

# Hunting & Fishing in Columbus County



## The News Reporter's **OUTDOORS**



**August 30, 2019**

# Get back to basics with small game

Small game hunting was once a staple of sportsmen and young hunters, teaching the basic skills needed to pursue larger game as well as filling the freezer.

Some state laws have changed this year, notably the expansion of fox squirrel season across the state, as well as opening the season Oct. 14, with other small game species. Oct. 14 is considered “the” day for most small game hunters, as most of the state’s seasons open then. Seasons for gray, red and fox squirrels; rabbits; bobcat; grouse; raccoon and possum open Oct. 14. Quail season still maintains its traditional opening day of Nov. 23.

Foxes are subject to local laws in many counties. Gray and red foxes may be taken year-round with dogs, with no limit. In Columbus County, foxes may be hunted with firearms or archery from Dec. 1 – Jan. 1. Total bag limit for trapping and hunting foxes is 30. Tags must

be purchased from [ncwildlife.org](http://ncwildlife.org) before foxes are harvested.

Other seasons and bag limits are:

Gray and red squirrels — Oct. 14-Feb. 29, daily limit eight  
Fox squirrels — Oct. 14-Jan. 31, daily limit one, possession two, season limit ten.

Rabbit—Oct. 14-Feb. 29, daily limit five, no possession or season limits. Rabbits may be trapped with box traps without a trapping license, but may not be sold live.

Raccoon — Oct. 14-Feb. 29, daily limit three, no possession or season limit.

Possum — Oct. 14-Feb. 29, no bag limits.

Bobcat — Oct. 14-Feb. 29, no bag limit. Bobcat tags must be purchased before cats are harvested if the hide is to be sold.

Quail — Nov. 23-Feb. 29 — daily limit six, possession 12, no limit for season.

Grouse — Oct. 14-Feb. 29, daily limit three, possession six, season 30.

Coyotes and feral swine may be hunted all year, with no season or bag limits, on private property. Hunters may use electronic calls for both coyotes and hogs, and artificial lights may be used for night hunting hogs and coyotes.

Groundhog, nutria rat, striped skunks, and armadillo may be taken all year, with no season or bag limit.

Beaver may be hunted during any open season for other animals, with permission of the landowner or agent.

Controlled hunting preserves may be hunted Oct. 1-March 31, for upland birds and domestic mallards. Wild turkey may not be harvested on preserves outside of turkey season.

A safety orange hat, cap, jacket or vest is required when hunting most small game species.

See the Wildlife Regulations Digest or [ncwildlife.org](http://ncwildlife.org) for more specific regulations for hunting all species.



Gray squirrels are among the most hunted species of small game.

## Trapping a popular, sometimes profitable alternative for dedicated outdoorsmen



Coyotes are one of the more popular animals to trap.

Even though fur markets remain down, trapping furbearers, especially beaver and coyotes, is slowly but surely drawing more and more outdoorsmen to its ranks.

In Columbus County, the beaver bounty program pays trappers to harvest beaver for landowners suffering from timber and crop damage and flooding. Now in its 11th year, the local program has been used as a model by other counties in the state.

Local coyote trappers also have found ready markets for live sales as well as mar-

kets for tanned furs. Prices vary, but live coyotes range from \$50 to \$100, depending on size, age and condition, and tanned furs sell for \$75 to \$150, depending on the quality of fur and size of the pelt.

Bobcats, foxes and coyotes are also popular as tanned hides as well as with taxidermists.

Columbus County allows trapping of beaver from Sept. 1 through March 31. The state’s “recreational” trapping season for beaver and other species runs from Nov. 1 through March 31.

Regular trapping season is from Jan. 2-Feb. 29 in Columbus County, due to local laws. Coyotes, foxes, bobcats, muskrat, nutria, beaver, otter, possum, raccoon, mink, weasels and other furbearers may be taken in accordance with state trapping regulations during that time. All traps must be tagged with the owner’s name and WRC customer number or address.

For more specific regulations regarding trapping, trap size and placement, and other requirements, go to [ncwildlife.org](http://ncwildlife.org).

# Some changes in waterfowl rules this year

Duckhunters will have a few more days and a few less headaches when it comes to waterfowl seasons this year.

New federal guidelines allowed the Wildlife Resources Commission to streamline its duck seasons, with the last day to hunt now set as Jan. 31.

