

Trout

- 1) I am writing to express my opposition to the "slot" size limit in the proposal for size limit on trout in Jocassee from October 1 through May 31. The proposal states that during that time frame it will be unlawful to possess more than one trout over 20 inches. This will lead to an increase in attempted releases of larger fish and likewise increase the chance of mortality in large fish.

The SCDNR agrees that this proposed statute may lead to an increase in releases of fish as the angler catches larger fish. However, this practice is allowed only from October 1 through May 31 when water temperatures are colder and there is less likelihood of mortality due to catch and release.

- 2) I just want to let the DNR know that I have reviewed this information and I have no problem with about 98% of it, however the 2% I do have a problem with just about makes me want to tear up my fishing license and not buy another one. I just purchased a new boat and have recently developed a new found interest in fishing that I had lost over the last several years. Now, it discourages me to read that the DNR is considering changes to the limits fisherman are allowed to keep. Three trout on Jocassee....really? I have a hard enough enough time figuring out the trout as it is. I find comfort in knowing that when I do "figure them out" I can at least take home enough to provide my family of four with a good meal, at the current limit of five. If it lowered to three, then I'll have to freeze those three and wait to get some more and trout aren't as good frozen in my opinion. Leave this one alone, five is sufficient.

The trout fishery in Lake Jocassee is a put/grow/take fishery. That is, the SCDNR stocks the lake with trout and they grow utilizing the forage base in the lake. The trout do not spawn in this lake, so the population is dependent on both SCDNR stocking and the forage base. Fishing pressure on this lake has increased, resulting in fewer and smaller trout. Therefore, SCDNR proposed a reduction in the creel for trout in Lake Jocassee to be more protective of this fishery.

Historically, Lake Jocassee has been managed as a trophy fishery for trout. Increased efficiency of anglers has lead to increased exploitation of this trout fishery which has resulted in the trophy aspect greatly declining in recent years. The average trout harvested from Lake Jocassee weighs over three pounds.

- 3) I am also an avid trout fisherman and have been for the last 15 years. I am glad to see some additional regulations but I am afraid that you may be adding too many at one time for me to digest. I do practice catch and release as well as catch and eat. Is the proposed limit of 5 fish realistic? I only fish 4-5 times per year for trout and would like to bring home a mess of fish whenever possible. A seven fish limit seems more reasonable that cutting the limit in half.

Based on data collected by the SCDNR, reducing the creel limit to five trout (three on Lake Jocassee) would be most protective of this fishery.

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Specifically, South Carolina trout anglers currently expend over 100,000 angler trips each year targeting stocked trout. The SCDNR is only able to produce and stock 300,000 catchable trout each year (i.e., three fish per angler trip if perfectly allocated). Creel studies show that recently stocked trout are quickly fished down after stocking events and allocation among all anglers is sub-par. This 5 fish limit seeks to improve allocation of trout caught.

- 4) I do support the reduction in creel limit from 5 to 3. The reduction in creel will be more than sufficient to protect larger numbers of trout as well as trout in the larger size bracket. Also, a split "season" will only lead to confusion for those who do not frequent the lake on a regular basis. It is my opinion that all regulations remain the same with the exception of lowering the creel from 5 to 3.

The reason for the different statutes proposed during the summer months in Lake Jocassee is to address the potential for increased mortality due to catch and release of trout in the warmer summer months. For additional information, please see the response to Question #1, above.

- 5) How about the previous year round regulations of single hook, artificial only, catch and release on the Middle Saluda, section extending from the park gate downstream to Hugh Smith Bridge?

The stream section referred to in the question is a privately-owned segment that the SCDNR leases for public access. Regulations for this segment will remain as it is to allow flexibility in case the status of the lease changes.

- 6) My only comment concerns treble hooks and trout. I am against treble hook use in trout waters. I understand that the data that the DNR used shows no demonstrable difference in mortality rates as a science based reason for regulations in preventing treble hook use. However, if we benchmark SC trout waters, against the same in say California, Colorado, Montana, North Carolina, etc, their use is open to question if SC hopes to develop a nationally or regionally recognized trout fishery.

Comment acknowledged.

- 7) I am completely in favor of the proposed changes to the state's trout catch and release regulations. A trout is too important a resource to be caught and killed, when it could be caught and enjoyed many times using catch and release. I think there will be problems enforcing the regulations, if they are adopted. We've already seen lots of people keeping trout on the delayed harvest section of the Chattooga River. I guess a lot of South Carolina fishermen think fishing is for killing not catching.

Comment acknowledged.