



Tidal Chickahominy River 2010

Largemouth bass

This river supports a nationally recognized largemouth bass fishery, and in recent years anglers have been reporting excellent bass fishing in the tidal Chickahominy. Generally anglers can expect good numbers of largemouth in the 1 – 3 pound range, with relatively few largemouth weighing over 5 pounds. This fishery is characterized by high angler catches, and of all Virginia tidal rivers, the tidal Chickahominy typically has the highest largemouth catch rates. It is a close second to the tidal James in abundance of bass greater than or equal to 15 inches. Boat electrofishing catch rates have been fairly high over the past several years – over 100 bass per hour in three of the last four years (Figure 1).

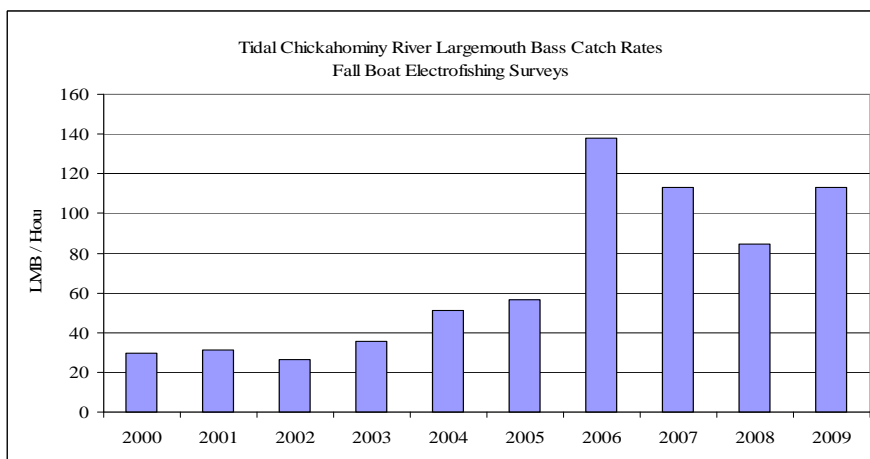


Figure 1. Largemouth bass catch rates (bass/hour) in fall boat electrofishing surveys conducted during 2000 – 2009 in the tidal Chickahominy and its tributaries.

Production of young bass has been good for several years: with a record year-class in 2009; average year-classes in 2007 and 2006, and a strong year-class in 2005. With fish from these year-classes moving into the fishery, angler catch rates were at record highs in the spring of 2009; double what they were in 2005, and much higher than in most Virginia bass lakes. In 2009, 73% of anglers interviewed rated the Chickahominy largemouth fishery as either good or excellent. This fishery should continue to produce high angler catch rates over the next several years.

During a period of low abundance in 1999 – 2003, young bass grew faster than normal, and there was a resulting increase in the average size of adult bass – even a few reports of fish over 7 pounds. However, with increased abundance in recent years, growth of young bass has slowed markedly. Some will remember the classic description of the Chickahominy – “you can catch a bunch of bass, none of them over 1 ½ pounds”. In

future years, largemouth bass in angler catches may mirror that of times gone by. However, for the time being there are still some of those larger fish available for anglers to enjoy.

Electrofishing results indicate anglers fishing the tidal Chickahominy in 2010 will see an abundance of largemouth to 16 inches (2 ¼ pounds), with the occasional fish to 18 inches (3 ¾ pounds), in their catch (Figure 2).

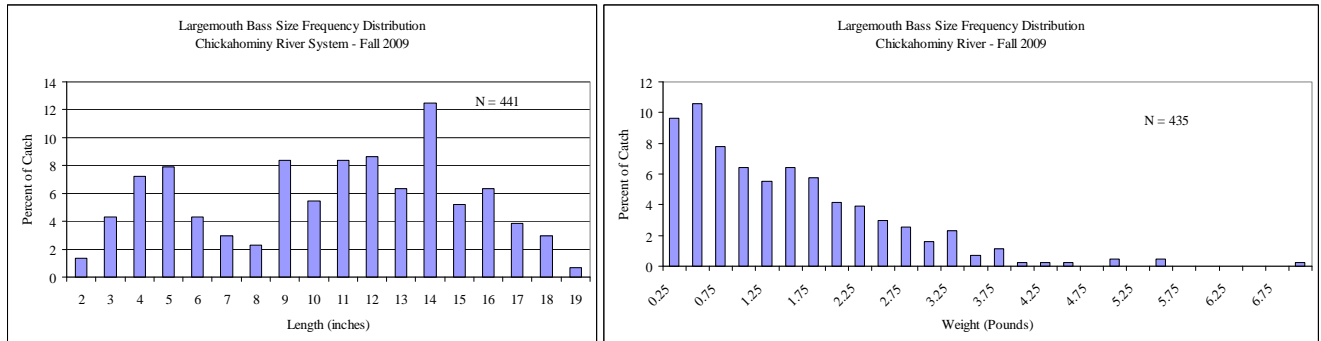


Figure 2. Distribution by length and weight of largemouth bass collected in the fall 2009 boat electrofishing survey of the tidal Chickahominy River and its tributaries.

