



## Fishing the Falls of the James

*Your Guide to Fishing the James River in Richmond*

A MIXTURE OF ROARING RAPIDS, DEEP POOLS, AND CALM FLAT water creates some excellent fishing and beautiful scenery on the James River within the city limits of Richmond. This brochure will help you locate ten popular points of access. It describes river conditions at those sites as well as the fish species usually found there. Additional information is provided about parking, bicycle access, and any special safety concerns. It is best to use this brochure in conjunction with a standard park map. At the end of this brochure is a list of lures and live bait most commonly used here as well as some comments on the natural history of fish likely to be caught.

### BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

- Be careful—in parts of the river the water is fast and turbulent with rocks that are slippery and sharp.
- Always wear old tennis shoes or special river shoes when wading—avoid open-toed sandals.
- Hip boots and waders are usually not recommended.
- It makes sense to wear a life jacket. Use of life jackets is mandatory when wading or in boats when the river exceeds 5 feet at the West-ham Gauge and the river is closed to recreation when it exceeds 9 feet.
- Boaters must have life jackets in their craft at all times.
- If the gauge is above 6 feet, fishing is generally poor in the rocky, fast, nontidal parts of the river (upstream of the 14th St. Bridge). Fishing remains reasonably good in the slow, flat, tidal water area below the Fall Line (downstream of the 14th St. Bridge) up 9 feet especially during the spring fish migration.
- Current river level information can be found on the Park website at [jamesriver-park.org](http://jamesriver-park.org).

## Huguenot Flatwater Park

Location: 8600 Riverside Drive,  $\frac{3}{10}$  a mile west of Huguenot Bridge (Rt. 146) near intersection of Riverside Dr. and Southampton Rd.



**Parking:** Day-light hours inside parking lot for 35 cars; night parking for 3 cars outside the gate for fishermen. (Leave a note on the dashboard.)

**Description:** Flat

water.  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles upstream to Boshier Dam; 1 mile downstream to Z-Dam (William Island). Shoreline fishing east of the bridge—especially at night at three sites just above Rattlesnake Creek (no rattlesnakes). One port-a-john in parking lot.

**River Access:** Hand-launch access steps for canoes and kayaks. No gas motors. Several shoreline fishing sites  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile downstream are especially popular on summer nights for catfish.

**Fishery:** Smallmouth bass at dams and rocky areas with moving water. Flathead and Channel Catfish and Sunfish in slower water with underwater structures like tresses and in sandy areas at night. Occasional Walleye (winter) and large Carp (summer) may be caught, but must be released immediately.



*Blue Catfish*

**Warning:** Beware of the hydraulics below the dams on both sides of William's Island. Several boaters have died at both sites, especially the one on the south channel with the fish passage. Do not attempt

to paddle the fish passage notch in the Z-dam. (It can be done, at certain river levels, by skilled paddlers in kayaks. It cannot be canoes or john boats.) Use the portage on William's Island.

**Bike Use:** Nice place to ride—scenic and flat—slow car traffic on Riverside Dr. allows easy connection to two other sections of the Park.

**Comments:** William's Island, downstream of Huguenot Flatwater, does not have good land-based fishing as there are no maintained trails except for the portage route. The main paddle route goes along the south channel (i.e. "river right"). And the large, deep pools for big Blue and Flathead Catfish are here just above the Pony Pasture Rapids. Water is deeper and slower on the north channel, but the portage there is much more difficult and the paddle route below the dam rocky and convoluted. It is, however, isolated and attractive in summer and fall.

## Riverside Meadow Greenspace (Z-Dam)

Location: 7200 Riverside Dr. about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile east of Huguenot Bridge or  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile west of Pony Pasture Rapids.

**Parking:** There is no parking. You must walk or bike to this site.

**Description:** Rapids below dam. Deep rocky pools



in the  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile of flatwater. No convenient boat access. (You must portage from above dam or paddle up from the Pony Pasture.)

