

# Trout fishing etiquette: Dos and don'ts when on the stream

When I was young I fished every chance that I had. Many of the kids in the neighborhood also fished. When our parents felt we were mature enough to walk to the creek at the end of my street by ourselves, Steve Peace and I would hit Horseleg Creek to catch whatever fish would cooperate.

We would go to our favorite hole, fishing side by side with crickets, worms or what we thought the fish might eat. Or we might go on a family outing to a special lake or pond and aunts, uncles, cousins and friends would all be fishing. It was not unusual to see five or more people fishing for bream at a huge cluster of spawning beds swarming with fish. We would talk, brag and laugh or complain that "you threw in my spot." Sometimes fishing with a crowd is fun.

Steve and I still fish together for trout in Cherokee, North Carolina. We head off in different directions for the special spots where we had success in the past, but many times we wind up fishing the same hole at the same time. Steve or I might see some fish and one would tell the other where to cast and how deep to let the lure sink before retrieving. Many times we might head to our favorite hole only to find one or more anglers already there. The hole might be as huge as an Olympic swimming pool but we usually just pass it on by unless those fishing say, "there's plenty of fish" and invite us to join in.

Rivers such as the Oconaluftee in Cherokee are large enough to allow several anglers to fish without disturbing each other. Small streams do not make it easy to have multiple anglers fishing the same hole.

What are the unwritten rules of etiquette for fishing small streams? The primary rule would be to be courteous and not just start fishing in a location where another angler is fishing.

Do not cast into the same water as the angler who was there first. Avoid wading into the water but instead bypass the pool and fish the next area of the stream. You would not want someone horning in on your favorite spot, so don't do it to others. Most anglers move upstream when fishing. Ask the fisherman if he is working his way up or down. Then, make sure you re-enter the stream far enough away to allow the other guy plenty of undisturbed water. You would want the same from him.

Fly anglers often fish slow and methodically. Cast after cast will cover the pool or run from top to bottom. Again, bypass this patient fisherman and enjoy another part of the stream. As a general

rule, take a wide berth when passing any angler to avoid spooking any fish that angler may be pursuing.

If you are on a stream that has been recently stocked full of hungry fish, catch a few and leave some for others, whether you are harvesting for the dinner table or

a catch and release angler. The fish you release may not be willing to take a fly, spinner or worm any time soon. You share the stream with others so don't be greedy. Remember, the creel limit is a maximum, not a quota that you must catch.

Wild streams with natural reproduction deserve special attention, especially during spawning times. I have often seen spawning beds, known as "redds," in midstream. These shallow depressions are swept

clean of algae and sediment by spawning fish and should not be disturbed. Avoid wading on the redd as the future wild fish are either eggs or tiny fry that are living in the spaces between the rocks. Brown and brook trout usually spawn in late fall or winter. The ancestors of rainbow trout in the southeast have come from many different populations around the country and spawning time varies from late winter into early summer.

One piece of trash is too much to leave on a stream. Even leaving a few feet of line with the fly, bait or lure attached is something to be avoided. Take a small trash bag with you. Carry out the trash you come across and ask others to do the same. If you see someone trashing a spot and they are unwilling to pick up after themselves, do the right thing and pick up after them. Do not confront the litterbug. Just maybe your good deed will rub off on him or her.

In Georgia, a lot of trout streams are located on private land. Just because a trout stream is stocked by the DNR does not allow you to trespass. If you stay in the stream and do not get out on the bank, you are still trespassing. If you wish to fish private water, you should knock on some doors and find out who owns the property. It is best be polite and go alone as several folks at once may lower your chances. Offer to bring the owner a few trout and most likely the owner will be happy to let you fish. Being granted access does not mean you can invite others. Do not damage fences, and pick up any trash you find.

Remember, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" and always abide by the state regulations.

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