

# ALPHARETTA ROS WELL HERALD

## Wintertime fishing tips for Delayed Harvest streams



Smith Creek offers Delayed Harvest fishing in a small-stream setting



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Steve Hudson

By the time you read this, the volunteer-assisted “bucket brigade” stocking at the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area’s Whitewater access point will be history. That means that there will be plenty of newly-stocked trout in the river, waiting to match wits with anglers who come to enjoy the great catch-and-release fishing that Delayed Harvest offers. Georgia’s Department of Natural Resources has done a great job on our state’s Delayed Harvest fishery. Be sure you get out there and enjoy it!

But just because there are lots of fish in the Hooch, DH streams does not necessarily mean that they’re easy to fool.

Let's talk about one of those other DH streams for a minute. Let's take a look at Smith Creek.

Last week, for example, I visited one of my favorite DH fisheries – Smith Creek in Unicoi State Park. My schedule gave me about two free hours at the end of the day, and a quick call to my wife got me the okay to spend 'em on the stream (yes, even us outdoor writer types have to run such requests through Scheduling Central).

Smith Creek is a small stream – in fact the smallest of Georgia's Delayed Harvest streams. It offers a unique small-water fishing experience that in many ways is simpler than what you find on larger DH waters such as the Chattahoochee. Many anglers are especially fond of it for that very reason.

Anyway, after putting on the waders and stringing up the rod, I moseyed on down to the water.

How was it? Low and clear, especially on a small stream. That's the recipe for "no fish" unless you get sneaky and stealthy. Because the water is so skinny, the fish will see you coming a mile away if you're not careful. Those conditions call for Ninja-like fishing, with careful approaches to likely holding water and a minimum of overhead movement. Even camo is not out of the question, and it's not unusual to see the most serious DH anglers easing up on the water as if they were Special Forces ops on a mission. Yes, it can take almost nothing to spook fish on a low, clear stream.

My Ninja skills are not quite what they used to be (thank you, knees) but they must have been good enough. I found that if I could sneak up on a deeper run or small hole I could tempt one of those Smith Creek trout often enough to keep it interesting. But if I went in standing tall, my only trouty encounter might be one with a fish-shaped shadow heading the other direction at full speed.

Lesson 1, then, is simple: on a small stream like Smith Creek, be sneaky and keep a low profile.

What's lesson 2? Well, that one has to do with tactics. During the cold months, the fish will tend to be deep. On a stream like Smith Creek, "deep" is a relative term. Look for water that's even a six inches deeper than the water around it, and fish that "deep" spot thoroughly. It's amazing how often that strategy pays off. Many DH anglers concentrated only on the very deepest spots, and those certainly do hold fish. But remember that every other angler on the creek that day has probably fished those same "deepest" spots before you. Think outside the deep-hole box a little bit, and your success rate will go up.

How do you identify those deep spots? It's a situation where the old adage "you'll know 'em when you see 'em" really does apply. I find that if I'm asking myself whether a place is "deeper" enough, then it probably is.

And that brings us to lesson 3, which has to do with the how of fishing those deep spots. How do you do it?

Easy – by getting down deep. Yes, there's that word again. But it may be the big key to Delayed Harvest success. Since the trout are going to be deep, you've got to get your fly down deep too. And this applies not just to Smith Creek but to every other Delayed Harvest stream too.

Sometimes when I'm fishing, I'll see another angler who isn't having much success. Sometimes we'll chat for a moment, and as we talk about tactics it will often turn out that my newfound friend has only a little weight on his leader. In flowing water, even in a small creek like Smith Creek, it can take a surprising amount of weight to get flies down near the bottom, where the fish are, and on many occasions the simple act of adding more weight has turned that angler's day completely around.

It happens to me too! I might be fishing a run with, say, a single BB shot and doing nothing, even though I know fish are there. But by simply adding additional split shot to take my offering deeper and closer to the bottom, I go from not-a-strike to fish-on, sometimes on the very next cast.

So there you have it – three tips that can help you have greater success on Smith Creek. Be stealthy, look for the “deeper” spots, and use enough weight to get your flies down where the fish are.

And how did my two hours on the water turn out? Better than I deserve! Which flies worked? Well, the short answer is that I caught fish on tiny flies (little midge patterns such as the Blue Assassin), on big streamers (Rolexes, black Woolly Buggers, and the one that they’re calling the “Hudson Streamer”). In fact, those same flies have been working well on other DH streams too.

Next week we’ll look at the long answer, flies-wise, to help you further meet the delightful challenge of fishing for Delayed Harvest trout.