**Fishery:** Smallmouth Bass below the dam and rocky areas of shoreline. Sunfish in sandy/gravelly areas. Flathead and Blue Catfish in deep pools and channels. Popular with flyfishermen as many sites have open area for back cast.

**Bike Use:** Best way to access this site since there is no parking for cars. No bike rack.

**Comments:** 100 feet from shore is a 20' wide notch in the dam. This allows migratory fish to move further up-

stream to spawn—striped bass, shad, river herring, and eels. Do not attempt to wade on the dam when the water exceeds ankle height and never attempt to step down into the notch itself! This site has no parking, trash cans, porta-john or drinking water!

## Pony Pasture Rapid Park

Location: 7200 Riverside Dr., 1½ miles east of Huguenot Bridge (Rt. 147), but popular access is from Forest Hill Ave. at Hathaway Rd.

Parking: Daylight parking for 150 cars inside parking lot. Nighttime parking for three cars at the Police Pullout overlooking the rapids. (Leave note on dashboard.)

Description: About 200 yards of rapids and riffles with rocky shoreline followed by ¾ mile of wooded shoreline. Good shoreline access via a network of trails. Easy wading and rock-hopping. (Good for kids in summer.) Hand-carry canoe / kayak access steps. Restrooms and drinking water. Very scenic with little sign of civilization, except in the summer when the site can be very crowded on weekends and the lot full by 11:00 am.

Because of parking limitations at many of these locations consider riding a GRTC bus, when available. For schedule and route information go to: [ridegrtc.com](http://ridegrtc.com).

Fishery: Smallmouth bass

and sunfish in the rocky areas. Very large catfish in the huge deep basin (clearly visible in summer) up stream of the rapids in isolated deep pools downstream beyond The Wetlands Park. Huge fish are an icon to this urban wilderness park! The rocky areas are popular with fly fishermen in the summer since there is much back cast space and easy wading.

Bike Use: Nice central location to bike sites for fishing; wooded trails to The Wetlands; paved road to Riverside Meadow and Huguenot Flatwa-

ter. Bike rack at “Police Overlook”.

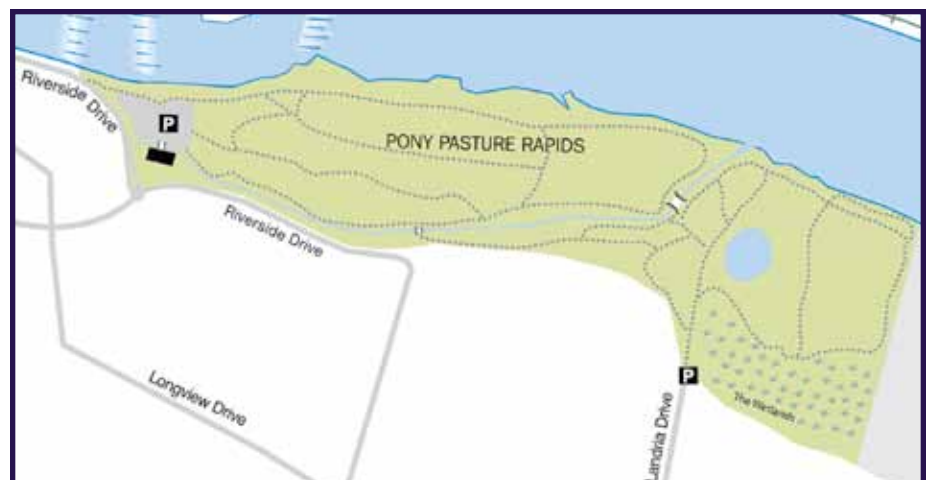
Comments: This is the put-in site for a popular three mile, beginner/intermediate whitewater boating route downstream to Reedy Creek. (There are several deep pools in the distant flatwater downstream. After them are many small rapids and riffles.) Rocks and riffles begin just before the Powhite Highway Bridge and continue for two miles past two more bridges down to the Reedy Creek take-out beside the park HQ. Canoes and kayaks can also be put in at the launch by the Park Kiosk. This area is heavily used by swimmers, paddlers and rock hoppers. The maze of trails also makes it a popular place for nature walks, jogging and bicycling. At times in the summer there are pockets of litter on some rocks. Please help pick up a piece or two.