River Herring (alewife and blueback herring)

The spring herring run has been a tradition for many years at Walkers Dam, unfortunately angler access to the dam is closed at this time – no fishing from the dam. This is because of ongoing repairs, which will take years to complete. Even with closure of the dam, the river herring run continues to draw many anglers each spring from late March through early May. With the closure of the dam, herring anglers are now fishing primarily from boats in the area downstream of Walkers Dam. During the peak of the run in April, anglers can land an abundance of these unique fish using bare gold hooks, small spoons, or shad darts. Anglers should be aware that river herring runs have been depleted along the Atlantic coast, and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission is considering closing the fishery. While the fishery was open for the spring 2010 season, anglers should check with the Virginia Marine Fisheries Commission (<http://www.mrc.state.va.us/swrecfishingrules.htm>) for current regulations related to this fishery.

Black Crappie

Black crappie numbers vary considerably year-to-year in the tidal Chickahominy. However, anglers have reported good catches of crappie in recent years. While crappie can be caught throughout the year, October – April is the primary season for this tasty species. The size structure of this tidal river crappie population is excellent, with high relative stock density values for preferred-size fish (RSD-P) – RSD-P is an index of the proportion of the population 10 inches or larger. During electrofishing in 2009, crappie 10 inches or larger were well represented in samples (Figure 3) and RSD-P = 62, indicating a high proportion of preferred-size fish were available in the river for anglers to catch.

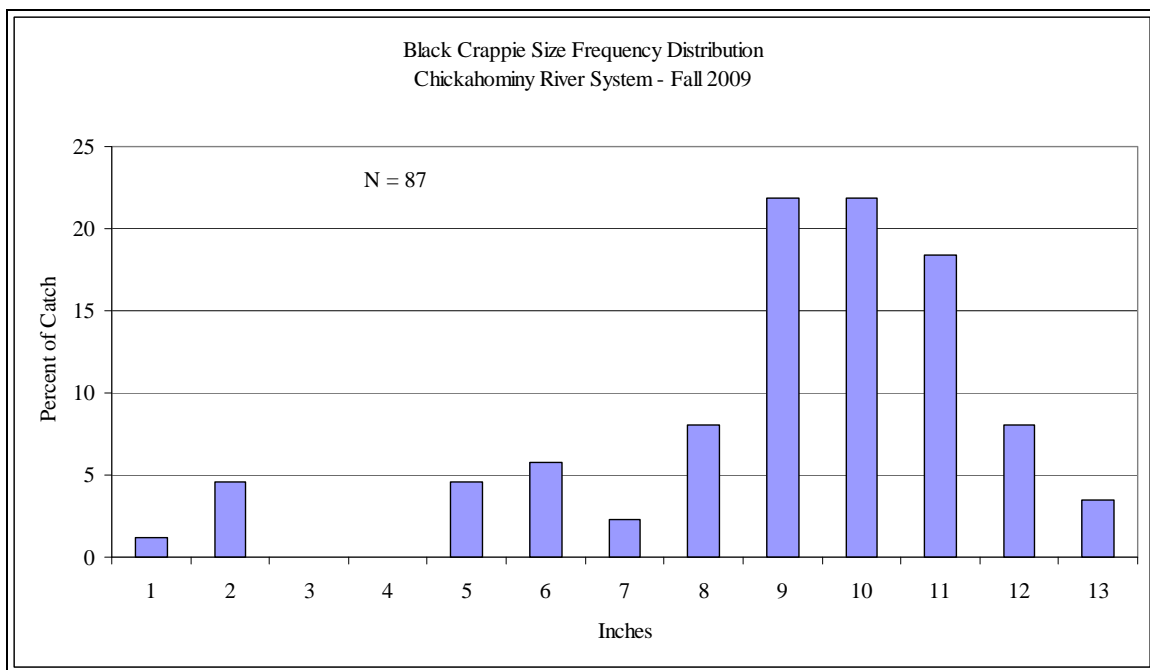


Figure 3. Distribution by length of black crappie collected in the fall 2009 boat electrofishing survey of the tidal Chickahominy River and its tributaries.

Catfish

The two most sought after catfish species in the tidal Chickahominy River, channel cats and blue cats, are not native to the river. Channel catfish likely became established in the river sometime between 1890 and the early 1900's. Blue catfish were stocked in the tidal James River in the mid-1970's, and they colonized the tidal Chickahominy following this introduction. Following introduction, blue catfish quickly became the dominant catfish species in the river, replacing channel catfish as the most abundant catfish species. In the spring of 2009, anglers reported catching 11 blue catfish for every 2 channel catfish caught.

Anglers catch "eating size" 1-3 pound channel catfish by fishing night crawlers or various other cut-baits, while anglers fishing for blue cats typically use fresh gizzard shad. Trophy blue catfish to 70 pounds do occur in the tidal Chickahominy, however, anglers should be aware that trophy blue catfish are not as abundant in the tidal Chickahominy as they are in the James. Anglers may only have one blue catfish longer than 32 inches in their possession. There is no limit on possession of channel or blue catfish less than 32 inches in tidal rivers.

More information on fishing the tidal Chickahominy and other waters of Virginia can be found on the web: www.dgif.virginia.gov.

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