Bag limits, however, have been reduced for some species, due to declines along the Atlantic Flyway.

The daily bag limit for mallards has been reduced to two, with no more than one hen. The brant season was also cut to 30 days, due to declines in reproduction.

Since 2000, according to the Wildlife Commission, the status of eastern mallards has been used to set the duck hunting frameworks in the Atlantic Flyway. Due to a long-term decline in Atlantic Flyway mallards, setting all duck seasons based on the status of mallards is no longer the optimal approach because most other im-

portant duck species in the flyway (such as wood ducks, ring-necked ducks, and green-winged teal) are either stable or increasing while mallards continue to decline.

A new program this year will allow veterans and active duty military to hunt on youth waterfowl days. Ducks, geese, brant, tundra swan, mergansers and coots may be harvested in season on those special hunt days.

Seasons this year are as follows:

■ General duck seasons are Oct. 2-5, Nov. 16-Dec. 2, and Dec. 14-Jan. 31. No black or mottled ducks may be taken until Nov. 23. The daily bag limit includes a total of six ducks with no more than four scoters, four eiders, four long-tailed ducks, two mallards (with no more than one hen), three wood ducks, two scaup, two redheads, two canvasbacks, two black ducks, one pintail, one mottled duck and one fulvous whistling duck.



Canada geese fall under some of the least restrictive hunting regulations.

The season on harlequin ducks is closed.

■ Merganser and coot seasons are the same as other duck seasons, with daily limits of five mergansers (no more than two

hens) and 15 coots.

■ East of U.S. 17, the September teal season is Sept. 12-30, with a limit of six.

■ The special sea duck season in designated areas is Nov. 23-Jan.

31. Limits are five total with no more than four scoters, four eiders and/or four long-tailed ducks. Go to [ncwildlife.org](http://ncwildlife.org) for more specific information about sea duck areas and restrictions.

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# Follow simple steps to stay safe in your treestand



State law requires an outer garment of safety orange for most hunters. It's a good idea for others who enjoy the outdoors during hunting seasons.

With the start of archery season just weeks away, many hunters are dusting off their tree stands for another year of deer hunting.

The N.C. Wildlife Resources is reminding hunters to be cautious when setting up tree stands prior to deer season.

"Every year someone is injured in a tree stand-related incident before deer season opens," said Travis Casper, state hunter education coordinator. "We need hunters to practice tree stand safety at all times, not just during hunting season."

In recent years, Pender County has averaged one serious injury per year involving tree stands.

If you are scouting a location or trimming shoot-

ing lanes and putting up your tree stand, even on a trial basis, use the same precautions you would during hunting season:

- Use a full body safety harness.

- Maintain three points of contact when climbing.

- Follow manufacturer instructions.

- Have an emergency signal.

- Tell someone where and when you plan to go.

Use a lineman-style belt in addition to a full body harness when first putting a tree stand in place. This minimizes the chance of falls and potential injury.

As with any piece of equipment, tree stands need inspection before use.

Long-term placement, such as leaving your tree

stand up from one season to the next, has some inherent problems that outweigh any convenience.

Exposure to the elements will damage straps, ropes and attachment cords, and potentially lead to breakage and failure. Also, trees are living, growing things and change over time, affecting stability.

"If you have a tree stand that has been in place for an extended length of time, take it down," Casper said. "Inspect it. Replace rusted bolts, frayed straps or, if needed, buy a new tree stand. Your life could depend on it."

Permanently mounting tree stands on public land is against the law, and Casper said hunters should, out of courtesy,

ask a landowner's permission before installing a long-term stand, even if they have permission to hunt the land.

"In areas where forestry is a major industry," he said, "tree stands can do serious, long term damage to valuable trees. That could cost the farmer money, and cost you or someone else a place to hunt in the future."

In North Carolina, all first-time hunting license buyers must successfully complete a Hunter Education Course, available for free across the state. Go to [www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org) to consult the online version of the 2012-2013 N.C. Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest or call 919-707-0031 for more information.



## WILDLIFE ACTION

The local members of Wildlife Action wish to say "Thank You!" to all our community friends and associates who have worked so hard and given selflessly of their time and money throughout the years. Your volunteer efforts have been the key to making our family and children's educational programs and activities successful! We appreciate and are grateful for all that you have done!