## The Wetlands

*(east end of the Pony Pasture)*

Location: Northern end of Landria Dr. (Follow the directions to the Pony Pasture Rapids from Forest Hill Ave, but turn right at the curve with the large yellow and black traffic markers (Wallowa Dr.) Follow the small brown signs to Landria and The Wetlands.

Parking: Daylight parking for about 10 cars along the road; no parking lot. Description: ¼ mile walk through damp woods and a wet meadow to a wooded, sandy shoreline with one large, open, gently sloping section of the riverbank.



**Fishery:** One mile of flat-water with some deep holes holding Blue, Channel and Flathead catfish.

James River Park System is open during daylight hours only. Parking lot hours vary by location with some locations open only on weekends. Be aware that isolated cars have been subject to break-ins.

**Bike Use:** Wide gravel trail to river; narrow dirt trail along river and throughout woods and marsh. No bike racks.

**Comments:** This site is designed for use by disabled canoeist and kayakers. Others may use the site, but must portage their boats ¼ mile. The area is popular with bird watchers and dog walkers. Easy bicycling for families on wide dirt trails. When

other parking areas are full, this site usually has spaces. No port-a-john or drinking water.

### Main Area (Entrances at 43rd St., Reedy Creek, & 22nd St.)

**Directions:** Three entrance points along Riverside Dr. between the Boulevard and Lee Bridges, best reached by taking Forest Hill Ave. to 42nd St. and down to Riverside Dr. Numerous signs lead the way.

**Parking:** 43rd St. parking lot has space for 30 cars but is open on weekends only Memorial Day through Labor Day, walk down a set of stone stairs at any time to reach

several islands and a nice trail along a wooded river channel. In summer, there is also a large expanse of flat rock in the middle of the river.

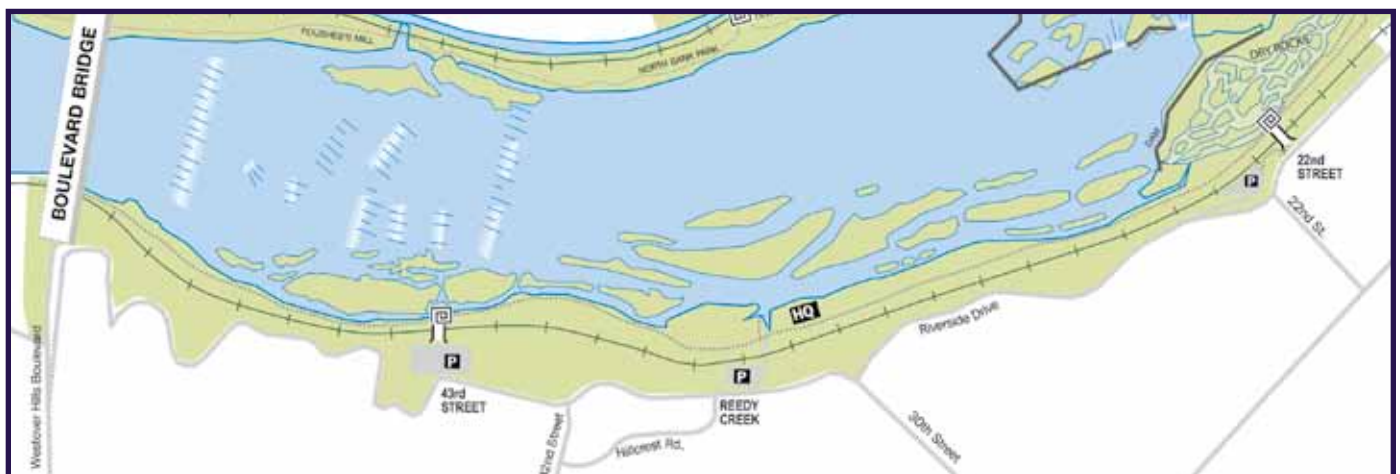
Reedy Creek, 4100 Riverside Dr., parking lot (15 cars) is open year round. This is the main canoe / kayak access site since there are no stairs. The park HQ is also nearby, but is rarely open except for special programs.



