



Great Smoky Mountains National Park – Fishing Guide

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is home to 2,900 miles of protected streams, including some of the last wild trout habitats in the eastern U.S. About 20% of streams support trout populations, offering anglers a variety of experiences—from remote headwater trout streams to cool, wide waters with smallmouth bass.

Fishing here is not only a tradition, it's a way to help protect the park's fisheries. Whether you caught one fish or many, please take a few minutes to complete the Angler Creel Survey, which helps park biologists monitor fish populations, catch rates, and seasonal patterns.

Fishing Seasons & Hours

- Season: Year-round
- Hours: 30 minutes before sunrise to 30 minutes after sunset
- Streams: Fishing is permitted in all park streams

License Requirements

- A valid license or permit is required from either Tennessee or North Carolina. Both are honored throughout the park. No trout stamp is needed.
- Tennessee: Residents & nonresidents age 13+ must have a license. Residents 65+ may obtain a special license.
- North Carolina: Residents & nonresidents age 16+ must have a license. Residents 70+ may obtain a special license.
- Licenses are not sold in the park—purchase online or in nearby towns.
- Special permits apply for fishing in Gatlinburg and Cherokee.
- Youth: Under 16 in NC and under 13 in TN may fish with adult bag limits.

Daily Possession & Size Limits

- Limit: 5 fish per day (brook, rainbow, or brown trout, or smallmouth bass, in any combination).
- Rock bass: 20 may be kept in addition to the limit above.
- Minimum sizes: Trout (brook, rainbow, brown): 7 inches; Smallmouth bass: 7 inches; Rock bass: no minimum.
- Fish under the legal size must be released immediately.
- Once you reach the daily limit, you must stop fishing.

Lures, Bait, and Equipment

- One hand-held rod only.
- Artificial flies or lures with a single hook only (dropper flies permitted, up to two flies per leader).
- Prohibited baits: live bait, worms, corn, cheese, salmon eggs, pork rinds, bread, liquid scents, or natural baits found along streams.
- No treble, double, or gang hooks.
- All gear, creels, and fish are subject to inspection.
- Report violations: 865-436-1294.

Safety on the Streams

- Cold water and wading can quickly lead to hypothermia—stay alert.
- Sudden mountain storms cause fast-rising water. Watch levels closely.
- Currents are stronger than they appear; moss-covered rocks are slippery.

Be a Clean Angler

- Pack out all fishing line, cans, and trash—even if it isn't yours.
- Fish remains: dispose of entrails in a deep pool downstream from campsites (not within 200 feet).

Brook Trout Fishing

- Thanks to successful restoration, brook trout harvest is permitted park-wide since 2006.
- Research shows no decline in population health from regulated fishing.

Protecting Streams & Wildlife

- Do not move rocks: It destroys fish nests and aquatic insect habitats, especially during April–August spawning season.
- Stop Rock Snot: Didymo, a harmful invasive algae, threatens stream health. Clean gear carefully and avoid spreading it.

Remember

- One of the core missions of the National Park Service is to preserve natural resources in their unaltered state.
- By following these rules, anglers help ensure that future generations can enjoy the same pristine fishing.