



Tunica Cutoff 2016

REEL FACTS

Keith Meals – Fisheries Biologist

keithm@mdwfp.state.ms.us

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: <http://www.mdwfp.com/license/fishing-license.aspx>

Lake Depth Map: <http://www.mdwfp.com/media/271025/tunica.pdf>

Amenities

- 3 pay-to-use ramps.
- Bait shop.

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

- White Crappie - 27,060, fall, 2015.
- Black Crappie – 62,235, fall, 2015.
- Bluegill – 370,795, fall, 2015.

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

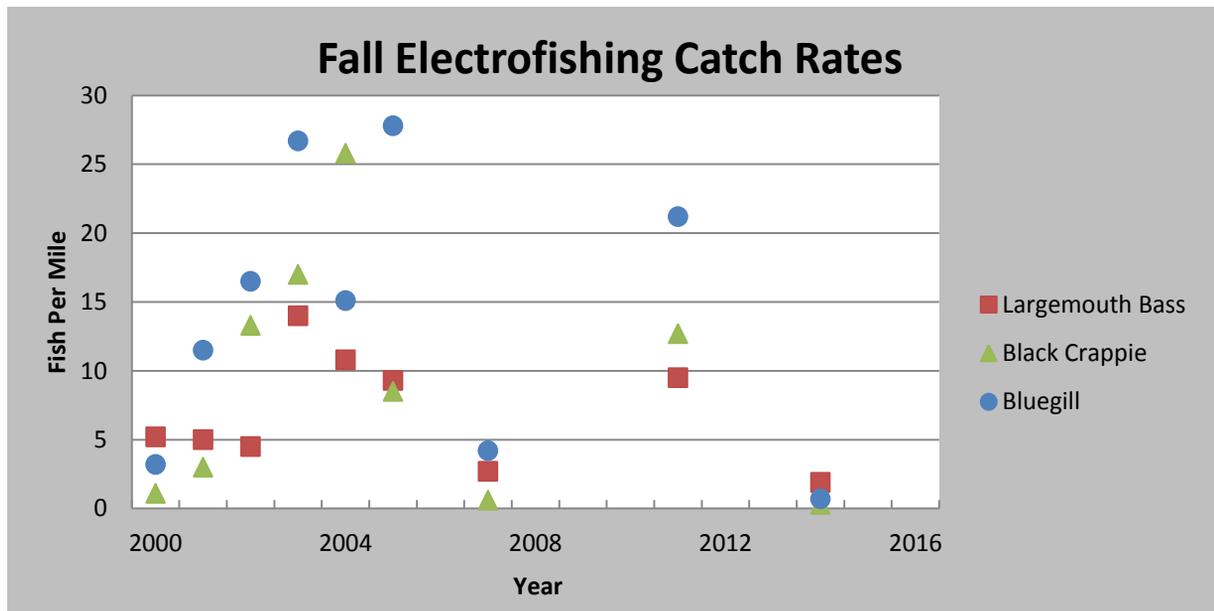
- Fish crickets or redworms near cover.

Catfish

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

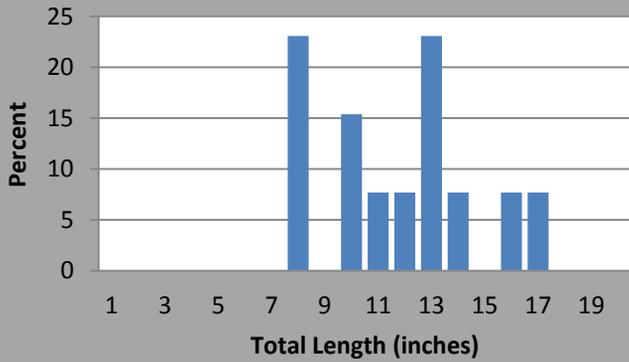
Below: Results from 2016 spring electrofishing surveys at Tunica Cutoff. Catch rates were extremely low; water levels were high and fish were scattered in thick shoreline vegetation.

