey will also be starting in the James and Chickahominy Rivers in August 2021. Keep an eye out for creel clerks at boat ramps and answer a few questions to help DWR monitor the fishery if you have the time!

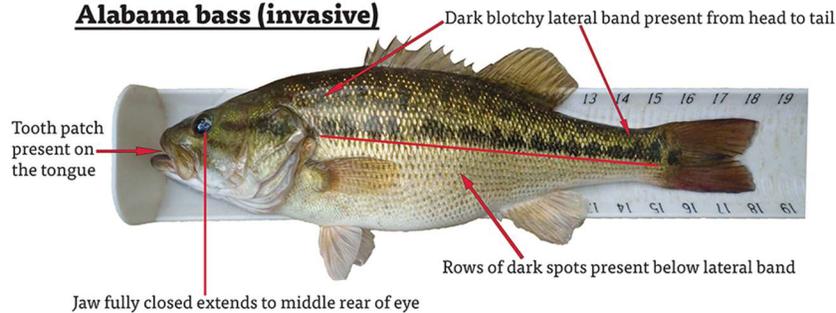
Be safe, wear a life jacket, and please obey fishing and boating regulations while on the water

Prepared by: Margaret Whitmore, Scott Herrmann, and Eric Brittle

For more information, please contact:
Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
Region 1 Office
3801 John Tyler Memorial Hwy
Charles City, VA 23030
(804) 829 – 6580

Visit: www.dwr.virginia.gov

Alabama bass (invasive)



Largemouth bass

