

## OUTDOORS

# Taking a look at the deep end of the trout pool

BY PHILLIP GENTRY  
FOR THE JOURNAL

Even without the fishing, the scenery around Lake Jocassee is breathtaking.

Overlooking the obvious signs that drought has stricken the water levels, even 28 feet below full pond is a drop in the bucket when you consider Jocassee's depths nearly touch 300 feet.

The landscape is a vertical one from the water, with towering trees that stretch upward from rocky slopes and sheer cliffs. With development along less than five percent of the shoreline — and that's only near the public access area — the surrounding Jocassee Gorges embody the Appalachian chain. When high clouds hang over the mountains and low fog hangs over the water, it's often hard to tell where the ground ends and the sky begins.

Below the surface is an equally if not oppositely other-worldly view. Scuba divers who frequent the clear waters describe sheer rock faces the size of buildings and boulders the size of dump trucks scattered along the lake's floor. Even deeper within Jocassee's pools are standing forests of trees

that reach into depths unseen.

According to biologists, for all the abundant life above and below the water, Jocassee is classified as a relatively infertile reservoir. The deep, cold water gives little purchase to decomposing matter on the lake floor, which bolsters nutrient loads in other lakes. The lake's tributaries also provide cold, clear water that flows pristinely but lacks in fertility.

However, to scores of rainbow and brown trout, Jocassee is home.

This time of year, trout are likely to be found at the upper levels of the water column, and most seasoned veteran trout anglers on Jocassee prefer to fish for trout by trolling baits on downriggers. A few anglers still catch trout by straight line trolling or using live baits fished straight down, usually at night. To consistently catch good fish year-round on Jocassee, the downrigger is a must-have piece of equipment

Trolling spoons and crankbaits behind downriggers from 40 feet to the surface is the best tactic during the spring months. Try the dam area early and late in the day and halfway back



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**Lake Jocassee is managed as a put, grow and take fishery for both rainbow and brown trout and has developed into a premier trophy trout fishery in South Carolina.**

into Three Rivers during the rest of the day. A lot of stocker-sized fish are caught, and keep in mind that the minimum size limit is 15 inches for any trout on Lake Jocassee.

Technically, Jocassee is managed by the state as a put, grow and take fishery, with emphasis on the "grow" before the trout are legal for harvest. Like Lake Jocassee, many South Carolina rivers and tailraces are capable of supporting trout habitats on a year-round basis but lack the conditions necessary for trout to

reproduce naturally.

To maintain these fisheries, anglers rely on stocking efforts by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources.

South Carolina raises all of its stocked trout at the Walhalla State Fish Hatchery located north of Walhalla. The hatchery was built in 1933 by the Civilian Conservation Corps and has supplied

trout to the area for more than 75 years.

The hatchery raises rainbow and brown trout and has recently begun a program to reintroduce the native southern brook trout to their original mountains stream home.

More than 500,000 trout are reared each year and stocked into South Carolina waters.

There are four public access ramps on Lake Jocassee, all within the perimeter of Devil's Fork State Park.

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.

A South Carolina freshwater fishing license is required for South Carolina waters. South Carolina does not require nor offer a trout stamp.

**PHILLIP GENTRY** is a freelance outdoor writer and the host of P & Boatgirl Outdoors. Download the podcast on Apple, Google Play, Spotify or at [pgandboatgirl.com](http://pgandboatgirl.com).