



## **Leesville Reservoir 2008**

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 headwater of Leesville Reservoir is a very harsh environment for most fish species due to the cold water temperatures, fast water currents, and poor forage. Consequently, fishing is generally poor from Smith Mountain dam to the vicinity of Howell Creek (three pipes area). While most fishing should be concentrated downstream of Howell Creek, there are seasonal movements into the upper reaches for some species such as striped bass and walleye during spawning and summer refuge periods.

Largemouth bass are 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 very low numbers. According to VDGIF electrofishing samples, largemouth bass densities in the lower half of this reservoir rival nearby Smith Mountain Lake and Philpott Reservoir. The highest numbers of bass are found from Leesville dam to approximately mile marker 6. Most fish are between 9 and 14 inches but there is a fair number of fish up 21 inches.

Leesville Reservoir is stocked with additional predators, striped bass and walleye. The stocking of striped bass and walleye is a way to utilize available open water forage (shad) 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 in the fall through early summer.

Leesville Reservoir is also stocked with walleye and has historically produced fish up to seven pounds. The walleye population had increased around 2005 due to a good year class in 2002 and 2004 but appears to have recently declined with poor catches again in 2007. The best concentrations of walleye are between Cliff Creek and Leesville Dam. Walleye fishing in mountain reservoirs is typically challenging and successful walleye anglers spend considerable time with specialized gear perusing this species in order to be consistently successful. Walleye are predominantly nocturnal feeders so daytime anglers must be very patient and deliberate in their fishing techniques. 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.

Biologists will be tagging walleyes in Leesville Reservoir in 2008 as part of a statewide study. A cash reward of \$20 will be offered for the return of the tag and catch information. Anglers can remove the tag by cutting through the monofilament attachment with scissors or a knife. The fish can then be released or harvested. Return the tag and catch information to the address printed on the tag. Catch information includes: date, time and general location of catch, "Was the fish harvested or released?", "Were you fishing for walleyes?", and "Did you catch other walleyes on this fishing trip?"

White bass at Leesville Reservoir have historically produced a good fishery. Increasing abundance of white perch and poor reproduction in recent years have severely limited the white bass population to the extent the current white bass fishery has almost been eliminated. Although white perch are not as desirable as white bass because of their smaller size, they have produced a good fishery due to the high numbers and high catch rates.

Catfish are abundant at this reservoir with the most common species being white catfish and channel catfish. There are limited numbers of blue and flathead catfish available but these species make up a very small portion of the catfish population.

Additional species of interest include black crappie, yellow perch, bluegill, and redbreast sunfish. The crappie fishery is fair, the best crappie fishing months are April through July and the average size harvested is 10 inches. Leesville Reservoir has traditionally been one of the few good yellow perch fisheries in Virginia. However, the population has declined in recent years. Sunfish species are abundant but sizes are generally small. Crappie and sunfish are most abundant in the lower half of the reservoir with yellow perch numbers more evenly distributed throughout the reservoir.

There are two public ramps and two marinas at Leesville Reservoir. The public ramps are located in Pittsylvania County near the dam and in the upper end of the reservoir at Myers Creek. The only facilities available at these access sites are boat ramps and associated parking.

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.