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*Wildlife Action, Inc.* is a non-profit (501-C (3)) volunteer organization dedicated to raising public awareness of the many threats to our diminishing wildlife habitat and natural resources. Our primary focus is on children's education programs. We share with our youth the outdoor traditions that we have enjoyed and together work to protect those traditions for future generations through programs such as "Take a Kid Fishing Day," camping, boating and hunter safety classes, summer camps with canoe trips, and archery, bluebird and duck box building days. To fund these programs we rely solely on member dues, charitable donations, and fund-raising events. We are currently developing and building Helms Nature Preserve & Resource Education Center in Whiteville in order to better serve our community and provide increased resources for our many children's programs and activities.

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# Blaze orange attire required for most hunters

In North Carolina, hunters are required to wear a cap or hat of blaze orange color, or wear an outer garment such as a shirt or game vest in blaze orange that is visible from all sides, when hunting bear, deer, wild boar, rabbit, squirrel, grouse, pheasant or quail with a firearm.

A new law also requires that any hunter in the woods during a season requiring blaze orange wear the same type garment, regardless of his or her weapon. Previously bowhunters were not required to wear blaze orange during gun seasons.

"It's a good idea for anyone in the woods this time of year," said Capt. Chris Huebner, hunting safety coordinator for the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. "Wearing blaze orange is a wise precaution for the outdoors through February. It alerts hunters to your presence and, in case of an injury, makes it easier for rescuers to find you."



Blaze orange, also known as hunter orange, safety orange, fluorescent orange or 10-mile cloth, is readily available in a variety of clothing, caps and hats, through sporting goods and hunting supply stores, as well as general retailers.

"It is essential for a hunter to be absolutely certain of their intended target, knowing what is behind the target and its surroundings," Capt. Huebner said. "Unlike your fellow hunters, everyone is not required to wear blaze orange. You have to be sure before you shoot."

Successful completion of Hunter Education, offered free by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission throughout the state, is required for all first-time hunting license buyers. Advanced courses are also available. For course schedules, game regulations and additional hunting safety information, go to [www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org) or call (919) 707-0031.

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# Bear population continues to rise in area

Considered the “comeback kid” of wildlife, black bears are now found in every county in the state.

Columbus County is in Zone 5 of the Coastal Bear Management Area for North Carolina, with one of the healthiest populations in the state. Dog and still hunting are allowed in Columbus County, which was once considered the “bear hunting capital” of the state.

In North Carolina, the black bear is usually black with a brown muzzle and sometimes a white patch on its chest. Bears have five toes on each foot, with sharp curved claws that help them climb trees and feed on insects and grubs in decaying logs.

The state record black bear was an 880 pound, 10.75 year old boar harvested in Craven County in 1998. Bears in the 400-500 pound range are not uncommon in Columbus County, although most run 200 to 300 pounds.

Black bears rely mostly on their sense of smell and hearing due to their average (similar to human) eyesight, but are adept at climbing, running, swimming and digging. They can run as fast as 35 miles per hour.

North Carolina's official state dog, the Plott Hound, was intentionally bred to hunt bears, although other breeds are also used to pursue, tree and bay bears.

Intense hunting pressure and eradication as pests left North Carolina with dramatically lower populations

by the mid-1900s. Black bears were restricted to remote areas and reached very low numbers. Strict management practices helped the species rebound, along with the establishment of bear sanctuaries.

Since the 1970s, over 500,000 acres of land have been designated as bear sanctuaries by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. These sanctuaries were key to the successful restoration of bears and are still vital to bear population management.

Research on bears is funded through electronic permits required for all bear hunters. The E-stamp is available online and through license agencies.

North Carolina also offers a bear cooperator program to assist in research and help hunters learn more about their harvests. Hunters can mail an upper pre-molar tooth (which is not usually visible in taxidermy mounts) in an envelope supplied by the Commission. WRC staff is also available during the season to help extract and process teeth.

The teeth are then analyzed for a number of important data. The hunter will receive, free of charge, an analysis of the tooth, including age, diet and other information.

The 2019 black bear season is Nov. 11 through Jan. 1. Hunters may harvest one bear per season. Sows with dependent cubs, and bears under 75 pounds may not be



**Black bear populations are on the rise across the state.**

harvested at any time.

Information on bear hunting, the cooperative program and bears in general can be found at [www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org).

