



2007 Walleye Fishing Forecast

Upper New River

Walleye fishing in 2007 should be hot on the upper New River from Fries Dam downstream to Allisonia. The New River walleye fishery has received a lot of attention from the VDGIF over the last several years. In the late 1990's, a cooperative study between VDGIF and Virginia Tech identified a unique native strain of walleye in new River and since that time VDGIF biologists and hatcheries have developed an aggressive stocking program to "boost" the native strain of walleye. Stockings have been very successful and catch rates of walleye from sampling in 2006 are the best on record, and this should translate into increased catch rates for anglers.

Walleye fishing in the New River is best during the winter months and peaks from February through May during the walleye spawning season. Two main spawning grounds for river walleye are at Fosters Falls (in Fosters Falls Village, part of the New River Trail State Park) and the area upstream from there at Buck Dam. There are two boat ramps in the Village, both of which are best suited to shallow running jon boats. Below Buck Dam is a newly constructed parking lot and bank fishing access site at the end of State Route 636 in the Austinville area. Big fish are common and the current Virginia state record (15 pounds, 15 ounces) was caught from the upper New River. Small jigs tipped with minnows, plastic grubs, minnow type crankbaits, and live minnows are all effective walleye baits. Reports from anglers are that walleye are being caught and fishing is getting better. But remember, there is a 20-inch minimum size limit on walleye, so throw back the little ones and catch them again.

Philpott Reservoir

The 2007 fishing season for walleye at Philpott Reservoir should be very good. Philpott Reservoir has one of the better walleye populations in Virginia. This fishery does not contain many large fish but does support good numbers. Walleye reach 18 inches at about 2.5 years of age and most male walleye grow very slowly after reaching this size. Female walleye typically grow well for another few years with some achieving larger sizes. A new 18 inch minimum size limit for walleye was initiated on July 1, 2006.

Anglers who spend time learning walleye angling techniques, search for productive walleye areas of the lake, and fish in the late April-June period should have successful fishing trips. Catching a few walleye per outing should be considered good and catching a limit of five walleye, a very good trip. There should be fewer smaller fish this year due to poor survival of walleye stocked in 2005. However, the good news is the bulk of the population is in the 18-20 inch size range. Approximately 15% of the legal size walleye (18 inches) are over 22 inches and about 5% of the population is over 24 inches. Occasionally walleye are caught in the 6-8 pound range.

Leesville Reservoir

The 2007 fishing season for walleye at Leesville Reservoir should be good. This fishery supports large fish and has also maintained good overall numbers of walleye for several years. The bulk of the walleye population is in the 18-19 inch size range; however, there are walleye up to 24 inches in length. Occasionally walleye in this reservoir exceed eight pounds, but most fish are in the 5-6 pound range. Walleye reach 18 inches at about 2 years of age.

The most productive walleye fishing is typically between Leesville Dam and mile marker 6. Night fishing in May and June with floating or shallow running plugs cast to the shoreline should not be overlooked. Walleye often frequent water less than 2 feet deep during these dark hours. During daylight hours, fish the shoreline contour but in deeper water than at night. As water temperatures increase in late spring and throughout the summer, walleye continually move deeper seeking cooler water. Anglers must fish deeper throughout the summer to capitalize on this fishery. A very important point to remember is fish deeper in clearer water during the day, regardless of season. Walleye are very light sensitive and prefer dark or shaded habitat. Consequently, anglers need to adjust their tactics accordingly. During daylight hours, many walleye can be found in only a few feet of water if the water is stained or muddy but will remain deeper during the day if the water is clear. Anglers who spend time learning productive walleye angling techniques for Leesville, concentrate on areas and habitat that hold walleye, and fish in the late April-June period should encounter a number of these elusive fish.

South Holston Reservoir

South Holston should provide excellent walleye fishing in 2007. Sampling catch rates in 2006 were the best on record for young-of-year fish and adults. Walleye growth is outstanding, so anglers should find plenty of fish larger than the minimum size of 18 inches. Anglers who have discovered techniques that work, and have the willpower to endure the heat of summer and the cold of winter, are catching walleyes year-round. Anglers congregate near the community of Alvarado from February through April to catch walleyes on the spring spawning "run". During May and June anglers find walleyes feeding along the shorelines of the lake. When walleyes move deeper during the summer months, successful anglers troll crawler harnesses on lead core line or use jigging spoons to reach the depths. Fall and winter fishing call for jigging spoons or jigs and live minnows. So pick a season that fits your schedule, or schedule some free time during one of the peak seasons.

Flannagan Reservoir

The overall abundance of walleyes in Flannagan is down compared to the boom years from 2000 to 2004. A fish kill in 2004, caused by low dissolved oxygen, reduced the population considerably. Fingerling walleyes are stocked each year, and hopefully the population will rebound quickly. The good news is there are still some nice walleyes to be caught. Anglers will probably be pleased with the average size of walleyes, but may be disappointed with the overall numbers. There is an 18-inch minimum size limit in effect for Flannagan Reservoir. Timing might be especially important this year, so plan to fish when walleyes are concentrated during the spawn and during the feeding period

following the spawn. This would be a good year to search for the really key walleye locations. A few years ago anglers could expect to catch a walleye on virtually any stretch of shoreline on the lake. This year the walleyes will probably be found in the best habitats.

