Tunica Cutoff 2022

REEL FACTS

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General Information: Tunica Cutoff was created by the US Army Corps of Engineers (COE) in 1942 when a bend in the Mississippi River was "cut off" to shorten the river. The lake is inside the mainline levee and connects to the river via the "runout". Present minimum pool is about 4,000 ac. Tunica Cutoff is one of the largest oxbows in Mississippi and is a popular destination for bream and crappie anglers, mostly from Memphis, TN.
Location: Approximately 6 miles west of Tunica via Hwy 4.
Fishery Management: Largemouth Bass, bream, crappie, and catfish.
Purchase a Fishing License: https://www.ms.gov/mdwfp/hunting_fishing/
Lake Depth Map: https://www.mdwfp.com/media/5383/tunica-cutoff.pdf

Amenities

- 2 fee ramps; Nel-Win ramp is for members only.
- Bait shop across levee.

Creel and Size Limits

The following apply to both sides of the lake.

- Crappie: No length limit and 50 crappie per day per angler.
- Largemouth Bass: No length limit and 10 bass per day per angler.
- White and Yellow Bass (common): No limits.
- Striped and Hybrid Striped Bass (very rare): 15-inch minimum length limit and 6 per day per angler.
- No limits on bream or catfish.

Regulations

Tunica Cutoff is a boundary water with Arkansas and the following regulations apply to the Mississippi side of the lake.

Yo-Yo's and Jugs

- No more than 25 jugs and no more than 25 yo-yos may be fished per person. No more than 2 hooks are allowed on each device.
- Grabbling season May 1 – July 15; only wooden structures allowed; same for Arkansas side.

Stocking

- Black Crappie – 26,960, fall, 2017.
- Blackstriped Black Crappie – 23,161, fall, 2017.

Fishing Tips

General

- Best fishing is when the water is slowly falling from 15 to 10 ft (Memphis gauge).
- Fish outside edges of cover as water falls, inside as it rises.

Crappie

- Target shoreline cover in spring. In summer and fall, troll out from cover near deeper "pockets".

Largemouth Bass

- Target wood cover on steep, sandy banks, especially small points.

Bream

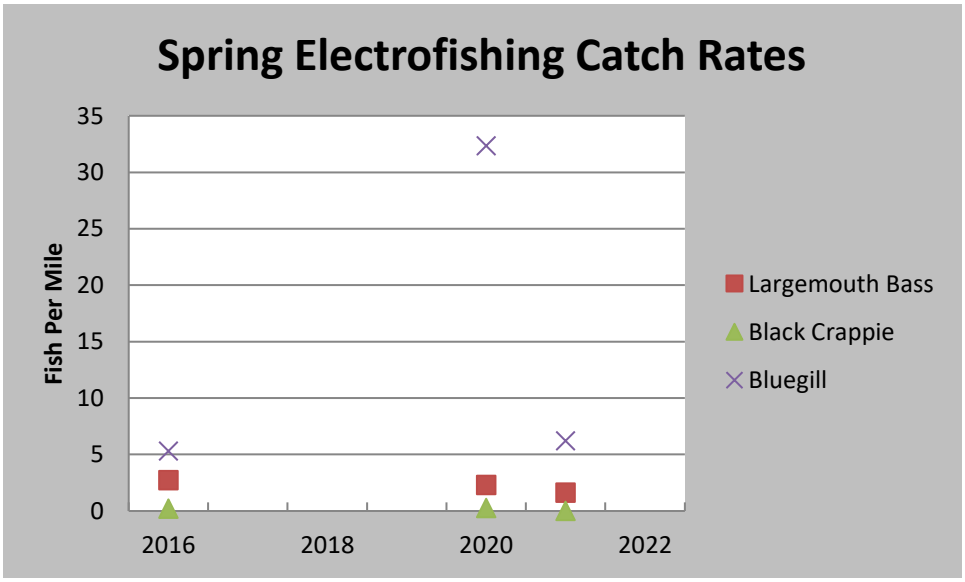
- Fish crickets or redwoms near cover.