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# Deer harvests drop again in 2018



Whitetail deer continue to be the most popular big game animal.

Damage to forests and access roads likely contributed to a local decline in deer harvest numbers in 2018, according to the Wildlife Resources Commission.

Statewide numbers show that the Southeastern Zone — which was the hardest hit by Hurricane Florence — saw a 19.2 percent decrease in hunter success during the 2018 season. The Central and Northwestern zones saw little change, but the Northeastern Zone, which was affected by tropical weather and an outbreak of “blue tongue” disease, saw the biggest decline, at 20.4 percent. Antlered buck harvests also dropped in both the Southeastern and Northeastern zones, at 23.9 and 24.9 percent, respectively. Those numbers were also the largest decline in antlered bucks for the season.

The WRC reported that for 2018, 51.5 percent of all deer

harvested were antlered bucks, 4.6 percent were button bucks and 43.9 percent were does. Most deer were harvested with a gun (81.1 percent), followed by blackpowder (8.1 percent), bow (6.3 percent) and crossbow (4.5 percent).

The WRC reported that variations in harvest numbers are common, and no cause for alarm.

Hurricanes and flooding can block access to hunting areas, as can wildfire damage. Mast crops of fruit and nuts were also affected by the hurricanes of last fall, especially Florence, thus cutting down on the wild food supply available for deer.

New regulations also played a role in the decline, according to the WRC. The state has adopted a new management plan statewide that limits hunters to six deer on a regular license, only two of which may be antlered.

“We primarily focus on long-term trends rather than annual variations to monitor the population, and have observed increasing trends in deer harvest in western North Carolina, likely due to an emerging deer herd and improved deer habitat on private lands,” said Jon Shaw, the Commission’s deer biologist. “In some areas we have relatively stable harvest trends, while in large portions of Eastern North Carolina, we are observing declining trends in harvest and deer numbers.

The Commission implemented rule changes in 2018-2019 to intentionally reduce harvest with the goal of stabilizing deer numbers and improving the sex ratio and age structure of the herd.

Whitetail deer continue to be the most popular game animal in the state, with 143,529 harvested statewide last year.

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# Dove season, other migratory birds begin Monday



Populations of the invasive whitewing dove have grown in recent years, and due to the birds' similarity to mourning doves in appearance and habits, whitewings may be harvested along with mourning doves again this year. Bag limit is 15, and includes any mixture of the two species.

While not as popular as their webfooted cousins, rails (king, clapper, Virginia and sora), purple gallinules and moorhens may be hunted Sept. 7-Nov. 27. Bag limit is 15 for king and clapper rails, 15 for sora or Virginia rails, and 15 for other species.

Woodcock, sometimes called timberdoodles, have been on the decline in recent years due to habitat destruction, agricultural chemicals and predators. The season remains the same for the tiny, fast birds — Dec. 7 through Jan. 28 — but the daily bag limit has been reduced

to three this year.

While they are considered the butt of many a practical joke, snipe hunting can be a real challenge for wingshooters. The semi-aquatic birds are similar to dove in meat texture, and not unlike quail in their flight habits. Snipe may be hunted Oct. 28-Feb. 28, with a daily bag

limit of eight.

Possession limits for migratory upland birds are three times the daily bag limit. All shotguns must be plugged to accept no more than two rounds in the magazine and one in the chamber. Shooting hours are 30 minutes before legal sunrise until sunset.

## Dove hunting is a traditional pasttime for many area hunters.

Monday marks the start of another season for hunting one of the most frustrating and sought after gamebirds.

Mourning doves are the most popular gamebird in the United States, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Thou-

sands of hunters are expected to take to the field statewide Monday as the first of three seasons gets underway for this year.

Seasons for mourning doves for 2019-20 are Sept. 2-Oct. 5; Nov. 16-Nov. 30; and Dec. 9-Jan. 31.

## Forgotten fowl offer challenges to hunters

While duckhunting is considered the number one sport for many hunters, several species of waterfowl offer big challenges for hunters before, during and after regular waterfowl seasons.

Canada geese have become a nuisance in some areas, as resident populations continue to grow. North Carolina's expanded resident goose season is Sept. 2-30. During this season, expanded hunting methods may be used in areas west of U.S. 17.