Hungry Mother Lake

This 108-acre lake provides anglers with a great opportunity to catch walleyes in a small lake setting. Located in Hungry Mother State Park, the lake is also a great destination for families. The walleye population is stable or slightly increasing. There are good numbers of fish up to 20 inches, and just enough bigger ones to cause anglers to lose some sleep this summer. Walleyes up to 28 inches in length have been landed in recent years. April, May and June are the three best months, and night fishing is generally more productive. Most anglers use artificial lures, but live shad, minnows and night crawlers are also very effective.

Lake Whitehurst

Anglers fishing for walleye in Lake Whitehurst should expect to see good numbers of quality fish in 2007. Excellent numbers of 18-23 inch walleye were captured during our spring and fall sampling, and a few trophy fish measuring nearly 25 inches were also collected. Catch rates were down slightly in 2006, but still reflect a healthy walleye population. Walleye are not able to successfully reproduce in this lake, but approximately 45,000 fingerling-sized walleye are stocked in Whitehurst each year. Early spring in Whitehurst may be your best bet to catch a big walleye, especially in Southeast Virginia. Previous tagging studies have shown that walleye in Whitehurst are most likely to be “on the move” and covering a lot of distance in the cooler transitional months (Feb.-April and Oct. –Dec), so anglers should be willing to cover a lot of water to locate fish. Anglers should be reminded that Lake Whitehurst is a Norfolk owned water supply reservoir and a daily or annual fishing permit is required.

Lake Orange

Anglers hoping for an opportunity to catch a decent walleye while fishing for multiple species should look no further than Lake Orange. This northern piedmont impoundment has been stocked with walleyes for years. Currently, walleye fingerlings are stocked at a rate of 100/acre. Survival of stocked fingerlings has been good and the current age structure is comprised of fish up to age-15, with most fish in the population less than age-8. Walleye growth is fast to age-4, averaging about 20 inches and 3 pounds. Beyond age-4, growth is very slow and fish seldom reach 26 inches. Occasionally, Lake Orange anglers will catch walleye in the 6-8 pound range, but catch rates for these larger fish are very low.

Lake Brittle

Lake Brittle may be one of the easiest places to catch a walleye in the northern Virginia piedmont. Angler's targeting walleyes report good success at this small impoundment. Most fish caught seem to be in the 2-3 pound range with an occasional fish up to 5 pounds. Fisheries sampling over the years has documented good survival of stocked walleye fingerlings. Currently, a strong population of walleyes up to age-5 is present at Lake Brittle, increasing the odds for angler success.

Lake Robertson

If you're looking to catch a limit of five lunker walleye from this 26-acre impoundment, you had better make plans to take your walleye jigs elsewhere. However, if your goal is to hook into an occasional 20 incher, while focusing on largemouth bass or catfish, this hidden jewel might be what you are looking for. Lake Robertson was stocked with walleye beginning in 1983, with the intention of controlling the growing sunfish population and adding diversity to the lake. It succeeded in both cases. Today, a small walleye population inhabits this clear impoundment, adding to the robust largemouth bass and channel catfish fishery. In 2006 gill net samples, two walleye exceeding 20 inches were caught and released. This points to a small walleye population, but scattered 'eyes are the norm for Lake Robertson. The largemouth bass population is through the roof, so predation on young walleye is high. Walleye growth, however, is very good. It takes 3 years for fish to reach the 20-inch minimum limit. One Lake Robertson walleye measured 27 inches and 8 pounds, so trophies can be found. A good time to catch a walleye at Lake Robertson is in March or April, before or after the fish have spawned. Since walleye prefer hard substrate, you can best locate these nocturnal creatures near the dam in the spring.

Clinch River

Walleye are native to the Clinch River, and are available in low densities throughout most of the river. Stocking efforts resumed in 2005, and several young-of-year walleyes were collected in the May 2006 sample. Consistent stocking should improve fishing opportunities over the next few seasons. For now, anglers should focus their efforts at the times and locations that concentrate walleyes. Walleyes often congregate in pools just below significant ledges and shoals during daylight hours, and then move into shallow water at dusk. Another good location is where a creek enters the river.

For more information, contact the following offices:

<u>Leesville and Philpott Reservoirs</u>	<u>Forest Office</u>	<u>(434) 525-7522</u>
<u>Lakes Orange and Brittle</u>	<u>Fredericksburg Office</u>	<u>(540) 889-4169</u>
<u>Lake Robertson</u>	<u>Verona Office</u>	<u>(540) 248-9360</u>
<u>Lake Whitehurst</u>	<u>Chesapeake Office</u>	<u>(757) 465-6812</u>
<u>Upper New River and Clinch River</u>		
<u>South Holston Reservoir</u>		
<u>Flannagan Reservoir</u>		
<u>Hungry Mother Lake</u>	<u>Marion Office</u>	<u>(276) 783-4860</u>