Catfish

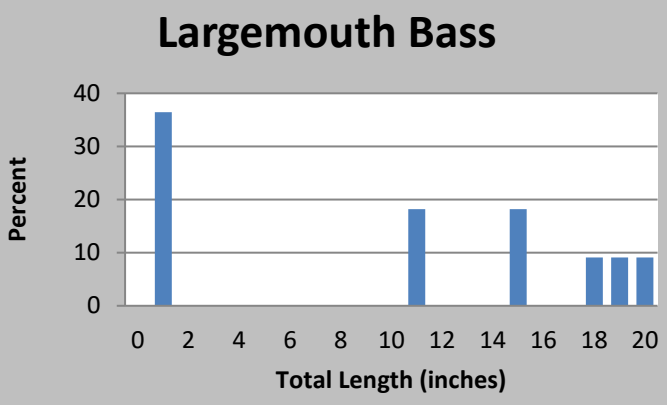
- Target mudflats or the runout with liver, worms, or cutbait.

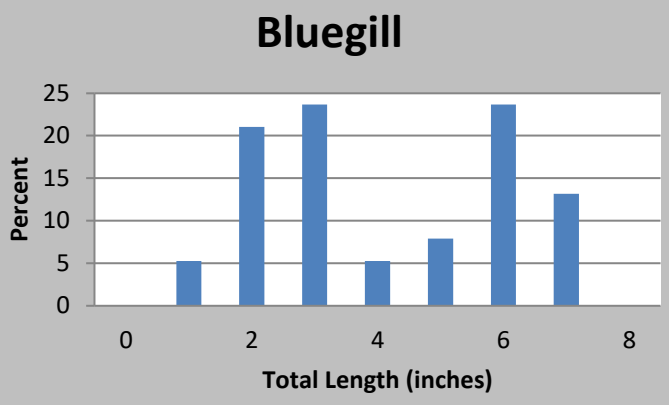
Below: Results from 2021 late spring electrofishing surveys at Tunica Cutoff. Catch rates were low because water levels were high and fish were scattered in flooded shoreline vegetation.

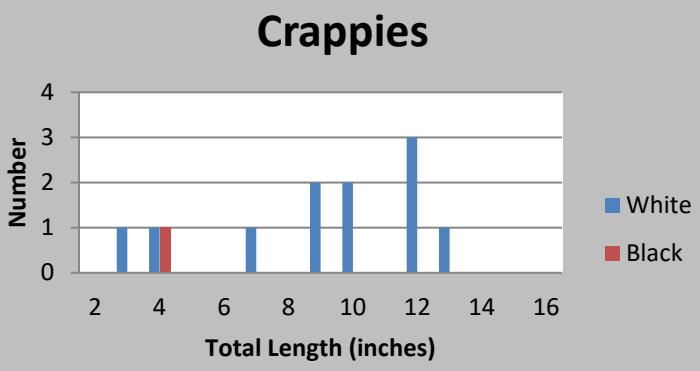
Species	# of fish collected	% of sample	Average Length (inches)	Maximum Length (inches)	Average Weight (pounds)	Catch Rate – Adult fish (fish/mile)
Bluegill	38	27.1	4.7	7.5	0.1	6
Gizzard Shad	36	25.7	7.3	14.0	0.2	3
White Crappie	14	10.0	7.9	13.0	0.6	2
Longear Sunfish	12	8.6	3.3	4.8	<0.1	2
Largemouth Bass	11	7.9	10.8	20.0	1.6	2
White Bass	11	7.9	7.9	15.6	0.7	2
Channel Catfish	7	5.0	17.6	23.0	2.1	2
Yellow Bass	4	2.9	7.4	9.3	0.3	1
Bighead Carp	2	1.4	39.5	43.9	19.3	<1
Silver Carp	1	0.7	29.5	29.5	10.6	<1
Grass Carp	1	0.7	31.3	31.3	14.5	<1
Flathead Catfish	1	0.7	17.1	17.1	1.8	<1
Morone hybrid	1	0.7	4.4	4.4	<0.1	<1
Black Crappie	1	0.7	4.3	4.3	<0.1	<1

