

Bass Catch-and-Release Guidelines for Lake Keowee

By Bill Walker, Tournament Director of the Keowee Anglers

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On behalf of the Keowee Anglers Board of Directors, I would like to urge you to follow our club's catch-and-release guidelines for the preservation and development of the Lake Keowee bass fishery.

Our view is that Largemouth Bass are endangered on Lake Keowee due to the unauthorized introduction of Spotted Bass a few decades ago. Largemouth Bass started as the major bass on Lake Keowee. Since the unauthorized introduction of Spotted Bass a few decades ago, the numbers of Largemouth Bass have dropped and Spotted Bass have become so plentiful in Lake Keowee that today only about 1 bass in 10 are Largemouth Bass.

Our bass catch-and-release guidelines are simply stated:

- **Please practice catch-and-release on ALL Largemouth Bass.**
- **Please practice catch-and-release on ALL Spotted Bass longer than 16 inches.**
- **Eat all the Spotted Bass you want in the 14-16 inch range (in our view, Spotted Bass shorter than 14 inches are not big enough to be worth cleaning).**

The trick is identifying which bass are Largemouth Bass and which are Spotted/Red-eye/Hybrid bass. The rest of this article is an aid to help you tell the difference.

Compare the Spotted Bass in Picture 1 to the Largemouth Bass in Picture 2. These are classic examples taken from Lake Keowee.



Picture 1. Spotted Bass



Picture 2. Largemouth Bass

A major identifier is that with the mouth closed, the lip cover of a Largemouth Bass extends back behind the eyes. In Spotted bass, Red-eye bass, and Spotted/Red-eye hybrids, the back end of the lip cover ends under the forward part of the eye.

[Another major identifier, not visible in the pictures, is that Spotted Bass have a rough cluster of small teeth in the center of their tongue, which you can feel with a finger, and Largemouth Bass do not.]

Also, while both Spotted and Largemouth Bass may have spots along the side, Spotted Bass have spots above the side row of spots, while largemouth bass generally have even shades of dark color darkening toward the dorsal (top) fin.

Also, the tail fin on Largemouth Bass tends to be rounded, on Spotted Bass it is more pointed.

From the gill cover forward, the heads of Largemouth Bass tend to be more monochromatic, while the heads of Spotted Bass tend to have more white below the level of the eyes.

One thing I did not notice until I saw these pictures side by side, (I checked some pictures of other fish and they seem to bear me out) is that in the scale pattern along the side of the Spotted Bass, one or more horizontal rows of scales appear to end in the middle of the side of the fish to allow other lower rows to continue up and along the side of the fish. While in the Largemouth ALL the rows of scales appear to continue straight until they reach the bottom of the fish closer to the tail.

And, Largemouth Bass have a distinctive fishy odor that is much stronger than the scent of a Spotted Bass. In the dark I use the smell test very effectively! Largemouth also taste much more fishy than Spotted Bass! Spotted Bass have a nice mild flavor.

We on the Keowee Anglers Board of Directors hope you all agree with these guidelines and will practice them with all uninjured bass for the preservation and enhancement of the Lake Keowee bass fishery.