*Striped Bass*

22nd St., 2101 Riverside Dr. (45 cars) lot is open weekly Memorial Day through Labor Day. This is generally not considered a good fishing access route, since it enters a large area of dry rocks behind a low dam and is most popular with sunbathers and party types. It is possible, however, to reach an isolated and very scenic area of shallow, narrow, wooded channels at the western (far left) end of the rocks and damn known as the Goat Islands. This is a good summer escape for a parent and child wading for bream and small bass.

**Description:** Narrow, wooded islands and shallow, rocky channels. Riffles, rapids and pools. A broad, gravel trail parallels the shoreline. In the summer and fall it is popular to rockhop out to the deep main stem of the river via 42nd St Island or on the CSO pipe just west of the Boulevard Bridge and wade for larger fish. (During floods, there are also catfish at the mouth of Reedy Creek.)



**Fishery:** Small to medium sized Smallmouth Bass and Sunfish predominate with large fish in the deep rocky channels between 42nd St. Island and the Boulevard Bridge continuing up to the Atlantic–Coastline Railroad Bridge. Large catfish are in the deep pool located near shore just beyond the Boulevard Bridge.

**Bike Use:** The gravel maintenance road is a popular place to both bike and fish for bream. Enter at Reedy Creek and turn left. You can easily go  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile to the picnic shelter along the river and with a little effort, as far as the pool at the pipeline just beyond the Boulevard Bridge. Bike racks at Reedy Creek.

**Comments:** Reedy Creek is the takeout point for the three mile beginner / intermediate whitewater canoe trip from the Pony Pasture Rapids Park and is the kayak put-in for the large rapids at Belle Isle and The Pipeline. It is also the trailhead for the seven mile Buttermilk / Northbank Trail Loop popular with mountain bikers

and hikers. There are a changing room and port-a-johns at Reedy Creek. And water fountains at 42nd and Reedy Creek entrances.

## Belle Isle

**Location:** 1 Belle Isle, via the Belle Isle Pedestrian Bridge (under the Lee Bridge). This 65 acre island located under the Lee Bridge and can be reached by a suspension bridge from the north shore along Tredegar St. or by an access bridge east of the 22nd St. stair tower on the south shore.

