

Save the Toccoa River Trout Fishery

A Call for Your Support for Special Regulations for Trout Fishing on the Lower Toccoa River

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For many years there has been talk of special trout-fishing regulations on the Toccoa River tailwater (from Blue Ridge Dam to the Georgia-Tennessee state line) that would protect it as a viable and valuable recreational fishery. That effort was all but washed away, however, when the tailwater trout fishery was decimated in late 2010 by the high-volume water releases associated with mandated repairs and maintenance of Blue Ridge Dam and the powerhouse intake structure. On top of the massive loss, budget cuts and curtailment of trout stocking in the tailwater by the USFWS hatchery, even fewer trout will be stocked beginning this fall than have been stocked in the past. Indeed, money for massive stocking to restore the tailwater trout fishery is understandably scarce.



Because the local economy depends on tourism and the vitality of our natural and enhanced resources, the Toccoa River Watershed Coalition (TRWC) urges your support for the calling for changes in the trout-fishing regulations on the Toccoa River tailwater. The regulatory alternative protects the limited amount of stocked fish and allows the fish, and the fishery as a whole, to grow and is a cost-saving measure and an investment in the quality and diversity of the fishery.

On Sept. 1, the TRWC stepped up to support all public trout-fishing opportunities on the Toccoa tailwater when it engaged the GDNR and proposed a set of special fishing regulations that will play an important role in the recovery, improvement and conservation of the Toccoa River's tailwater trout fishery. The recommendation proposed to chief staff members of the GDNR/Wildlife Division includes:



Develop special fishing regulations on the lower Toccoa River (Blue Ridge Dam tailwater) to improve the quality of the fishing experience for all anglers in the most cost-effective manner:

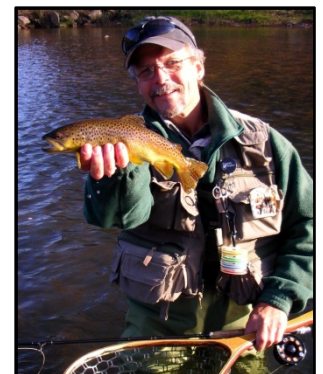
• **From Blue Ridge Dam to the Highway 515 Bridge (Tammen Park); and from the upstream boundary of Horseshoe Bend Park (McCaysville) to the Tennessee state line:**

- All legal methods of fishing allowed.
- No minimum-length limit.
- Eight trout daily creel limit per person.

And ...

• **From Highway 515 Bridge to the upstream boundary of Horseshoe Bend Park (McCaysville):**

- Artificial lures/flyes only with a single hook.
- All trout between 12 inches and 24 inches must be immediately released unharmed.
- Limit 4 fish less than 12 inches and 1 fish longer than 24 inches per day per person.



Recreational trout fishing plays a vital role in the economic and recreational development of the cities of Blue Ridge and McCaysville and the surrounding area of Fannin County. The Georgia state legislature recognized this role, with the support of local representative and Speaker of the House David Ralston, when it passed a resolution in 2010 that named Fannin County the "Trout Fishing Capital of Georgia."

As a result of the resolution, the public identity of Fannin County as a top trout-fishing destination in the Southeast was confirmed and is sought by anglers of all kinds. It is embraced by the community and was expected to boost the local economy, which is heavily based on tourism and recreation ... that is, until the prolonged high-volume and high-temperature release of water from Blue Ridge Dam reduced trout numbers in the riverway by nearly 85 percent (as measured by the GDNR in November 2010). Until that time, trout anglers of all kinds reveled in their opportunity to catch both rainbow and brown trout in great numbers and that frequently stretched

more than 20 inches and weighed well over 5 pounds. There were just two venues in Georgia where this kind of angling diversity was available. Today, there is one and *it is not* the Toccoa River.

Residents and business owners can – and must – get the support of our state fisheries officials to recover, improve and sustain the tailwater trout fishery. However, the GDNR has determined that further study is required to implement special fishing regulations that address critical fishery management objectives and angler opportunities for all kinds of fishing and fishermen. We no longer have the luxury of time, because effective September 1, 2011, we can no longer expect the support of the federal trout hatchery that has long provided trout stocking of the riverway. Also, it was learned in early summer 2011 that the Chattahoochee Forest National Trout Hatchery could soon close or scale back its operations, seriously affecting the amount of stocked trout into the Toccoa River. The resources to bring the river back are simply not available, and the TRWC is looking for alternative measures to help the river, including special regulations.



Contact Fannin County community leaders to help recover, improve and conserve the trout fishery of the Toccoa River tailwater.

Recently, public support for the special fishing regulations has gained the attention of local anglers, business owners and community leaders who can make the difference in bringing change and improvement to the tailwater trout fishery. In fact, it is public demand that will be the deciding factor that will see the tailwater trout fishery recover to support a diverse fishing community, while helping drive the recreation- and tourism-based economy of Fannin County. Special regulations not only maximize the use of limited fish stocked in the river, they are a significant “draw” in the increasingly competitive tourism market. It would be a shame to miss the opportunity to restore the tailwater to its former standing as a destination fishery. It would be a greater shame to lose the trout fishery of the Toccoa tailwater altogether.

It is almost as if the “perfect storm” has struck the area, and it is now necessary for local residents, community leaders and area merchants to move quickly to make it known they believe the restoration, improvement and conservation of the tailwater trout fishery will produce long-lasting and vital recreational and community value for Fannin County and, indeed, the state of Georgia. It’s easy to see the river’s importance to the community rests on satisfying fishing experiences for those who visit the county to rent cabins, eat at the many wonderful restaurants and shop at the merchants -- all of whom have combined to establish Blue Ridge, McCaysville and all of Fannin County among the state’s top tourism centers.

The recommendations of the Toccoa River Watershed Coalition to establish special fishing regulations is a good first step to help recover, improve and conserve the trout fishery on the lower Toccoa River where trout fishing and the associated recreational opportunities have played an extremely large role in the economic growth of the area. Water quality, public education, public access and natural-resource partnerships are critical for the continued success of the Toccoa River watershed and to ensure the Toccoa River tailwater returns to – and remains one of – the most highly regarded trout-fishing destinations in Georgia and the Southeast.

Please use the contact information shown below to engage your community leaders and voice your support for recovering, improving and conserving the trout fishery of the Toccoa River tailwater.

Thanks for your help ... and keep your line tight!
Toccoa River Watershed Coalition



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