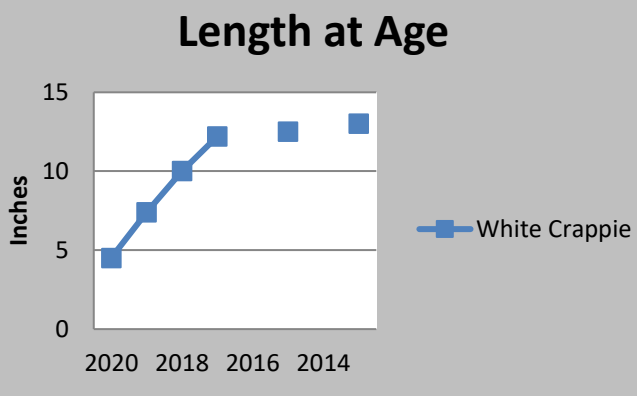


Above: Catch rates in spring 2021 electrofishing. Bluegill catch rate declined sharply from 2020. Sport fish electrofishing catch rates remained very low in spring 2021, but the water was high and fish were scattered in dense shoreline vegetation. Spring electrofishing had been cancelled in 2017 – 2019 because of severe flooding.









Above: Largemouth Bass collected during spring 2021 electrofishing at Tunica Cutoff had spawned, and fingerlings were one inch long. Bluegill were small but plump. Fourteen White Crappie and one Black Crappie were collected; water levels were too high to access the oxbow during their spawning season before they moved into deeper water. Aging White Crappie showed fast growth until Age 4, then growth slowed down.

Below: Extended periods of flooding since 2011 has killed some shoreline vegetation, especially the "new willows" (left) established during the 1988 drought. Younger brushy vegetation (right) has also been damaged from high water; some may survive, some may not. Woody vegetation colonizes during dry years, but may be weakened or killed if flooded too long. Beavers are also a threat.

Below: Tunica Cutoff runout with the weir after construction in 2002 (top); the Mississippi River is in the background and water is flowing from the river into the lake. The weir was a cooperative effort by the City of Tunica, natural resource agencies in Mississippi and Arkansas, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the US Army Corps of Engineers, Memphis District. The unique double-notched shape (center notch can be seen in faster flowing water, top) was designed by MDWFP and COE biologists and COE hydrologists to allow boat traffic to and from the river and to conserve bank vegetation, including the "new willows" (bottom) that grew up during the 1988 drought. The weir raised the minimum pool of the lake about 8 ft. During low water before the weir, the lake divided into two separate pools and all but one ramp was out of the water; afterwards, the lake remained one pool with water on all ramps.

Lake Characteristics: Tunica Cutoff normally fluctuates 20+ ft yearly (highest in spring, lowest in fall), but varies widely year-to-year. Droughts let vegetation colonize for later flooding as fish habitat. Floods bring in nutrients and let fish move out over the floodplain for spawning and food. Aquatic vegetation is scarce due to fluctuating lake levels, but there are abundant shoreline trees (mostly bald cypresses and black willows) at all but the lowest lake levels. The peak of the spring fishing season may not always coincide with the best fishing conditions. The weir keeps the lake from falling below about 6 ft and was designed to allow angler access to and from the river most of the year. For the Mississippi River (Memphis gauge) daily level and 5 day forecast, go to: https://forecast.weather.gov/product.php?site=NWS&issuedby=ORN&product=RVA&format=txt&version=1&glossary=0

Tunica anglers keep a close eye on river levels to determine where and how to fish. Because incoming river water is cooled by northern snowmelt, fish here spawn about a month later (usually May for crappie and bream) than at nearby lakes.

Left: The river allows access by many wide-ranging fishes, such as Asian carps (Silver Carp, top. Bighead Carp, bottom), Paddlefish, and Striped and Hybrid Striped Bass. Largemouth Bass, bream, and crappie are mostly homebodies, spawning and living in the lake. Many anglers think the river stocks the lake with sport fish; if it did, their numbers should not rise and fall with lake conditions since the river flows into the lake every year.

Right: There was a fish kill of mostly Asian carps in late summer 2019. Similar kills have been ongoing for several years but do not seem to significantly reduce carp numbers. Previous investigations have shown they are caused by a bacterial infection.