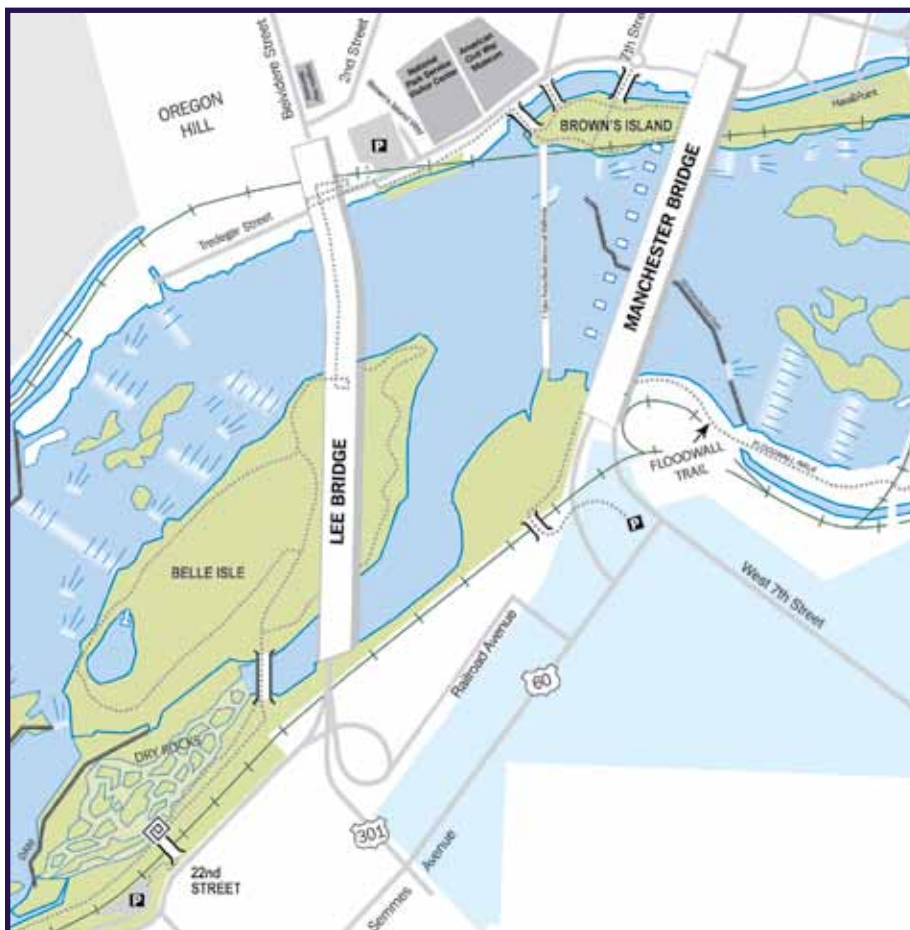
**Parking:** About 50 cars in the lot on Tredegar St., which opens at 9:00 am daily, and about half that on the side streets at the 22nd St. Entrance.

**Description:** Big rapids and deep water along the north shore of the island. Shallow rapids at the western end. Muddy, shallow, flat water at the east. Dry rocks on the south part. A quarry pond near the western part has a Wheelchair Accessible Fishing Dock (which can be out of service due to repairs) but the  $\frac{1}{2}$  miles access trail is dirt, so disabled users should bring a helper.

**Fishery:** Smallmouth bass, sunfish and channel catfish in the river. Largemouth Bass, Yellow Perch, Bluegill and Bullheads in the Quarry Pond.

**Bike Use:** This is a very popular biking destination, but only moderately productive for fishing—it is heavily used. The loop around the island is 1 mile. The hanging bridge access is  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile long.

**Comments:** A wide dirt trail passing broad, flat rocks and crashing white-water rapids makes this a very popular park for sunbathers, joggers, and photographers. There are also the ruins of a hydroelectric power plant and a steel factory that are interesting to visit. The island is heavily used on weekends and after work and after-noon, especially in Spring and early



Summer. Parking can be difficult. Fishing in the quarry pond is usually productive only in the early morning. Numerous port-a-johns in various locations. Drinking water



*Channel Catfish*

at the triangular brick storage building referred to as the Environmental Center is inconvenient and sometimes out of service. It is best to bring your own.

### **Brown's Island** (*access to the T. Tyler Potterfield Memorial Bridge*)

Location: On the north shore under the Manchester Bridge off Tredegar St. between 5th and 12th Sts.

Parking: Along 5th St. or at the Tredegar St. parking lot after 9:00 am.

Description: Fast water with large and small rapids. A rocky, dirt path leads down to the river behind



*White Perch*



*Alewife*

the bridge pier, beside the dumpster and storage trailer. Only accessible here when the river is below 5½ feet in summer and fall.

Fishery: Smallmouth Bass and Channel Catfish.

Bike Use: Bikes are not allowed on the grass. Bike racks available in Tredegar St. parking lot.

Comments: At the western end of the island provides access to the T. Tyler Potterfield Bridge, a pedestrian and cycling bridge. This bridge is the only section of the Park that is open 24/7. This is a good place to see shad and river herring migrating in the springtime but there is no fishing allowed from the bridge.

