

Tom Higgins fishing forecast

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Where are the most promising places for anglers to test any fishing tackle they might receive as gifts this weekend?

There are plenty of options:

Lakes Norman and Wylie in the Piedmont, Fontana Lake in the mountains, Santee-Cooper Reservoir in the S.C. Lowcountry, offshore of all coastal ports for big wahoo and the salty backwaters for reds or spottails.

LAKE NORMAN: Excellent for big white perch, with spotted bass and stripers mixed in, 40-50 feet deep at the mouths of the major creek arms on live baits. Plentiful blue catfish 15-25 feet deep in the creeks and coves on cut baits. Scattered largemouth and spotted bass on shakey head warty artificial worms and spinnerbaits cast to the shoreline and on spoons jiggged over long points and around humps.

LAKE WYLIE: Crappie in the Plant Allen hot hole and nearby waters on minnows and Berkeley Bait's white Crappie Nibbles. Some anglers are using the two baits in combination, tipping their hooks with minnows.

Schooling largemouth feeding on the surface in the main body of the reservoir. Blue and channel catfish on cut baits.

MOUNTAIN ISLAND LAKE: White bass continue to provide action in the Riverbend hot hole. Good for crappie and white perch.

CANE CREEK PARK LAKE: Crappie on minnows.

HIGH ROCK, TUCKERTOWN, BADIN, TILLERY AND BLEWETT FALLS: Crappie on the Yadkin-Pee Dee River reservoirs on minnows and Kalin jigs in acid rain color pattern. Some anglers reportedly are buying 20 dozen minnows and packets of the jigs per trip. Badin, Tillery and Blewett Falls are producing especially well. Good catches of white perch also are being taken at Badin and Tillery. Catfish in the Pee Dee below the U.S. 74 Bridge.

LAKES JAMES, HICKORY, RHODISS: Stripers at the upper end of Hickory on live baits. Crappie at Rhodiss on minnows and trolled jigs. Little activity at Lake James.

FONTANA LAKE: Excellent for smallmouth and spotted bass on Berkeley's Power Smelt lures worked on a one-eighth-ounce lead head 8-10 feet deep just off the shoreline. Limits of walleye 65 feet deep near the mouth of Forney's Creek on jiggged Ice Spoons.

LAKE WATEREE: Dandy action for catfish on drift-fished gizzard shad with some anglers reporting they boated 10 per hour. Good for crappie, some weighing 2 pounds, from Dutchman Creek to the main lake and then along the old river channel. They're hitting Fish Stalker jigs in "ugly green" and pearl color patterns.

LAKE MURRAY: Stripers in schools on the north side of the lake on bucktails, spoons. They also are hitting live baits fished 20 feet deep. Crappie up the Little River arm on minnows worked 10-15 feet deep. Fair catches of shellcrackers along the shoreline.

LAKE THURMOND: Very good for stripers, hybrids across the lake on umbrella rigs trolled 35 feet deep. Crappie 20-25 feet deep around brush on minnows. Plentiful white perch.

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SANTEE COOPER LAKES: Good for surface-schooling stripers in lakes Marion and Moultrie on bucktails and spoons cast to the jumps. The fish also are hitting shad and big shiners. Blue catfish are being caught shallow and deep on cut baits. Fair to good catches of crappie on jigs, minnows around deep cover.

LAKE HARTWELL: Improving for stripers, hybrids on umbrella rigs trolled 35 feet down. Crappie suspended 15-20 feet deep over 25-30 feet of water. Lots of white perch.

LAKE KEOWEE: Largemouth and spotted bass over the main lake points on a variety of lures.

LAKE JOCASSEE: Little activity.

OUTER BANKS: Manteo/Nags Head area: Little activity; Oregon Inlet: Limits of blackfin and yellowfin tuna offshore when sea conditions are favorable. Scattered stripers to 50 pounds; Hatteras Island: Fair for speckled trout, whiting in the hook at Cape Point, near Buxton. Some trout in Pamlico Sound from Avon to Hatteras Village. Exceptional for blackfin tuna and good for wahoo offshore of the village; Ocracoke Island: Little activity.

Morehead City area: Speckled trout in the North River, at an area called The Haystacks, Shackleford Banks and the Cale Lookout jetties. So many false albacore offshore they are a nuisance for anglers trolling for blackfin tuna and wahoo. Bluefin tuna reported between the Knuckle Buoy and the Shad Boat Buoy.

SOUTHEASTERN N.C. COAST: Big schools of reds in the backwaters at Sunset Beach. Large reds and trout at the Little River jetties. Wahoo and yellowfin tuna offshore.

S.C. COAST: Grand Strand: Wahoo offshore; Charleston area: Excellent for sheepshead to 10 pounds 8-20 feet deep around heavy structure on fiddler crabs, clams and oysters. Big schools of reds on the backwater flats during low tides on a variety of lures.

Beaufort area: Schooling reds on the flats during low tides on Gulp! lures and live shrimp. During high tides the fish are around grass edges in the creeks.



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