



Middle James River Report 2019
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The James River is the largest river in the state of Virginia, stretching over 550 miles. The middle section of the river refers to the approximately 130 mile stretch between Lynchburg and Boshers Dam just above Richmond. Generally fisheries biologist sample the James River every fall, however sampling could not be conducted in 2018 due to high water levels. Sampling resumed in 2019 with a total of 13 sampling locations between Lynchburg and Boshers Dam sampled using boat electrofishing (Figure 1). The information that follows outlines the results of those sampling efforts. For more information of the middle James River or to plan your next float trip visit our website by [clicking here](#).

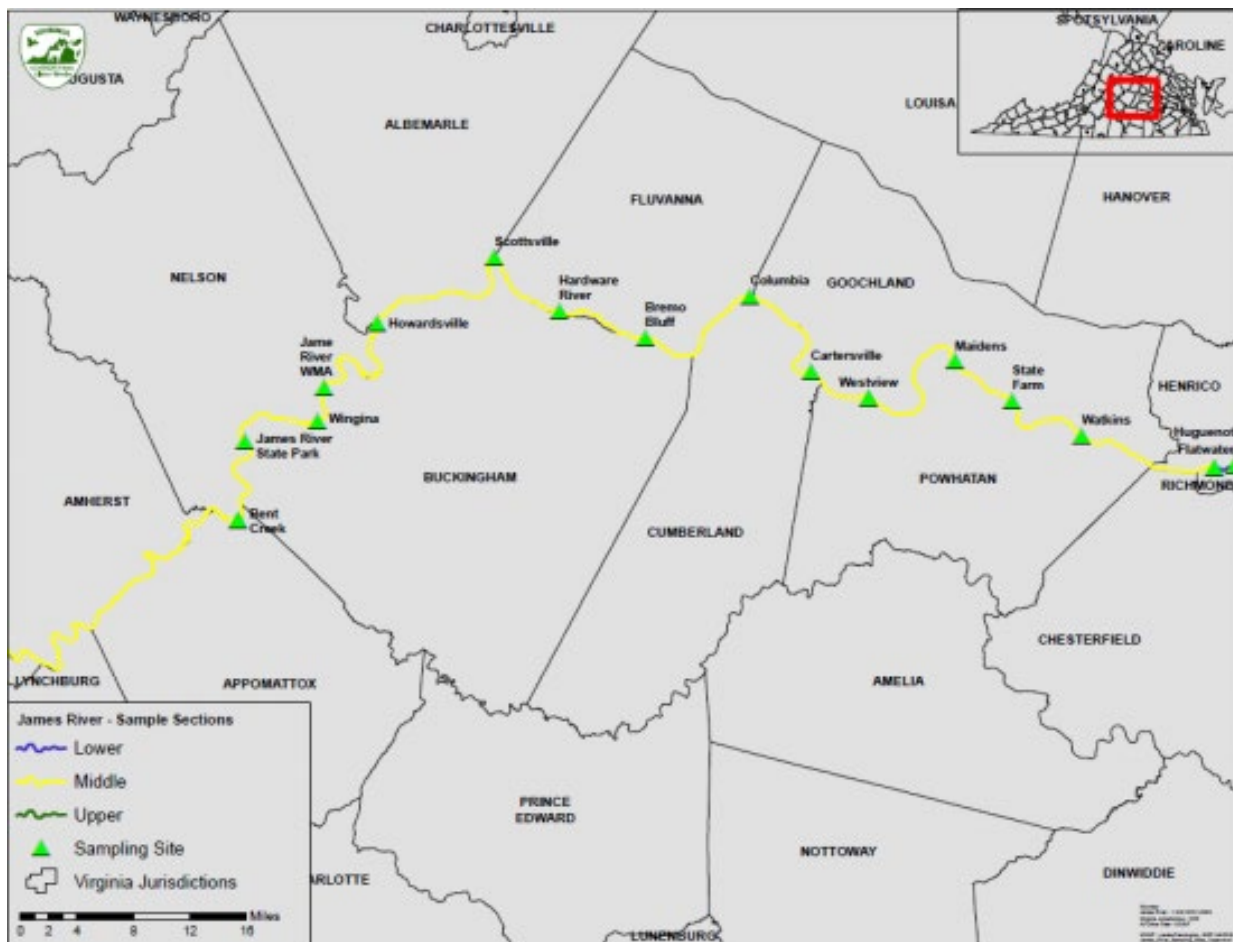


Figure 1. Fish Sampling Locations along the middle James River.