At the eastern end, under the Manchester Bridge, there is a short, steep trail that leads to the river. It follows the shore line to a large CSO pipe with a maintenance walkway on top. Known as "The Pipeline," it is very scenic and

has close up views of rapids. A popular area to dip for shad and herring in the Spring, it leads out to the flood-wall near 13th St.

There is a bike racks and a water fountain at the Tredegar parking lot and a water hose bib (for filling water bottles) on the side of the kiosk on Brown's Island.

### **Mayo Bridge** (*also called the 14th St. Bridge or Hull St. Bridge*)

Location: Where Hull St. (Rt. 360) crosses the river.

Parking: South end of the bridge, about 10 spaces.

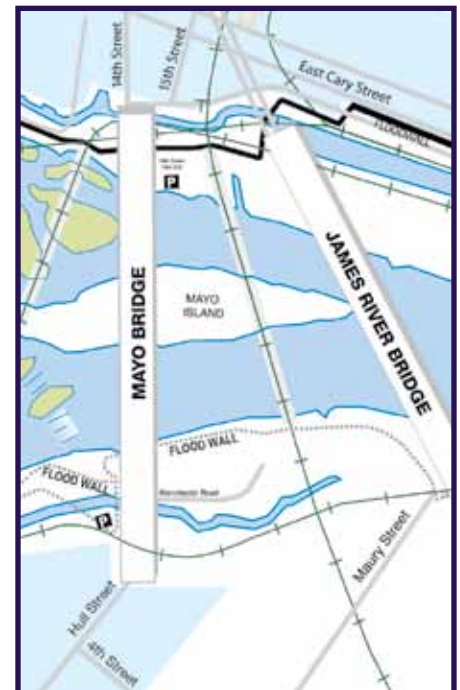
Description:

This is the end of the Fall Line where the rapids meet the flat, tidal waters. It is heavily

fished during the springtime fish migration. Fishing occurs on the south western shoreline (rapids,) along the eastern side of the bridge (beginning of the flatwater,) and by boat throughout the wide, south channel. Not much ambience, but highly productive in season.

Fishery: White Perch and Channel Catfish from the bridge. American and Hickory Shad, Alewife, and Blueback Herring, and White Perch all in the rapids above the bridge and in the swift flatwater below. Striped Bass in several deep trenches located about midway down the side of Mayo Island reached by boats. (Note: there is not much else going on during the rest of the year except for the occasional Channel Catfish.)

Bike Use: Traffic can be fast and heavy on the bridge,



especially on weekdays. This is not a place for kids or beginners. (Ride on the bridge sidewalk as there is no shoulder.) Use a bike lock and keep your bike in view.

Comments: When the fish are running this is a crowded site. Flyfish White Darts for shad, bloodworms for white perch, and minnows or Rapellas for Striped Bass. See special regulations that change yearly. (At this time, all White Shad must be released and there is a size restriction and 2 fish limit on Striped Bass.) Motor boats are launched at Ancarrow's Landing at the east end of Maury Street. Night fishing is permitted. Numerous trash cans, but no port-a-johns or drinking water.

## Great Shiplock Park

Location: 2803 Dock St.

Parking: lot for 15 cars.

Description: Entrance gates to a historic canal plus wooded, muddy shoreline.

Fishery: Channel and Blue Catfish year round plus White Perch and Striped Bass in the spring. The river side mouth of the canal is often fished in the warm months. Fishing in the canal itself, or in the canal lock, is generally poor,

since the area is often drained for maintenance. There is a port-a-john but no drinking water.

Bike Use: The Virginia Capital Trail runs right beside the park and there are bike racks by the trail.

## Ancarrow's Landing

*(Manchester Docks)*

Location: 200 Branders St., eastern end of Maury St. Best reached by taking the Maury St. Exit from I-95, but also reached from 3rd St. off of Hull St.



