

Black Bass Species Shifts in Three Tennessee Valley Authority Reservoirs in North Georgia

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Historically, black bass fisheries in Chatuge Reservoir in Georgia/North Carolina and Nottely Reservoir and Blue Ridge Reservoir in Georgia were dominated by largemouth (*Micropterus salmoides*) and/or smallmouth bass (*Micropterus dolomieu*). Over the past three decades, all three reservoirs have experienced major shifts in black bass species composition and are now heavily comprised of spotted bass species (Alabama bass, *Micropterus henshalli* and/or Kentucky bass, *Micropterus punctulatus*). We reviewed historical agency sampling data at these three reservoirs and other Georgia reservoirs outside the Tennessee River basin to assess the factors that may cause spotted bass dominance. One of the primary factors suspected in causing this population shift is the introduction of non-native blueback herring, an egg predator. Species introductions of black bass likely also influence black bass species composition. Additionally, these reservoirs are between 72 and 83 years old, and habitat degradation due to reservoir aging may favor one species over another. Georgia DNR is currently stocking largemouth bass at Nottely Reservoir in order to mitigate for the decrease in largemouth abundance and is also considering stocking smallmouth bass at all three TVA reservoirs. Understanding the factors that led to these species shifts could be crucial in the feasibility and/or success of future stocking/restoration programs in reservoirs that have undergone a similar change in black bass species composition.