Smallmouth Bass

Smallmouth Bass are a major sportfish in the middle James River though not as prevalent as in the upper James above Lynchburg. A total of 357 Smallmouth Bass were collected from the middle James in the fall of 2019 ranging in size from 2 to 19 inches (Figure 2). Smallmouth represented approximately 20% of the total fish catch from electrofishing samples. Nearly 70% of Smallmouth collected were juveniles (less than 7 inches). While catch rates for adult smallmouth bass were lower relative to historic samples high catch rates for juvenile fish hold promise for the future of the Smallmouth Bass fishery in the middle James River.

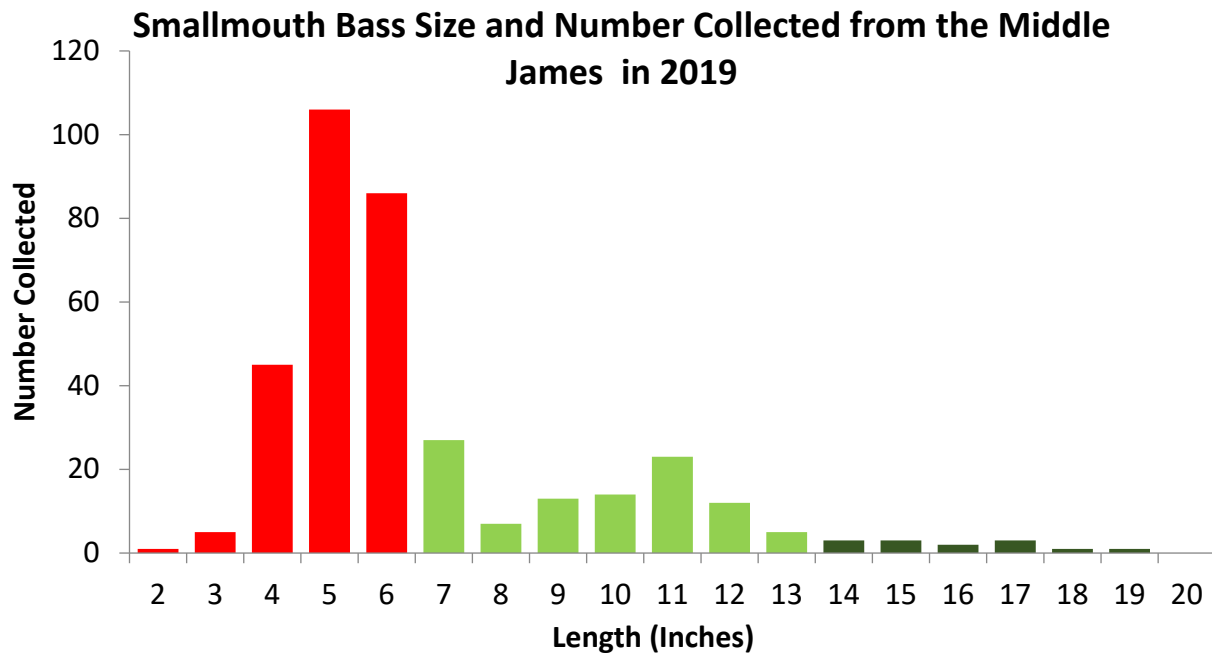


Figure 2. Number and sizes of Smallmouth Bass collected from Lynchburg to Boshers Dam in fall 2019. Juvenile Bass (less than 7 inches) are represented with red bars, adult smallmouth bass (greater than 7 inches) are represented in light green bars, and Smallmouth bass currently protected by the 14-22 inch slot limit are shown in dark green.

Smallmouth Bass anglers can employ a variety of tactics to catch fish throughout the middle James River. Soft plastics including stick worms and tubes can be effective throughout the year while flukes can produce well during warmer months. Hard baits including crankbaits, jerkbaits, jigs, and spinnerbaits can produce fish year round. During the warmer months topwater baits can produce exciting strikes. Time of year, water temperature, and flow will all play important roles in the areas smallmouth will be found. Target deeper riffles and transition areas into and out of pools. Submerged structure including boulders, fallen trees, and beds of aquatic vegetation can all hold fish. Anglers wishing to harvest Smallmouth Bass should be aware of the 14 to 22 inch protected slot limit for bass on the river. All fish between 14 and 22 inches must be released

immediately. 5 fish outside of the slot may be kept daily, with only one fish greater than 22 inches allowed.

