

# TomBIGbee Cats

BY JOHN N. FELSHER

Forming part of the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, the Tombigbee River originates in northeastern Mississippi and flows about 200 miles before merging with the Alabama River north of Mount Vernon to create the Mobile River.

Throughout the system, anglers can put the Big in TomBIGbee by targeting giant blue and flathead catfish. Some river monsters rival almost anything someone might challenge in the Gulf of Mexico. Both blue cats and flatheads can weigh more than 100 pounds.

Some of the best catfishing on the Tombigbee system occurs between the Mississippi line and Demopolis. Straddling the Alabama-Mississippi line, Aliceville Lake, also called Pickensville Lake, covers about 8,300 acres. Gainesville Lake spreads across 6,400 acres of Sumter County. Many associated creeks, cut-off channels, old oxbows and other tributaries create excellent habitat for enormous catfish.

Big blue cats frequently congregate at the mouths of tributaries waiting for the currents to bring breakfast to them. They also roam open waters looking for baitfish. Blue cats eat almost anything. They readily devour live fish, fish chunks, nightcrawlers, crawfish, cheese, shrimp, commercial baits, livers — just anything that gives off an odor or leaves an oily slick in the water. For big cats, use large baits.

“For big blue cats, I like a 1/2- to 3/4-pound chunk of skipjack,” recommended Phil King, a professional catfish angler. “A 30-pound catfish doesn’t have any problem eating a 3/4-pound bait. For bigger fish, my go-to bait would be the head section half of a skipjack. My second favorite bait would be a large shad. I use a double-snelled hook rig for blues. I put one hook through the skipjack’s mouth and tie it shut. I put the second hook farther down into the bait. A large fish usually just grabs the bait and takes it. Sometimes, a catfish just grabs the tail and I catch it on the second hook.”

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