Unplugged guns may be used for geese during the September season, along with electronic calls. Shooting hours are also extended to one-half hour past sunset.

After the migration is fully underway, hunters have three additional seasons for taking Canadas and white front geese. During those seasons, all rules apply, including use of plugged weapons, no electronic calls, and shooting hours ending at sunset.

The seasons in the resident population zone, which includes Columbus County, are Oct. 2-12; Nov. 16-Dec. 7, and Dec. 14-Feb. 8. Bag limit is five total birds of either species.

While brant have not yet become a common sight in the Cape Fear area, huntable flocks have been reported in a number of locales. Brant may be hunted Dec. 28-Jan. 31, with a daily limit of one.

The regular season for light geese such as snow and Ross' geese is set for Oct. 8-Feb. 8. Daily limit is 25, with no possession limit.

In areas under the Conservation Order season guidelines, snow and Ross geese may be hunted with a permit from Feb. 10-Jan. 31. Expanded methods are legal for snow and Ross geese during this season.

For more on migratory gamebirds, go to [ncwildlife.org](http://ncwildlife.org).

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# Columbus fourth in state for turkey harvests in 2019



Columbus County ranks fourth in the state for successful turkey hunts.

Despite habitat and bird loss from Hurricane Florence, Columbus County was fourth in the state for turkey harvests in the 2019 season. A total of 443 birds were reported here, according to the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

Duplin, Halifax and Rockingham counties led the field, with Bertie running just be-

hind Columbus.

The commission's wild turkey harvest summary show this year's harvest was the second highest ever recorded, with hunters across the state reporting 18,730 birds harvested, including 1,478 birds taken during the youth-only hunting season.

This season's harvest was

only slightly below the record harvest of 18,919 birds, which was set in 2017. The total harvest statewide for 2019 was 3.5 percent higher than the average harvest during the previous three years.

Turkey harvest in the coastal region was 9.6 percent higher than the average harvest during the previous three years, indicating turkey populations continue to grow in the coastal region. The growth comes despite the loss of breeding age hens and habitat in hurricanes Matthew and Florence.

Since their re-introduction in the 1970s and 1980s, turkey populations have exploded across the state. The wily birds have some of the sharpest eyesight of all game animals, and are considered the most wary of all game birds.

Approximately 70,000 hunters pursue turkeys in North

Carolina each year. About 15 percent of them will harvest one turkey and only 5 percent harvest their two-bird limit, according to the WRC.

North Carolina's turkey hunting season opens the second Saturday of April each year and closes in early May. A week-long, youth-only hunting

season opens the first Saturday in April. Hunters are allowed two bearded or male turkeys each year.

The 2020 season dates are April 4-11 for youth only, and April 11-May 9 for all hunters.

For more information, visit the Commission's wild turkey page.

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## Control predators to help deer

Recent studies by the Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA) show that one of the best ways to improve fawn survival rates is to hunt other deer hunters—black bears and coyotes.

Studies in coastal South Carolina and Georgia, areas with bear, coyote and bobcat populations similar to North Carolina's coastal plain, showed that in areas where heavy trapping occurred the previous winter and spring, fawn survival rates rose to .75 per two does.

High fawn predation rates are thought to cause a higher birth rate of does to bucks, thus further reducing the number of bucks that survive to adulthood.

In areas with limited bear hunting, the studies showed black bears have a surprising impact on fawn survival rates. In some cases, bears accounted for 60 percent of fawn mortality within one week of birth, with coyotes and wild hogs coming in second and bobcats a distant third.

A study of stomach contents showed deer ranked third, behind small rodents and fruit, as primary food sources. Mike Conner from the Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center assessed whether predation was causing the low fawn re-

cruitment rate at the 29,000-acre research center.

Deer density on the site was roughly 10 to 15 per square mile, based on spotlight counts and hunter observations and estimated approximately 0.5 fawns per adult doe in the fall pre-hunt population. Researchers selected two study blocks.

One 11,000-acre block was designated as a predator removal zone, and researchers removed 23 coyotes and three bobcats between January and August 2008. Most were removed during fawning (June and August).

Another 7,000-acre block was used for a control area and no predators were removed. The two blocks contained similar habitats and were 2.5 miles apart.