Sunfish

The middle James River supports several species of sunfish including: Bluegill, Redbreast Sunfish, Rock Bass, and Redear Sunfish. In 2019, 232 sunfish were collected from the middle James River with Bluegill being the most abundant. Bluegill represented 75% of the total sunfish catch and ranged in size from 3 to 7 inches (Figure 3). Redbreast Sunfish showed significant declines from previous samples and only represented 15% of the catch, ranging in size from 2 to 6 inches. Rock Bass and Redear sunfish were the least abundant species each representing about 5% of total sunfish catch. While there are catchable size sunfish in the middle James River, the number of quality fish (>6 inches) is low.

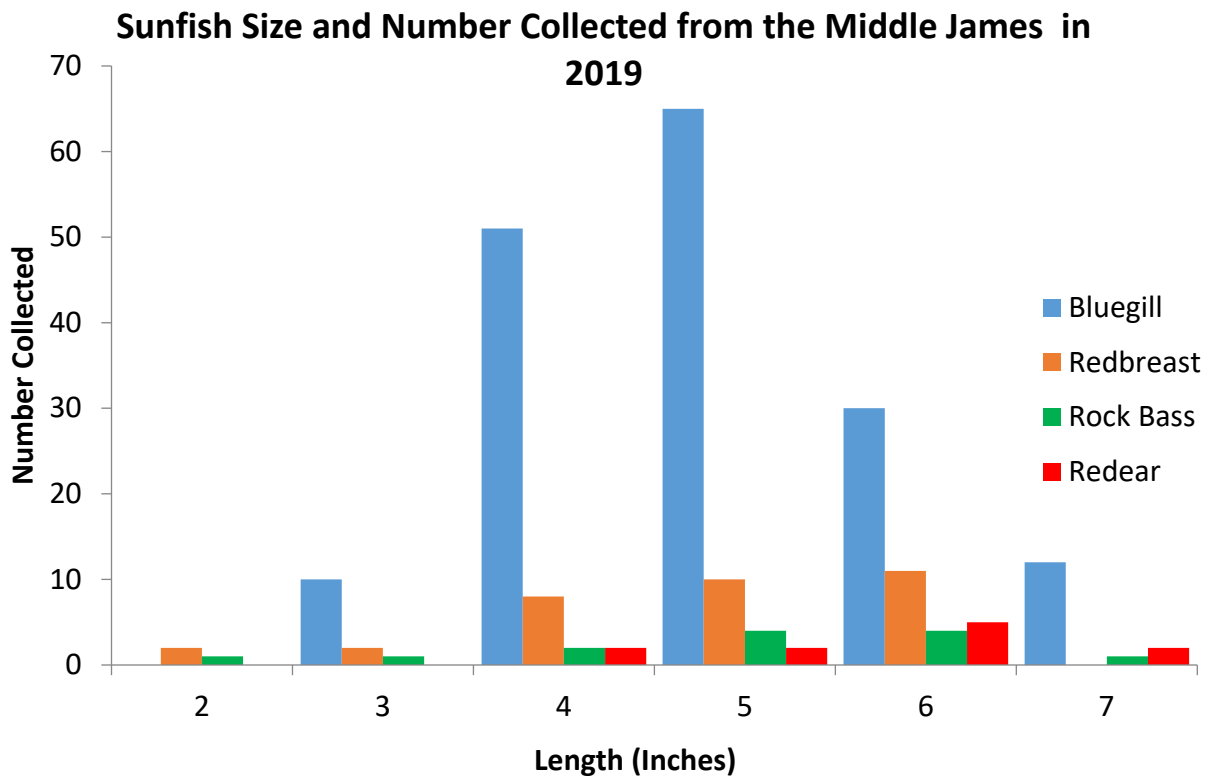


Figure 3. Numbers and sizes of sunfish species including: Bluegill, Redbreast Sunfish, Rock Bass, and Redear Sunfish collected from the middle James River in fall 2019.

Anglers targeting sunfish should use light tackle with small spinners, grubs, crickets, and worms. Fly fishing tackle can also produce well for sunfish. Bank areas with submerged structure including fallen trees, vegetation, and boulders generally produce well for sunfish.

