Fish hatchery, lakes streams are an angler's dream



TRAVEL

KEN SLOAN

Fishing is a major component of our local tourism industry. We have four lakes, multiple rivers, more than 15 species of fish, five state records, one world record and a fish hatchery that keeps our waters stocked full of trophy trout year round.

Since trout are cold water fish, now is the time to wet your hook.

The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (DNR) runs the Walhalla Fish Hatchery (www.hatcheries.dnr.sc.gov/walhalla/index.html). They produce rainbow, brown and brook trout. When the fish reach 9 inches-to-12 inches they are released in waterways that include Lake Jocassee, the Eastatoe, Chauga and Chattooga rivers.

Approximately 500,000 fish are released every year. As a result, we have world class fishery just waiting for you to try your luck.

For a truly fascinating day trip, drive out to the hatchery for a tour of the facility where you can see every stage of production from the egg to the catchable fish. You can also see some "lunkers" up to 15 pounds that they keep on hand just for your viewing pleasure.

While you are there, you can try your hand at trout fishing on the bordering stream. Just make sure you have a valid fishing license and follow the rules (www.dnr.sc.gov/regulations.html).

If you have never been fishing, but want to learn how, I highly recommend chartering a local fishing guide. For fly fishing, a great place to start is the Chattooga River Fly Shop (www.chatoogariverflyshop.com) in Mountain Rest on Hwy. 28.

Karl Ekberg, the owner, is an expert fly fisherman who ties his own flies right there in the shop – and sells them, too. You can also check out the Chattooga Whitewater Shop in Long Creek on Hwy. 76 (www.chattoogawhitewatershop.com). Both have everything you need to get started including some great guides and hands-on instruction.

As for Lake Jocassee, if you don't have a boat, a guide is mandatory and there are several to choose from on our website at (www.SC-MountainLakes.com). I recently caught a 3-pound Brown Trout with local guide Russ Reynolds (www.JocasseeFishing.com) who has been guiding on the lake for more than 20 years. Give him a call.

So, get outdoors, keep the lines tight, hang on, have fun and remember this – even if you don't catch a fish, a bad day of fishing always beats a great day at work.

KEN SLOAN, is president and CEO of the Mountain Lakes Convention and Visitors Bureau.