

Trout Fishing for the Rest of Us

Trout are one of the most-prized sport fish in the United States, and Fairfax County Virginia is making this fish available to a broad section of the local fishing population. Most regional state jurisdictions have sophisticated trout management programs. Virginia has their "Catchable Trout Stocking Program" that stocks mature trout in a wide variety of Virginia streams, lakes, and rivers, while Maryland's put-and-take program offers a similar management plan. Both are fee-based fishing options that give anglers a better chance to catch a full-sized trout. This pattern of state-wide trout management is the case in most states.

Fairfax County is the only local county government, perhaps the only one in the country, to sponsor and stock a fee-based trout program. Beginning February 9 and ending April 22, the Fairfax County Park Authority will stock two local lakes with mature rainbow and golden trout measuring about 12 inches and weighing up to three pounds. The stocking will alternate weekly between Lake Accotink and Lake Fairfax, each getting 1,000 pounds at their scheduled visit with the final distribution at Lake Fairfax on April 13. A thousand pounds is a lot of fish and this gives fishermen, young and old, a chance for bragging rights.

The mature trout are shipped to the lakes in water tankers from a commercial fish hatchery in Goshen, Virginia. At the lakes, they're transferred into buckets each containing about three or four fish. Park staff

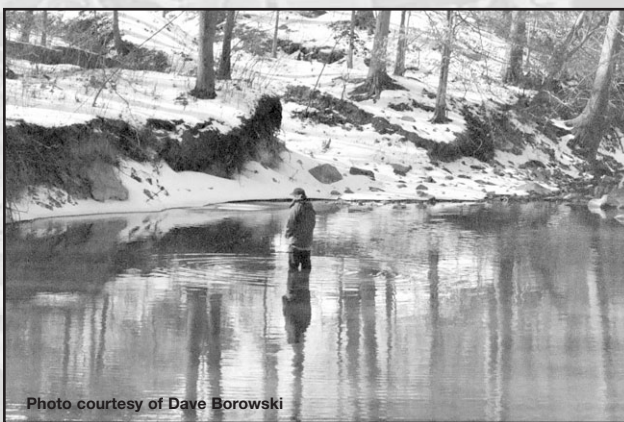


Photo courtesy of Dave Borowski

Stocking begins early in February enabling winter anglers to catch a full creel.

and volunteers form a line and pour the barrels into designated areas. For their efforts, volunteers get a free fishing pass for the day they assist.

At Lake Accotink, a 55-acre lake in Springfield, stocking is conducted at the spillway by the dam where about 20 barrels of fish are released. Staffers and volunteers then head south at the creek and continue to stock until all fish are released.

At the 18-acre Lake Fairfax in Reston the procedure is the same with fish being stocked in the creek and in the lake itself.

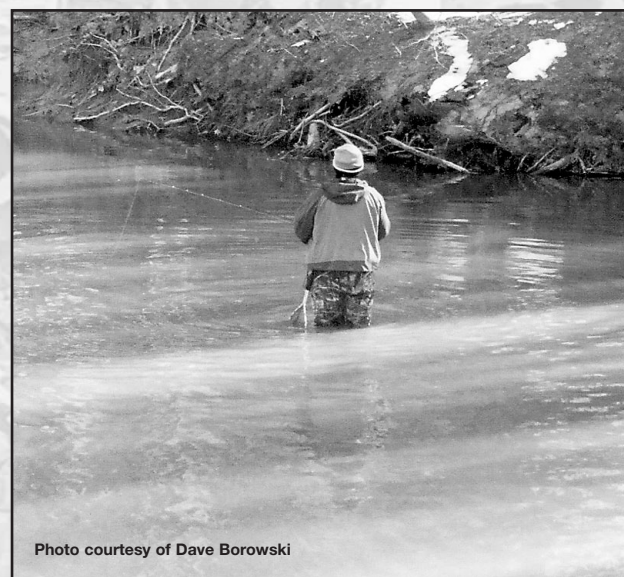


Photo courtesy of Dave Borowski

Working the banks and edges proves productive in any season.

Trout prefer cooler waters so in our region the best fishing occurs during this stocking period. Anglers report their best luck with spinning rods using small lures and live bait. Others reported luck with Power Bait and Trout Magnet. Local anglers also report that the best fishing is several days after the bi-weekly stocking. Those several days give the fish a chance to acclimate to their new habitat.

In addition to a Virginia state fishing license, trout fishing at Lake Accotink and Lake Fairfax requires either a \$35 season pass or \$9 daily pass. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries provides no funding for stocking so Fairfax County funds this entire operation by selling passes. Limits are six fish per day and one pole per angler. The parks are open from 7:00am to sundown. If you're interested in volunteering and getting to fish for free, check the Fairfax County Website for the stocking schedule.

To reach Lake Accotink, take Interstate 95 to the Old Keen Mill Road west exit; turn right on Hanover Avenue. Make a left on Highland Avenue, then a right at the Accotink Park Road to the entrance sign. To reach Lake Fairfax, from the Beltway, take the Route 7/Leesburg Pike west exit then left on Baron Cameron Avenue to the second left on Lake Fairfax Drive to the park entrance. For detailed information on this program, call the office at Lake Accotink at 703 569-0285. For Lake Fairfax call 703-471-5415. You can also visit the Fairfax County Government site at www.fairfaxcounty.gov.

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