

Proposed Changes in Fishing Regulations for 2016-2017

The following changes in the statewide fishing regulations are proposed by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and are offered for your comments, opinions or suggestions.

Trout

F1. Modify the lower boundary of Delayed Harvest Trout Waters on the Ararat River in Surry County, adding approximately 1.2 miles of Public Mountain Trout Waters. The designated reach will be the portion of the Ararat River adjacent to the Ararat River Greenway in Mount Airy.

Justification: The City of Mount Airy is lengthening the Ararat River Greenway. The proposed change will provide additional angling opportunities on the Ararat River under Delayed Harvest Trout Waters classification.

F2. Modify the lower boundary of Hatchery Supported Trout Waters on the East Prong Roaring River in Wilkes County, removing approximately 1.3 miles of Public Mountain Trout Waters. The designated reach will be from the Stone Mountain State Park lower boundary to the S.R. 1002 bridge.

Justification: The reach to be removed from Public Mountain Trout Waters is under private ownership. The proposed change will modify the designated reach to reflect the section accessible to the public and being stocked.

F3. Clarify that the portion of Three Top Creek located on Three Top Creek Game Land in Ashe County is classified as Hatchery Supported Trout Waters.

Justification: Three Top Creek is currently classified as Hatchery Supported Trout Waters except the portion on game land; however, the entire creek is stocked and accessible to the public. The proposed change will eliminate angler confusion.

F4. Clarify the upper boundary of Hatchery Supported Trout Waters on Savannah Creek in Jackson County. The designated reach will be from Shell Branch to Cagle Branch.

Justification: The current upper boundary of Hatchery Supported Trout Waters on Savannah Creek is listed as the S.R. 1300 bridge; however, S.R. 1300 runs alongside of the creek and crosses it multiple times. The proposed change will identify one geographically distinct boundary and will eliminate angler confusion.

Black Bass

F5. Establish an exception to the general statewide regulation for black bass in Lake Chatuge (Clay County) by increasing the daily creel limit from 5 fish to 10 fish in aggregate, decreasing the minimum size limit for Largemouth Bass from 14 inches except that two fish less than 14 inches can be retained in the daily creel to 12 inches with no exception, and removing the minimum size limit of 14 inches for Smallmouth and Spotted Bass.

Justification: Lake Chatuge is bisected by the North Carolina/Georgia State Line. There is a reciprocal fishing license agreement between the two states, but fishing regulations differ which unnecessarily complicates fishing on the lake. This proposal aligns black bass regulations on Lake Chatuge with the statewide regulations in Georgia. Georgia

Department of Natural Resources has traditionally taken the lead on fisheries management at Lake Chatuge in coordination with Commission staff. In the North Carolina portion of the lake, the statewide regulations for black bass currently apply by default.

F6. Establish an exception to the general statewide regulation for black bass in Lake Hampton (Yadkin County) by allowing no Largemouth Bass between 16 and 20 inches to be possessed. The daily creel limit will remain 5 fish, and the minimum size limit will remain 14 inches except that two fish less than 14 inches can be retained in the daily creel.

Justification: Lake Hampton opened to fishing in fall 2014, and since that time fishing pressure has been extremely high. Yadkin County staff has observed episodic harvest of larger Largemouth Bass from the lake. The proposed change will protect Largemouth Bass from overharvest and maintain a quality fishery in Lake Hampton.

F7. Modify the exception to the general statewide regulation for black bass in the New River in Alleghany County downstream of Fields Dam (Grayson County, Virginia) by increasing the slot limit of 14 to 20 inches with only one fish greater than 20 inches to a slot limit of 14 to 22 inches with only one fish greater than 22 inches. The daily creel limit will remain 5 fish.

Justification: The proposed change will synchronize the black bass size limit in the North Carolina portion of the New River downstream of Fields Dam with the size limit implemented by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries on January 1, 2015 for the Virginia portion of the river. A majority of the river downstream of Fields Dam is located in Virginia, and only a few short sections loop back into North Carolina. There is a reciprocal fishing license agreement between the two states for this reach of the New River. This proposal will eliminate confusion for anglers fishing the interstate reach.

Crappie

F8. Establish an exception to the general statewide regulation for crappie in Lake Chatuge (Clay County) by implementing 30-fish daily creel limit. There is no minimum size limit.

Justification: Lake Chatuge is bisected by the North Carolina/Georgia State Line. There is a reciprocal fishing license agreement between the two states, but fishing regulations differ which unnecessarily complicates fishing on the lake. This proposal aligns crappie regulations on Lake Chatuge with the statewide regulations in Georgia. Georgia Department of Natural Resources has traditionally taken the lead on fisheries management at Lake Chatuge in coordination with Commission staff. In the North Carolina portion of the lake, the statewide regulations for crappie currently apply by default.

