

OUTDOORS

Upstate rivers offer great catfishing opportunities

Since colonial days, the main arteries of South Carolina's river systems have been utilized for their abundance of catfish. As time progressed, the face of catfishing has changed, but the rivers remained; quiet, steady and home to an abundance of river cats.

The first few decades of the 1900s brought about substantial changes to many of South Carolina's river systems. The river's flowing waters were harnessed for their potential hydroelectric power as well as a ready water supply to build reservoirs. Long sections of river channels were now lake bottom, but the sections below and between these massive reservoirs remained, and South Carolina cats now had a choice of river and reservoir habitats.

Of lesser fame but equal caliber catfishing are several Upstate South Carolina rivers. A couple of these rivers, the Saluda and Broad rivers, offer tremendous catfishing for both size and numbers.

The Saluda River rises in the North Carolina/South Carolina mountains and after consolidating into one main river is impounded between Laurens, Greenwood and Newberry counties to form Lake Greenwood. The Saluda becomes riverine again for approximately 17 miles before impounding again at Lake Murray. This section is accessed by public ramps

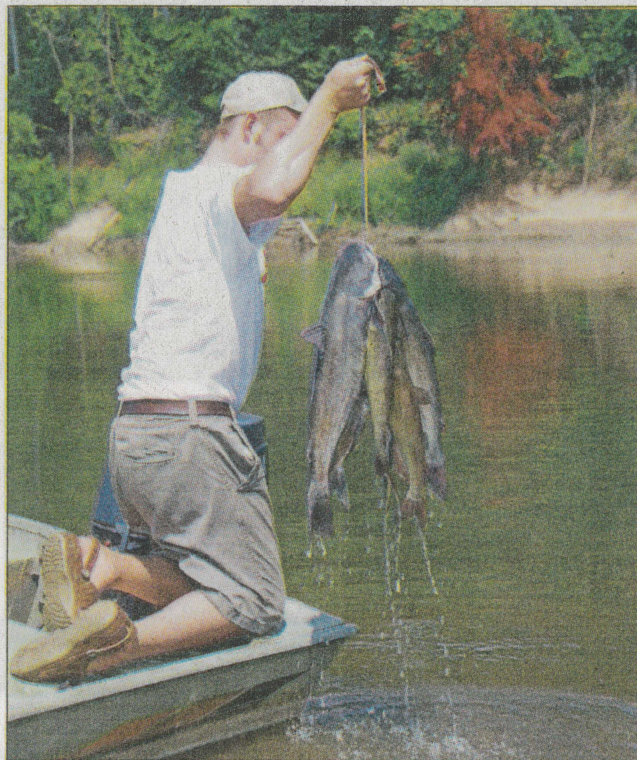


PHOTO BY PHILLIP GENTRY

While Upstate, South Carolina's rivers can produce big catfish, many anglers prefer catching good numbers of eating-size channel catfish.

located at the headwaters of Lake Murray, as well as a public ramp located at Higgins Bridge off S.C. Highway 121 west of Silverstreet.

Chris Gaddy is a State Farm agent who grew up and still lives in Chester, S.C. Gaddy spent much of his youth fishing with his father, splitting their fishing time between the Saluda and Congaree rivers. While striped bass were the more sought-after species, Gaddy soon realized that blue and channel cats were usually eager to bite, while the stripers could often be finicky.

The Saluda is heavily

influenced by water released from the Buzzards' Roost power plant at Lake Greenwood. Moving water means feeding time for catfish on the stretch of the Saluda between lakes Greenwood and Murray.

"If they're moving water, I like to slowly motor upriver toward Greenwood looking for deep holes and especially new snags that have eroded into the river from the bank. Once we find a spot, we'll put an anchor out the bow of the boat and throw Carolina-rigged baits down-

stream into the hole. The current makes it hard to fish more than 2-3 rods, and ideally you want to put out cut bait on the bottom, just upstream of the hole" Gaddy said.

Gaddy uses medium-heavy baitcast gear to place chunks of cut gizzard shad above the catfish lair. The current washes the scent back into the snag, and sooner or later the cats will move out to investigate. Fighting a hefty catfish against the current requires stout tackle and heavy line in the 20-30-pound test range.

The Broad River also has its origins in Western North Carolina and flows some 110 miles before merging with the Saluda near downtown Columbia to form the Congaree. Boat access to the Broad is difficult, which adds to its proclivity as a catfish destination.

The Broad River is rocky in nature, so care should be taken when navigating this river, especially during periods of low water. While rocks are a problem, they also provide some of the best structure on the Broad. Look for scour holes created by swirling currents. Placing live or cut baits in the eddies downstream of the rocks can produce some hefty blue and channel catfish.

PHILLIP GENTRY is a freelance outdoor writer who has been writing a wide variety of outdoor articles across the Southeast since 2004.