

Outdoors: Delayed harvest trout season opens Sunday

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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Beginning Sunday, sections of the Chattooga, Chauga and Eastatoe rivers will go strictly catch-and-release until the spring.

These areas, known as delayed harvest areas, offer trout fishermen a sporting-only chance to catch higher concentrations of hatchery-stocked brown, rainbow and brook trout where all fish caught must be released.

Chattooga River Fly Shop owner Karl Ekberg said both beginner and expert fly-casters alike have been looking forward to Sunday.

"The delayed harvest areas of our local streams provide more than ample opportunity for anglers to catch fish," said Ekberg, who offers hands-on guided fly fishing trips from his shop on S.C. Highway 28 in Mountain Rest. "They become a very popu-

lar place to fish because the state stocks the area pretty heavily at the beginning of the season."

Many trout anglers feared for the worst from the onslaught of rain that the area has received during October, but fly shop manager Karen Maddox said there has only been one day the rivers were unfishable.

"We had one day last week that blew the rivers out from the rain," said Maddox, referring to both the Chattooga and the Chauga. "But they recovered the next day, and the fishing has been really good. A lot of anglers are looking forward to getting into the delayed harvest areas this year because we have good water."

During the past week, hatchery trout have been released on the Big Eastatoe, Chauga, Brasstown Creek, South Saluda, and Chattooga rivers.

The Upstate's delayed harvest



COURTESY CHATTOOGA RIVER FLY SHOP

Sunday will kick off delayed harvest regulations in several Upstate trout waters. SCDNR will heavily stock these areas, but it's strictly catch-and-release for the abundant trout on offer.

areas include from the Highway 28 bridge on the Chattooga River upstream for 2.1 miles, from the Cassidy Bridge upstream for nearly 3 miles on the Chauga River and from the backwaters of Lake Keowee upstream to Roy Jones Road on the Eastatoe River in Pickens County. The

areas are well marked with yellow signage, classifying them as delayed harvest, meaning anglers must practice catch-and-release of all fish until May 1. Concurrently, the SCDNR will use helicopters to heavily stock these sections so that anglers will have plenty of fish to catch.

Rules for the delayed harvest include using single-hook baits made only from artificial materials. No corn, worms or synthetic live baits are allowed, but anglers are free to use either fly-casting or spin-casting tackle to fish with.

South Carolina embraced more areas as delayed harvest after seeing the practice gain popularity in neighboring trout-stream destination states such as Tennessee and North Carolina. The movement gained further momentum when several area trout and fly-fishing clubs put in requests to have areas sanctioned.

"Delayed harvest started as an experiment in the early 2000s on the Chattooga River on a two-mile section of river," Region 1 Fisheries biologist Dan Rankin said. "It was so popular that the State Legislature decided to add (to it)."

PHILLIP GENTRY is the host of "Upstate Outdoors," broadcast from noon to 2 p.m. Saturdays on 106.3 WORD FM. This week's guest on the show will be Jay A'hern, owner of the fishing report website SCFishingReport.com. Contact Gentry at pgentry6@bellsouth.net.