



2022 Tidal Bass Outlook

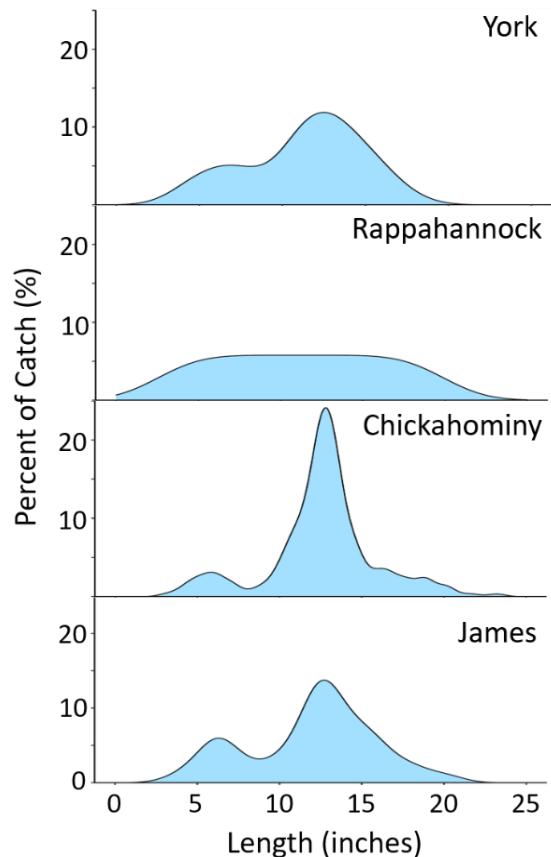


Electrofishing surveys produced some big fish from James River tributaries (bottom right). DWR Biologist Scott Herrmann holds up a Largemouth Bass on the left and an Alabama Bass on the right for comparison; DWR continues to work to stop the spread of this invasive species (bottom left). Tagged Largemouth Bass are still in the James and Chickahominy Rivers (top), please call the phone number on the tag to report your catch!

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 larger tributaries, such as 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. Size distributions from 2021 fall sampling efforts showed good recruitment in all tidal rivers. In the Rappahannock, larger bass can be found in tributaries and upstream reaches of the main stem river. 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 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.



Size distributions in all rivers show good recruitment. Higher salinities in some sampling locations in the Rappahannock impacted catch rates but all sizes were collected, including preferred size bass.

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 and James Rivers.

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 is sampling regularly to stop the spread of these invaders but help from anglers is critical.

Monitoring & Management

DWR samples all tidal rivers from September to November using boat electrofishing. These data are used to detect trends in Largemouth Bass populations as well as other sportfish and non-game species.

In 2021, DWR started a Largemouth Bass tagging project in the James and Chickahominy Rivers. The goals of the project were to 1) estimate catch and release parameters

and 2) assess translocation of preferred size Largemouth Bass between the Chickahominy and James Rivers. Thanks to hundreds of anglers reporting their catches, DWR was able to determine that translocation of bass from the Chickahominy to the James River is not sufficiently high to impact the bass population in the Chickahominy River.

DWR is still assessing post-release dispersal of tagged bass moved between rivers. Anglers who catch a tagged bass are still being asked to report their catch to the phone number on the tag (804-829-6580).

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

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