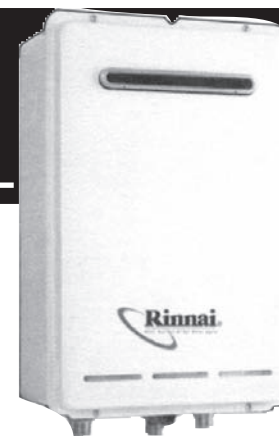
Researchers conducted remote camera surveys to determine pre-hunt fawn recruitment rates, and they estimated 0.72 fawns per doe in the predator removal zone and only 0.07 fawns per in the non-removal zone.

In other words, two fawns were recruited for every three does in the predator removal zone, while it took over 28 does to recruit the same number of fawns in the zone where predators weren't removed.

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# Anglers can help keep bass alive by following simple steps

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission is reminding largemouth bass anglers who practice catch-and-release that following a few simple steps will go a long way to ensure the largemouth bass caught today will live to see another lure tomorrow.

During the summer, higher water temperatures and lower dissolved oxygen levels in reservoirs and rivers are tough on largemouth bass. When caught, largemouth bass become more stressed and can suffer higher mortality rates.

To minimize stress on the fish, a catch-and-release angler should land the fish quickly and handle it as little as possible, including removing the hook from the fish's mouth while it is still in the water, if practical. Limited handling helps reduce the loss of slime coat, the fish's main defense against infection and disease.

"Before you touch a fish, always wet your hands," advised Brian McRae, the Piedmont Region fisheries supervisor for the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. "Return the fish quickly to the water if you do not plan to keep it or place it in the livewell. When using a landing net, a knotless nylon or rubber coated net is preferred over a knotted nylon net."

Anglers participating in fishing tournaments can minimize fish mortality by maintaining healthy oxygen and water quality in their livewells. A few ways to do this are:

Knowing the capacity of the livewell and not exceeding a ratio of more than 1 pound of bass per gallon of water;

Running a recirculating pump continuously if more than 5 pounds of bass are in the livewell;

Using aerators or oxygen-injection

systems to keep the water's oxygen level above 5 ppm; and

Keeping livewell water about 5 degrees below the reservoir temperature by adding block ice.

McRae also recommends that tournament participants fill their weigh-in bags with livewell water, not reservoir or river water, before putting in their catch. They should put only five fish in a bag, fewer if the fish exceed 4 pounds each, and finally they should limit the amount of time that fish are held in bags.

"Keeping largemouth bass in weigh-in bags for longer than 2 minutes will significantly increase post-release mortality," McRae said.

Fishing tournament organizers can do their part to help keep fish alive by providing holding tanks during the weigh-in with water 5 degrees below the reservoir or river temperature and with oxygen levels above 5 ppm.

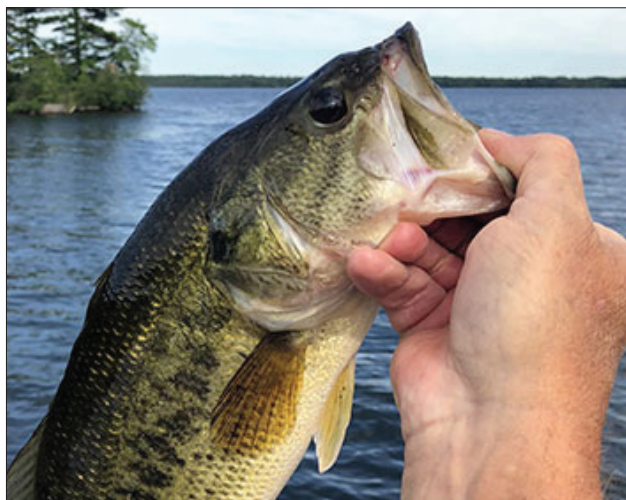
"Fishing tournament organizers and participants should adopt best handling practices at all events," McRae said. "Using staggered times to weigh in, release boats, and recovery stations with oxygen and recirculating water are all important considerations when planning a tournament."

Other options for tournament directors who enjoy summer fishing tournaments yet want to minimize mortality associated with higher water temperatures are reducing the number of competitive fishing hours or holding "paper tournaments" without weigh-ins.

More information on keeping bass alive, including the B.A.S.S.-produced publication, "Keeping Bass Alive: A Guidebook for Tournament Bass Anglers and Organizers," is available on the Commission's website, [www.ncwildlife.org/fishing](http://www.ncwildlife.org/fishing).



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