Catfish

Catfish are prevalent throughout the middle section of the James River. A total of 333 catfish were collected during fall 2019 sampling efforts, representing approximately 17% of the total fish catch. Both Channel Catfish and Flathead Catfish can be found in good numbers throughout the middle section of the James River. Channel Catfish are the more numerous of the two species representing 85% of the total catfish collected during 2019 sampling and ranging in size from 3 to 24 inches (Figure 4). Flathead catfish made up the remaining 15% of catfish collected and ranged in size from 3 to 43 inches. Blue Catfish have also been observed in the middle James River but occur in lower numbers than Channel and Flathead catfish. The middle James River offers the opportunity for high catfish catch rates, particularly for Channel Catfish, while Trophy Flathead Catfish potential exists as well.

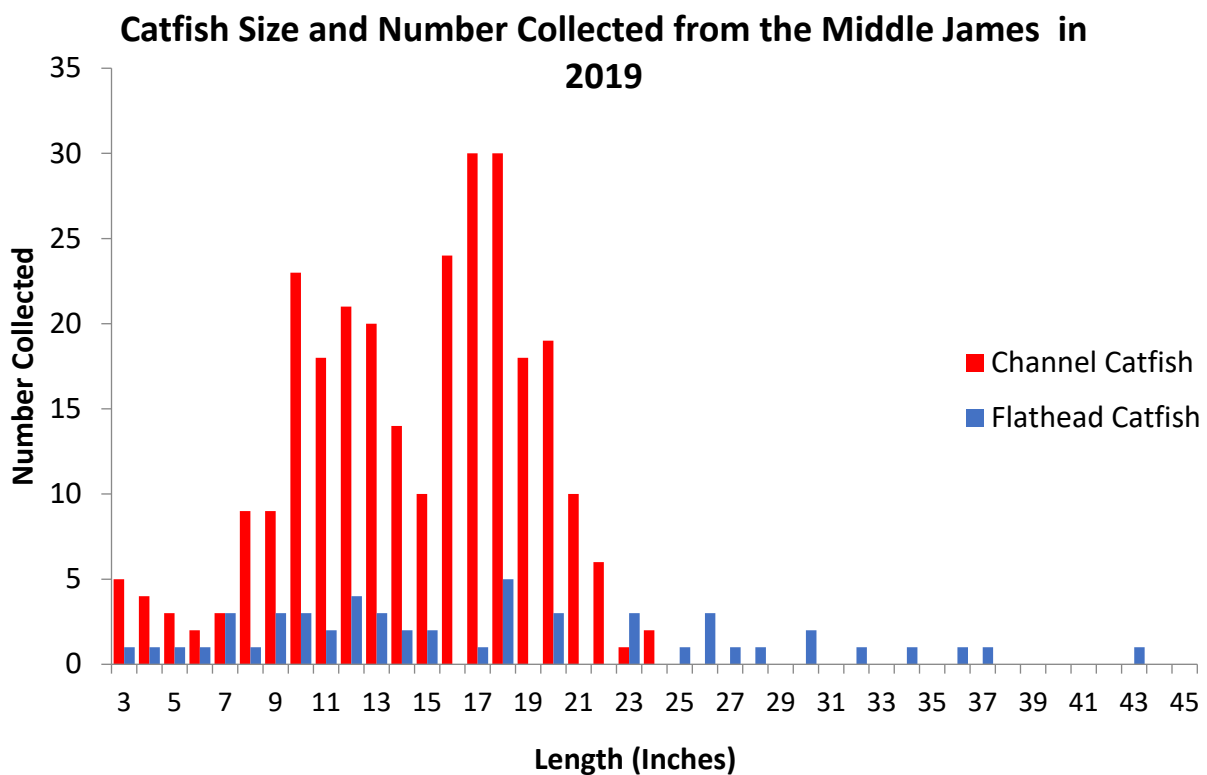


Figure 4. Number and sizes of Channel Catfish and Flathead Catfish collected from the middle James River in fall 2019.

Anglers targeting catfish should target pool areas specifically those with steep ledges, large boulders, or fallen trees. Bait choices for Channel Catfish include chicken liver, night crawlers, and dough balls. Flathead Catfish tend to prefer live or cut bait, as they are generally more prefer live fish. Be sure to check and follow regulations for the use of live bait.

Area Attractions:

[James River State Park](#)

[James River WMA](#)

[Hardware River WMA](#)

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