

Fee-fishing Ponds and Streams in Virginia

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What Is Fee-fishing?

Fee-fishing, or pay-fishing as the name implies, is buying the right to fish in a private pond, lake, or stream. These are excellent places to practice your fishing skills and teach children the fine art of fishing.

Fee-fishing ponds and streams can be operated in a variety of ways. In some fee-fishing waters, often called “catch-out” ponds or streams, the angler pays a fee for the fish caught. These waters are usually heavily stocked. In other waters, the angler pays a daily fee (access fee) for the privilege of fishing, but is not charged for the fish caught. Daily-fee waters are usually stocked only a few times each year and consequently, offer somewhat slower fishing than the small catch-out ponds and streams. Still other fee-fishing operations are run as fishing clubs where anglers buy an annual membership rather than pay a daily fee.

Why Pay to Fish?

Fee-fishing offers much the same exciting outdoor experience as does fishing public waters, but greatly increases an angler’s chances of catching a number of large fish for sport and food. It is an excellent way to provide children with a positive fishing experience. Since fee-fishing waters normally are heavily stocked on a regular basis with large fish, the fishing is easy, the action is fast, and the fish are fat, healthy, and fresh. Many anglers use fee-fishing to sharpen their skills, introduce their children to the sport, enjoy a day with the family, and at the same time fill up the freezer with tasty filets.

Fee-fishing is a convenient, relaxed form of fishing with success virtually guaranteed. For anglers who cannot afford time-consuming travel to remote fishing spots,

this is an option that offers “quick” and exceptional fishing. Good fee-fishing ponds typically are located in quiet, scenic areas with adequate roads, sufficient parking, and easy access. Most provide rest rooms, bait sales, tackle rental, ice, fishing lessons, picnic tables, and fishing docks or piers. Overnight camping, swimming, and food may also be available.

Is a Virginia Fishing License Required?

In most fee waters, no license is required to fish. Most fee-fishing pond owners purchase a state permit (Game Fish Breeders Permit) from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. This license entitles the operators to offer fishing to the public without requiring clients to have a valid Virginia fishing license. Under the terms of this permit, no license is required to fish in the designated fee-fishing pond, and no state regulations (season, harvest limits) apply. The pond owner is required to provide clients with a receipt listing the number or pounds and species of fish harvested, date of purchase, and a notice that the receipt must be retained by the angler while transporting the fish.

In some fee-fishing waters, however, anglers do need a current Virginia fishing license. These include the three state-owned fee waters operated by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. The Clinch Mountain Fee Fishing Area is located in Southwest Virginia, about 7 miles west of Saltville. Crooked Creek Fee Fishing Area is located in Carroll County 5 miles east of Galax. The Douthat Lake Fee Fishing Area includes about 4 miles of Wilson Creek along with the stocked 60-acre Douthat Lake. There is a “children only” area

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on Wilson Creek just below the dam, and children 12 years of age and under can fish throughout the Douthat Lake Area without a permit as long as they are accompanied by a permitted adult and their combined creel does not exceed that of the adult.

How Much Does it Cost?

Prices vary, but normally the cost of catching a fish at a fee-fishing pond or stream is similar to the price of the same fish at the supermarket. The bonus for anglers is that the family has had the extra enjoyment of catching large, hard-fighting sportfish. The cost of a trout or catfish caught in the fee-fishing waters may average \$3 to \$4 per pound. Because most stocked fish weigh slightly more than a pound, fee anglers pay approximately \$4 to \$5 per fish.

Charges can be calculated in a number of ways. Some fee owners charge by the weight (pounds or ounces) or length (inches) of the fish caught. Others may simply charge a flat fee for each fish harvested or a daily use fee (usually with a limit on the number of fish that can be caught). Some fee waters are managed on a “fish-for-fun” basis, where all fish are measured and then released. Prizes are sometimes awarded for catching the largest fish.

What Types of Fish Are Stocked?

Fee-fishing waters offer a variety of fish species including trout (rainbow, brook, and brown), catfish (channel and blue), largemouth bass, bluegill (bream), crappie, perch, pike, and carp. Of these, rainbow trout is the most commonly stocked species of fish in Virginia’s fee-fishing ponds and streams. Most trout ponds and streams are located in the Ridge and Valley and Mountain regions where an abundant supply of cold, spring water provides good growing conditions for trout.

Warm-water fish species such as catfish usually are stocked in valley ponds or those located in Piedmont and Coastal Plain counties where summer water temperatures are in the 80° to 90° F range. Carp occasionally are stocked in warm-water ponds.

What Are the Characteristics of a Good Fee-fishing Pond?

- Courteous operator
- Quiet, scenic setting
- Easy access
- Sufficient parking area
- Clean restrooms
- Bait sales
- Rod rental
- Fish cleaning facilities
- Life saving equipment
- Healthy, active sport fish
- Fast action fishing
- Drinking water
- Shade
- Picnic tables
- Posted fee-fishing rates

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