

# Trout tournaments under way

BY PHILLIP GENTRY  
FOR THE JOURNAL

One of the key ingredients to being a successful angler is being in the right place at the right time. That statement could also be amended to be the right place at the right temperature.

The right temperature has a lot to do with fishing. Fish are present and swimming around in a given lake 365 days of the year, but to consistently catch them, it helps to be in the right place when the water temperatures are to their liking. Such is the situation with trout fishing on Lake Jocassee.

Ray Hawkins of Jocassee Outdoor Center, located on Jocassee Lake Road in Salem, is the host of JOC's annual trout tournament. His store has been hosting trout tournaments at Jocassee for nearly 30 years, both under the current name and back when the late Jimmie Orr operated the store under the name Hoyett's Grocery.

This year's tournament season opened last November when the 18 anglers who participated in the event came home empty-handed.

"Our first tournament was tough," said Hawkins. "The weather was real warm for November, and the trout were still deep in the lake. We didn't have a single fish weighed in at the tournament."

This is why they call it "fishing," not "catching". Hawkins was happy to report the second tournament of the six-tournament season produced much better results.

Following the Dec. 17 tournament, Garry Vreugdenhil of Cabarrus



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**Garry Vreugdenhil of Cabarrus County, N.C., won the Jocassee Outdoor Center December trout tournament with this 6.16-pound brown trout. JOC's tournament schedule resumes today and runs monthly through April 21.**

County, N.C., led the pack with a 6.16-pound brown trout. The beauty of JOC's tournament format is that anglers only weigh one fish, so the biggest fish wins. Hawkins believes his anglers will start seeing more big fish as the winter progresses.

"Trout fishing gets better as the weather and the water gets colder," he said. "Right now the trout have come up out of 100 feet of water where they spent the summer and are more likely to be found in the 40-60 foot depths."

Fishing for trout in Jocassee is very different from most other types of fishing in other lakes or even fishing for bass or bream in Jocassee.

Anglers troll artificial lures ranging from spoons to crank baits and even live baits behind heavy metal downrigger balls. These devices are tethered to a winch on the boat and allow the anglers to fish at specified depths to target fish. Multiple

rods are used to present multiple baits at the same time.

"This time of year, most of the trout fishing takes place up in the rivers that flow into the lake," Hawkins said. "The Thompson River, north of the state park, and the Three Rivers area — Horsepasture, White-water, and Laurel Fork, are where most of the anglers go."

Registration for the trout tournaments opens at 6 a.m. at Jocassee Outdoor Center. The blast-off begins at 8 a.m., and the weigh-in is held at 4 p.m. at the Devils Fork State Park.

Entry fee for the tournament is \$35 per angler and kids under 16 can fish for free. A big fish pot of \$10 is also collected for a series-end big fish prize.

Tournaments are scheduled for today, Feb. 18, March 17 and April 21. For more information contact Ray Hawkins at JOC at 864-944-9016.