Species	# of fish collected	% of sample	Average Length (inches)	Maximum Length (inches)	Average Weight (pounds)	Catch Rate – Adult fish (fish/mile)
Gizzard Shad	95	57.2	7.8	8.9	0.1	0.7
Bluegill	34	20.5	5.2	8.1	0.1	2.7
Longear Sunfish	13	7.8	4.2	5.4	0.1	1.3
Largemouth bass	13	7.8	12.2	17.3	1.2	1.4
Redear Sunfish	4	2.4	5.8	7.4	0.2	0.8
Silver Carp	2	1.2	18.6	28.8	4.8	0.2
Channel Catfish	2	1.2	23.3	25.2	4.4	0.2
Black Crappie	1	0.6	14.5	14.5	1.7	0.1
Threadfin Shad	1	0.6	3.3	3.3	0.0	0.1
White Bass	1	0.6	9.2	9.2	0.3	0.1

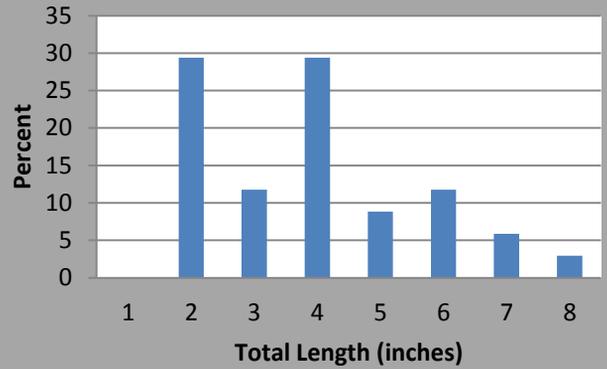


Above: Catch rates in fall electrofishing. Sport fish numbers rose after the weir was built in 2002. Numbers dropped after several years of low water, but rebounded after several years of higher water despite expansion of Asian carps. Sport fish numbers were low in 2014 after the 2011 flood and 2012 drought; adult fish declined from fishing and natural mortality, and reproduction did not replace those losses. Spring electrofishing is not directly comparable and is not shown here, but suggests better reproductive success since 2014.

Largemouth Bass



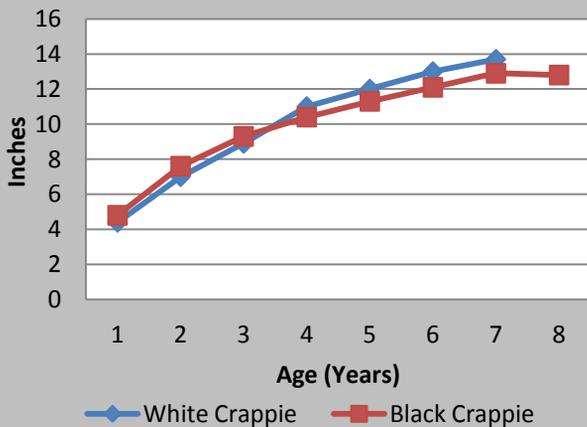
Bluegill



Above: Length distributions for Largemouth Bass and Bluegill collected by electrofishing, spring, 2016, Tunica Cutoff.

Below: Growth rates for White Crappie and Black Crappie collected by electrofishing, spring, 2015, Tunica Cutoff. There was a good crappie spawn in 2008, but reproduction was poor in 2011 and 2012.

Length at Age



Year	Age	# White Crappie	Average Length (inches)	# Black Crappie	Average Length (inches)
2014	1	5	4.6	1	4.6
2013	2	2	7.7	5	7.4
2012	3	0		0	
2011	4	0		1	12.5
2010	5	1	12.1	0	
2009	6	0		2	12.4
2008	7	2	13.7	3	13.1
2007	8	0		1	12.8

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 flowing water, top) was designed by MDWFP and COE biologists and COE hydrologists to allow passage of 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 level 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 as 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. Low water allows vegetation to colonize exposed flats which become important fish habitat when waters rise.. 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, call (901) 544-0408 (press 2) or check <http://www.srh.noaa.gov/lmrfc/?n=lmrfc-mississippiandohioriverforecast>

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.



Above: 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.