**General Information:** Sardis Reservoir is one of four flood control reservoirs (FCRs) in north Mississippi. Built by the US Army Corps of Engineers (COE) in 1939 on the Little Tallahatchie River, it is the oldest FCR with a summer pool of 32,100 ac. Water levels follow an annual rule curve, but deviate from it due to local precipitation and COE spillway gate operations. The reservoir is lowered in fall to winter pool (10,700 ac); flood pool is 58,500 ac. Sardis is the state’s most popular angling destination. Unique to Sardis is the 400 ac Lower Lake below the spillway.

**Location/Contact:** 12 miles northwest of Oxford, MS. COE office (662) 563-4531.

**Fishery Management:** Crappie, catfish, Largemouth Bass, and White Bass.

**Purchase a Fishing License:** [https://www.ms.gov/mdwfp/hunting_fishing/](https://www.ms.gov/mdwfp/hunting_fishing/)

### Amenities

- 12 concrete fee ramps.
- Bait shops in Oxford, Sardis, Holly Springs, Batesville, etc.

### Creel and Size Limits

*The following apply to the reservoir, but not the spillway or Lower Lake.*

- **Crappie:** Must be over 12 inches. 15 crappie per day per angler; no more than 40 crappie per boat (3 or more anglers).
- **Largemouth Bass:** No length limit and 10 bass per day per angler.
- **White Bass:** No limits.
- **Bream:** No length limit and 100 per day per angler.
- **Catfish:** No limits.

### Regulations

- No more than 25 jugs and no more than 25 yo-yos may be fished per person with no more than 2 hooks per device. Jugs and yo-yos must be tagged with the license holder’s MDWFP number or the angler’s name and address. Gear must be attended (in sight) during daylight hours.
- **Grabbling season May 1 – July 15; only wooden structures allowed.**
- No more than 4 poles may be fished per person; no more than 2 hooks or lures per pole.
- **Spillway and Lower Lake:** Consult Outdoor Digest

### Fishing Tips

#### General

- Best fishing is usually in the spring and fall.
- Fish near deeper water if the water is falling; fish shallower if it is rising.

#### Crappie

- Target shoreline cover in spring in creek arms and coves. In summer and fall, troll for suspended fish in creek mouths and the main reservoir.

#### Largemouth Bass

- Target cover in coves in spring, main reservoir points in summer, and tributaries in fall.

#### Bream

- Fish crickets or redwoms near cover.

#### Catfish

- Fish worms or cut bait in tributaries during runoff or over mudflats if no runoff.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th># of fish collected</th>
<th>% of sample</th>
<th>Average Length (inches)</th>
<th>Maximum Length (inches)</th>
<th>Average Weight (pounds)</th>
<th>Catch Rate – Adult fish (fish/mile)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gizzard Shad</td>
<td>969</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluegill</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Largemouth Bass</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Crappie</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Catfish</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Bass</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Crappie</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spotted Bass</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redear Sunfish</td>
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<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flathead Catfish</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Above:** Fall 2018 electrofishing results. Abundant small fish measured in length groups are not included in average lengths and weights, only fish measured individually. Forage fish (Gizzard Shad, Bluegill) were numerous, but mostly small. Threadfin Shad and Gizzard X Threadfin Shad hybrids common in fall 2017, were not seen in fall 2018; both succumbed to low temperatures during the 2017-18 winter. Most Black Crappie were young-of-year (YOY). Strong Black Crappie year classes are typically produced during high water years like 2018. However, overall fish spawning success was relatively low for a high water year, possibly due to a very cool, extended spring.

**Above:** Trend in fall electrofishing catch rates for adult Largemouth Bass and White Crappie. Abundance has improved recently due to higher water levels from 2013–2018 (except 2017). Bass abundance increased substantially with improved habitat, more forage fish, and better survival with 2018’s high water. Fewer White Crappie in 2018 may have been because of a warm fall (fish were holding deeper than electrofishing is efficient) and/or angler harvest. Depending on age, some or all fish from big year classes from 2013–2016 have grown to legal size.
Above: Length distributions, fall electrofishing, 2018. Most bass were from the big 2016 year class; the bass spawn was weak for a flood year, possibly due to a cool spring and/or cannibalism. Bass populations at the FCRs fluctuate mostly from environmental factors (mainly water levels) since angler harvest is low. Crappie were mostly this spring’s fish; crappie spawn at cooler temperatures than bass. Blue Catfish (“white humpbacks” or “white river cats”) were fairly common and good sized.

