



Leesville Reservoir 2006

Leesville Reservoir is a 3,400-acre impoundment located near Altavista, Virginia. This reservoir straddles the Pittsylvania and Bedford County borders. Leesville Reservoir is owned by American Electric Power and is managed primarily for hydroelectric power generation and to pump back stored water to Smith Mountain Lake for additional hydroelectric power generation. There is little development along the shoreline at this time but residential development is dramatically increasing. Facilities are limited primarily to four boat launching facilities and two marinas.

This reservoir experiences major water level fluctuations of 1 to 10 feet per day. Dramatic water fluctuations are a result of power generation and pump back storage for Smith Mountain Lake. The headwaters of Leesville Reservoir sustain cool water temperatures throughout the year due to discharges from Smith Mountain Lake.

Largemouth bass are one of the most sought after species by anglers at Leesville Reservoir. Smallmouth and Roanoke Bass are also present at Leesville Reservoir but contribute very little to the black bass fishery due to their low numbers. According to VDGIF electrofishing samples, largemouth bass densities vary depending on lake area. The upper reaches of the reservoir experiences dramatic water level and temperature fluctuations that reduce bass habitat and spawning success. The best largemouth bass population is from Leesville dam to Howell Creek. Most fish are between 9 and 14 inches but there are a fair number of fish up to 21 inches and the population is very similar to nearby Smith Mountain Lake and Philpott Reservoirs.

Leesville Reservoir is stocked with additional predators, striped bass and walleye. The stocking of striped bass and walleye is a way to utilize available forage and provide additional angling opportunities for predator species that do not reproduce successfully in this reservoir.

The current state record striped bass was caught from Leesville Reservoir in 2000. This reservoir does support a fair striped bass population but capitalizing on this fishery can be a challenge. Striped bass occasionally utilize the cooler water in the upper reaches of the reservoir during the summer months for thermal refuge. However, forage is very limited in this area of the reservoir and most striped bass move downstream to utilize additional forage when water temperatures are cooler during the late fall through early summer.

Leesville Reservoir supports good numbers of walleye including a few fish up to seven pounds. The walleye population has been increasing in recent years from changes in the stocking program. The best concentrations of walleye are between Cliff Creek and Leesville Dam. Walleye fishing can also be challenging due to rapidly rising and falling water levels. There is no or very limited natural reproduction of walleye so the population is sustained with an annual stocking of approximately 85,000 fingerling walleye.

White bass at Leesville Reservoir have historically produced good to poor fisheries due to variable recruitment success from year to year. Good production of young fish can create a fishery for a number of subsequent years. If there is multiple poor year classes of white bass then the fishery will suffer the following years. Good spawning success was related to high flows in the spring from the Pigg River. A combination of low flows in 1999-2001 and an increasing abundance of white perch the past several years has severely limited the white bass population to the extent the current fishery has almost been eliminated.

Catfish are abundant at this reservoir with the most common species being white catfish and channel catfish. Flathead catfish and blue catfish are also present but the number of blue catfish is low.

Leesville Reservoir can be a pleasant change from most busy reservoirs especially if you are looking for little competition with other anglers and boaters. Keep in mind, frequent water level fluctuations can make patterning fish more difficult. Boaters also need to watch for floating debris that is a routine occurrence on this reservoir.