

Delayed harvest successful

By **CHUCK HUBBARD** | Posted: Monday, February 15, 2016 2:00 pm

One of the biggest developments for trout fisherman in North Carolina occurred a number of years ago when the N.C. Wildlife Commission began designating some streams as “delayed harvest.”

On these streams, from the first Saturday in October to the first Saturday in June, trout are heavily stocked and none may be kept or “harvested.” Everything is catch and release.

Other than not being able to keep fish, the same rules applying to most wild trout streams apply here. Fishermen must use single-hook lures and the use of natural bait—corn, worms and so forth—is forbidden.

Several obvious portions of streams were chosen first for the designation, like the East Prong of the Roaring River in Stone Mountain, a large portion of the Watauga River outside of Boone and the Mitchell River in Surry County. Since then, many other delayed harvest areas have been added.

It turned out to be a really popular designation for several reasons, not the least of which is that these streams aren’t fished out as soon as they are stocked. People can come back week after week and experience success.

It used to be that opening day of the trout season on stocked streams—always the first Saturday in April—provided a weekend of really good business for country stores, given the massive influx of fishermen. These days, a ton of folks are steadily fishing from the fall until the late spring on these creeks and spending their money in the area.

The old joke about opening day on the East Prong in Stone Mountain was that the fish that weren’t caught would be stepped on. The human traffic jam on that fairly small creek was genuinely ridiculous, with holes having five or six people fishing them at once.

The delayed harvest designation has also pushed people toward developing their fishing skills. Instead of drowning some worms or fishing with corn, folks have learned how to use single-hook spinners. Many have branched out into fly-fishing.

Learning these techniques opens up a whole new world for those interested in trout fishing, given the fact that North Carolina has literally thousands of miles of beautiful streams under wild trout fishing rules, where the use of natural bait is always against the law.

I do believe that the wildlife commission has gone a bit overboard in its designation of delayed harvest streams, such as is the case with the Reddies River from the dam in North Wilkesboro to its confluence with the Yadkin River. The Reddies runs along the Yadkin River Greenway in this area.

Despite the proximity to the greenway and the fact that this section of river is in the middle of North Wilkesboro, I haven’t noticed that this has become a popular place to fish. Siltation makes this a difficult stretch to wade and it lacks something aesthetically in comparison to most other trout streams.

Beyond this, every heavy rain just washes trout out of the Reddies into the Yadkin, defeating the purpose of the delayed harvest designation.

Overall, though, the delayed harvest program has been one of the most successful wildlife ventures the Tar Heel State has experienced.