Parking: Space for over 100 cars and trailers.

Description: Motor boat ramp with shoreline fishing wooded access downstream and grassy, open areas with a historic stone dock upstream. This park is popular on weekends throughout the year, but is crowded April through June with boaters at the ramp and family groups along the historic stone dock and adjacent grassy areas.

Fishery: Channel and Blue Catfish plus occasional Sunfish and Largemouth Bass year round; White Perch, Shad, and occasional Striped Bass in the Spring. Bike Use: It's a long ride from anywhere.

Comments: Port-a-johns and many trash cans, but no drinking water. This area is often fished at night as well as in the day. This is also the terminus of the historic Richmond's Slave Trail, the route that American slaves walked on their way from the slave jails in the City to the ships sailing to the slave markets in Charlestown and New Orleans. (There are several interpretive signs.)

## Comments About Fish

Smallmouth Bass: The rocky Fall Line area of the James River is managed as a citation fishery for these "Bronzebacks." A "slot limit" prohibits the possession of fish



between 14 and 22 inches. That means that although there are many fish in the 12” range, you must throw back anything less than 22” (about 5½ lbs) and you can only keep one. Of course, most people let even the biggest fish live since they are good breeders and such a special resource for an urban environment. To get a citation cer-

**Catching a huge fish is fun but don't eat them! They bio-accumulate nerve damaging chemicals like PCB's—that they acquire from the tidal section of the river below Richmond where they feed in the winter— and mercury that falls throughout the watershed from coalburning power plants. These chemicals can be harmful to human health.**

**For fish consumption advisories please check the Va. Department of Health website at [www.vdh.virginia.gov](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov)**

tificated, contact DGIF ([www.dgif.state.va.us](http://www.dgif.state.va.us)) with an accurate measurement.

Fish for them in the late spring and early summer in sandy shallows between islands where they make their nests. Later in the season, fish out in the main stem of the river in the eddies around the boulders and in swift moving water. In winter, the biggest fish rest in

the deepest holes in hard to reach areas out the middle of the river. Excellent lures are imitation minnows, spinners, rubber worms and plastic grubs. Fly fishermen generally use rods from 5 weight to 7 weight, with weightforward floating fly line and 9' tapered leaders. #2 and #4 poppers are popular early and late in the day; streamer patterns during the midday.

Sunfish: There are several species Redbreasted (most common,) Redeared, Green, Blue gill, and Pumpkinseed, but together there are referred to as “Bream.” Most are from 3 to 5.”

Fish for them in slow moving water near boulders and sunken tree limbs.

Excellent lures are small spinners and plastic grubs. Live bait is usually worms, but grass hoppers are great on the

surface. Fly fishermen use various small bugs.

Channel Catfish: The most common catfish in the river and the best to eat. They are silvery-white with a few black speckles, have a moderately forked tail, a rounded anal fin, and look relatively long and narrow. Fish for them at night almost anywhere along the shoreline. In the daytime, try the holes below the rapids. Excellent baits at night included chicken livers and stink bait (use a small mesh bag to keep these baits on the hook.) In the day time, try cut bait, minnow, or night crawlers.

Blue Catfish: These get to be the largest of the catfish—over 50 lbs. They are lightly grey-blue in color, have a deeply forked tail, a fairly straight anal fin, a comparatively small mouth, and a more bulky body.

They live in the deepest holes during the day, but can also be found in quite shallow, sandy waters near shore at dawn and dusk. On a clear day, you can sometimes see schools of fish cruising around deep holes. The baits, small and medium sized fish, are the same as for Channel Catfish. For huge fish, use circle hook placed through the tail of a sunfish placed a foot off the bottom in a deep hole. Set the hook slowly after the 3rd or 4th tug. The creel limit is one fish over 32 inches.

