

# Take your pick for Jocassee bass

BY PHILLIP GENTRY  
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All the focus this weekend is on bass fishing as the Bassmaster Elite tour makes another stop at Lake Hartwell. The tournament is a regular tour stop, unlike the Bassmaster Classics that were held on the lake in 2015 and 2018.

If bass fishing is more your thing over bass watching, you might want to head north and try your hand at one of South Carolina's truly trophy bass fisheries — Lake Jocassee.

Trophy largemouth bass are not the only black bass species that call Lake Jocassee home. Like largemouth bass, the smallmouth, redeye and spotted bass that live in the lake frequently grow to phenomenal sizes. In fact, Jocassee is home to all but the largemouth bass in terms of state-record fish.

"We've got some good redeye, smallmouth and spotted bass that swim in here, too," local bass fishing icon Monty McGuffin said. "Each fish has its subtle differences in how they relate to the lake. The smallmouth is probably the most unique. There's a few guys who have figured the smallies out, but most anglers catch smallmouth by accident fishing for largemouth bass.

"You can target smallmouth up against the rocks using small jigs, the float-and-fly pattern using a cork to suspend a jig right off the rocks, that sometimes works real well up here."

Biologists are at odds with how to manage the interaction between the native redeye bass that are home to Jocassee, and the spotted bass that



COURTESY OF MONTY MCGUFFIN

**Lake Jocassee holds the state record for several black bass species, including redeye, spotted and smallmouth.**

have found their way in from other lakes. Spotted bass interbreed with the redeyes and even some of the native shoal bass in the lake, causing a hybridized species that is threatening to wipe out pure strains of both the redeye and shoal bass.

"You'd have a hard time telling some of these fish apart. They've all mixed in together," McGuffin said. "Some will have the markings of a redeye, but then you look closer and it's really a spotted bass, and then the mouths of both of those fish are generally smaller, so a lot of people mistake them for a smallmouth."

From mid-April to the end of May, largemouth bass enter a spawning/bedding pattern on Lake Jocassee when water temperatures reach a steady 58 degrees. The best fishing occurs during new-moon and full-moon cycles. Bass will stage or hold on around visible structure in water depths from 2 to 25 feet. The clear water makes sight fishing

for bedding bass possible. Anglers should strive to maintain distance from the fish to avoid spooking and cast a variety of top-water, suspending or soft-plastic baits to the fish to elicit a strike.

The better fishing is widespread around the perimeter of the lake. Small cuts, coves and ledges with gradual slopes typically offer better fish-attracting structure than stream tributaries, which can be deeper and colder than preferred by the fish.

The Toxaway and Horsepasture rivers extend into North Carolina, and no reciprocal license agreement exists between the two states. The state line is marked, and you must have a North Carolina license to fish in those waters.

**PHILLIP GENTRY** is the host of the "Upstate Outdoors," broadcast from noon to 2 p.m. Saturdays on 106.3 WORD FM. This week's show will be broadcast live from Sunrift Adventures in Travelers Rest.