F9. Establish an exception to the general statewide regulation for crappie in Lake Hampton (Yadkin County) by implementing an 8-inch minimum size limit and a 20-fish daily creel limit.

Justification: Lake Hampton opened to fishing in fall 2014, and since that time fishing pressure has been extremely high. Crappie anglers are generally harvest-oriented. The proposed size and creel limits will restrict angler harvest of smaller crappie to help maintain a quality fishery in Lake Hampton.

Striped Bass and Bodie Bass (Hybrid Striped Bass)

F10. Establish an exception to the general statewide regulation for Striped Bass and Bodie Bass in Lake Chatuge (Clay County) by increasing the daily creel limit from four fish to 15 fish in aggregate, removing the minimum size limit of 20 inches, and allowing only two fish greater than 22 inches to be retained.

Justification: Lake Chatuge is bisected by the North Carolina/Georgia State Line. There is a reciprocal fishing license agreement between the two states, but fishing regulations differ which unnecessarily complicates fishing on the lake. This proposal aligns Hybrid Striped Bass regulations on Lake Chatuge with the statewide regulations in Georgia. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources, with the support of the Commission, has been stocking Hybrid Striped Bass in Lake Chatuge since 2010. This management action has been successful in creating a Hybrid Striped Bass fishery. In the North Carolina portion of the lake, the statewide regulations for Hybrid Striped Bass currently apply by default.

White Perch

F11. Prohibit transport, possession or release of live White Perch in waters in and west of Haywood, Buncombe, and Rutherford counties.

Justification: Popular fisheries for White Bass, crappie, and Walleye are becoming increasingly impaired in reservoirs where White Perch have become established. Delaying the introduction of White Perch into additional reservoirs in western North Carolina will help protect these sport fisheries in those reservoirs. The use of Haywood, Buncombe, and Rutherford counties as a boundary will protect all reservoirs of the greater Tennessee River Valley in western North Carolina as well as those of the upper Broad River Basin.

Blue Catfish

F12. Establish an exception to the general statewide regulation for Blue Catfish in Lake Tillery, Lake Wylie, and Mountain Island Reservoir by allowing only one fish greater than 32 inches to be possessed in the daily creel.

Justification: Interest in catfish angling is growing rapidly, and anglers seeking large catfish target the Blue Catfish populations in Lake Tillery, Lake Wylie, and Mountain Island Reservoir. Commission data indicate that Blue Catfish greater than 32 inches are rare in these populations and that it takes on average between 12 and 20 years for Blue Catfish to reach this size. The proposed size limit will restrict harvest of large Blue Catfish to help maintain quality fisheries in these reservoirs. Harvest of fish less than 32 inches remains unrestricted.

Atlantic Sturgeon

F13. Designate Atlantic Sturgeon as State Endangered when found in inland fishing waters and remove Atlantic Sturgeon from the State Special Concern list. The scientific name of Atlantic Sturgeon will be updated to match currently accepted nomenclature.

Justification: The proposed change fulfills a statutory requirement and will not alter the restrictions already required by the endangered species listing under the Endangered Species Act. Pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 113-334, all federally-listed animals in North

Carolina shall have the same state designations as their federal status. Atlantic Sturgeon is designated as Endangered by NOAA Fisheries.

Equipment

F14. Add dip nets when used in conjunction with a licensed hand-crank electrofisher where authorized by local law to the list of equipment that can be used to take nongame fish for bait or personal consumption in inland fishing waters with an inland fishing license.

Justification: During the 2013-2014 legislative session, SL 2013-283 established a single Special Device License (resident and nonresident) required to take nongame fish with a special fishing device authorized by the rules of the Commission for use in specified waters and during designated seasons. The fees for the new license were set at \$75 for residents and \$500 for nonresidents. The new license and fees became effective August 1, 2014. This change significantly increased the costs for individuals who have traditionally fished certain special fishing devices recreationally under a Noncommercial Special Device License.

Hand-crank electrofishing is primarily a social activity with one hand-crank electrofisher used and multiple individuals dipping stunned catfish and other nongame fish. The individuals dipping are often on one or more additional boats. The use of hand-crank electrofishers is currently authorized July 1 – March 1 in the Cape Fear River between Locks and Dams 1 and 3 (Bladen County), Black River downstream of NC 1105 bridge to its mouth (Sampson, Pender, and Bladen counties), Lumber River (Columbus County), and Waccamaw River (Columbus County).

The operator of a hand-crank electrofisher would still be required to have a Special Device License under this proposal and remain restricted to the established seasons and waters. However, individuals dipping the stunned nongame fish would only be required to have an inland fishing license. Given the uniqueness of the device and approach, the number of operating hand-crank electrofishers is thought to be minimal and self-limiting.

The fish harvested under the bait or personal consumption provision cannot be sold. The use of a dip net in conjunction with a licensed hand-crank electrofisher to harvest nongame fish for the purpose of sale would require a Special Device License.