Below: Growth rates for crappie, fall 2018. Most White Crappie were from a big 2016 year class. This big year class grew slower than normal as they competed with each other for food plus had to suffer through the 2017 drought. No crappie older than 2014 (Age 4+) fish were seen in fall 2018; that does not mean they were gone, just rare.
**Fish Harvest and Fishing Effort:** MDWFP fisheries biologists conduct an angler survey every four years on each FCR to assess fishing effort, harvest, and catch rates. Other information gathered during the survey includes angler origin, expenses, bait, tackle, etc. An angler survey is planned on Sardis in 2021 (COVID depending). Results will be posted after data are analyzed. Although no survey was done in 2020, it appeared more people were fishing during spring (right, top). With adults out of work and kids out of school due to virus lockdowns, Sardis remained open and boat ramps were full.

Typically, most Sardis anglers fish for crappie (left, bottom) by trolling open water with multiple poles (spider rigging, right, middle). Catfish and Largemouth Bass are other popular targets, with White Bass and bream (right, bottom) making up the remainder.

Normally, about 40% of Sardis’ anglers come from the three counties around the reservoir. About 25% come from the Memphis (TN) metropolitan area (including Desoto County, MS), and about 15% from out-of-state (other than Memphis).
Lake Characteristics: Sardis normally fluctuates 24 ft during the year following a “rule curve” based on seasonal rainfall patterns. For water levels (rule curve vs actual water level), see http://www.mvk-wc.usace.army.mil/docs/bullet.txt for a table or http://www.mvk-wc.usace.army.mil/plots/sardplot.png for a graph or http://www.mvk-wc.usace.army.mil/resrep.htm for both. Due to its greater depth and storage volume, Sardis was the first FCR built. Still, water level fluctuations can make it challenging to find and pattern fish.

Fall drawdowns and droughts let moist soil vegetation colonize mudflats (middle, left) and provide fish habitat when water levels rise again. Flooding brings in nutrients and expands fish habitat. Aquatic vegetation is very rare due to fluctuating lake levels, but live shoreline trees and shrubs are abundant at higher water levels. Extended droughts (several years) allow woody vegetation to recolonize (bottom left), but most die off during extended flooding. Due to the reservoir’s age, the fluctuation zone (winter to summer pool, middle, right) has very little cover other than dead timber (bottom right), some live trees and shrubs, and colonized vegetation.
**Lake Characteristics:** Sardis’ rule curve and rainfall sometimes result in low water during spring spawning season and/or limited vegetation colonization. However, the Sardis Reservoir COE sponsors a Habitat Day in winter when the water is low. Materials are placed in the fluctuation zone with the assistance of volunteers (right, top) to provide fish habitat when the water comes back up. Although beneficial, these artificial structures do not begin to replace the quantity or quality of habitat created by naturally colonized vegetation during low water periods and flooded during high water events.

Some patches of American Lotus (right, bottom) that have colonized in Hurricane Creek in recent years have become a favorite target of bass anglers. These patches disappeared in 2018’s high water, but the areas will be monitored to see if they rebound.

**Spillway:** The Sardis Reservoir spillway and Lower Lake are also popular fishing destinations, mostly for catfish and crappie. Crappie in the spillway are dependent on reservoir releases and are caught mostly in winter and early spring; catfish are more common in summer. A concrete ramp into the Lower Lake provides boat anglers access. A handicapped accessible pier (below, left) was opened in 2017 near the end of the spillway channel rip-rap.

The Little Tallahatchie River below the reservoir allows access into the spillway by many wide-ranging fishes, such as Asian carps (below, right; Silver Carp, top. Bighead Carp, bottom) from the Mississippi River. Regulations prohibit anglers from keeping alive bait fish captured in the spillway to prevent the spread of these nuisance, non-native fishes to other waters. Uncommon species in the spillway may include Paddlefish, American Eels, Striped Bass, and Hybrid Striped Bass.