Flathead Catfish: This is our most strangely shaped catfish—it has a wide, flat head, a huge mouth facing straight ahead and a comparatively short, stubby body with a square tail. This is a predatory fish. Use sunfish hook through the tail and fished just off the bottom. These are caught usually in the day in fairly deep pools. 15 to 25 pound fish are common. Fly-fishermen now catch these on large, braided, Barracuda Flies fished deep.

Striped Bass: The migratory fish is most common in the Spring, but also reappears for a

**Creel and length limits for all fish species are subject to change. To receive current information please contact the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries at [www.dgif.state.va.us/](http://www.dgif.state.va.us/) and the Virginia Marine Resources Commission at [www.mrc.state.va.us/](http://www.mrc.state.va.us/).**



few weeks in the Fall. By far the best area is the underwater basin in the center of the channel on the south side of Mayo Island between 14th St. Bridge down to the little railroad bridge near the end of the island. There is also a

Fishing Licenses can be purchased at any tackle shop or through Department of Game and Inland Fisheries website, [www.dgif.virginia.gov](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov).

hole just upstream of the bridge. These areas are best fished by boat, but some fishing is also done along the riprap shoreline beside the floodwall walk. Pay attention to the Special Regulations that change every year, they are strictly enforced. The preferred bait is cut herring fished deep on a rising tide about

½ way to full. Good lures are large crank baits fished at sunrise and sunset. Fly fishermen try streamers and large poppers.

Shad: Several varieties come into (and above) the rapids of Richmond to spawn. American (White) Shad are the target species for restoration, so it is illegal to keep any. Hickory Shad (and the nonmigratory Gizzard Shad) are sometimes kept for cut bait. They can be kept if caught downstream of the bridge, but not above, i.e. where the rapids begin. Don't keep any if you can't tell them apart! (There is usually an ID poster on display at both the 14th St. Bridge and the Ancarrow's Landing Park site.) The best fishing is at the toe of the rapids just upstream of the Mayo Bridge, especially along the south shore, but this is a no keep area. Popular lures are shad darts, spoons, and smaller spinners. Fly fishing has become a popular sport. Hooking 100 fish a day is now not uncommon. Fly-fishermen generally use 6 and 7 weight rods with 200 or 250 sinking fly line. Try bright colored flies on the 4 and #6 hooks.

White Perch: Also known as "Stiff Blacks," these fish come in huge schools to spawn under the eastern edge of

the Mayo Bridge. Fishermen catch buckets of them. The most productive bait is the rather expensive Bloodworm. You only need to use a little piece on each hook. The best fishing is off the bridge itself, but they can also be caught from shore at Ancarrow's or Shiplock Parks. This is a surefire place for a child to catch a fish, as is the stone dock at Ancarrow's.

Alewife and Blueback Herring: Can also be caught in the springtime at the toe of the rapids at the 14th Street Bridge with Goldie hooks, using "sabiki" rigs or by dip-netting (you'll need a special license for that.) Alewife arrive early in spring in large numbers, but by mid-April, the run switches to Blueback Herring which are less plentiful.

## Fishing Equipment

Lightweight spinning rod and reel (4 lb. test) for Smallmouth Bass and Sunfish; medium weight gear (8 lb. test) for medium Catfish, heavy gear (30-40 lb. test) for the really big Blue Cats.

Medium gear (8-12 lb line and a metal leader) for Striped Bass.

Lightweight fly fishing gear (8 to 8½ ft rod in weight 4 or 5 with weight forward floating line, and 7½' to 9' leader and #8 & #10 poppers and small nymph patterns) for Sunfish, same or slightly stronger with sinking line for Smallmouth Bass.

Medium-to-heavy weight 9' rod with 200 weight sinking line and 6 lb. leader for Shad.

Wear wading shoes and a life jacket. Hat and polarized sunglasses are very helpful in summer, plus sun block and insect repellent and a small light in case you come in late.

Tell someone approximately where you are going fishing and generally when you expect to be out. Always carry a park map with you. They are waterproof, accurate, and indestructible.



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