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A Fisherman's Paradise: Fly Fishing in the Tennessee Overhill

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While the Ocoee River is known for its world class whitewater rafting, the Ocoee is just one of four rivers that cross through the region in southeast Tennessee known as the Tennessee Overhill. One of the Overhill's best kept secrets is that it is also a fly fisherman's paradise with three other rivers to choose from, each with their own personality.

The Hiwassee River, with its pristine waters, is home to some of Tennessee's finest rainbow and brown trout, making it one of the best trout fishing rivers in the eastern United States. An added bonus is the Trophy Trout section on the river north and east of the Historic District of Reliance. This section enables anglers to fish for trophy trout, with the largest brook trout taken from the Hiwassee weighing over 30 pounds. Fly fishing guide services are available for this designated Tennessee State Scenic River.

One of the largest natural trout streams in the Southeast and birthplace of the famous Tellico Nymph, the Tellico River Basin is big water by most standards and offers year round back country fly fishing for wild and stocked trout in secluded mountain streams. The Basin, which includes the Cherokee National Forest and the Citico Creek Wilderness Area, has 138 miles of trout streams, including 19 miles of brooktrout streams and is considered one of the largest natural trout streams in the southeast. Although the river is stocked weekly during spring and summer and has a liberal creel limit, large trout are occasionally taken. Brown trout of more than 20 pounds have been caught there, and each year anglers catch trophies of ten pounds or more. The Conasauga River is the most pristine major trout stream located in the Overhill and fishing this river effectively requires a great deal of stealth and stalking. This is the domain of the angler who doesn't mind walking a few miles to the two stretches of water downstream of the wilderness area that are on Forest Service land and, thus, open to public fishing. Rainbows up to 20 inches turn up occasionally, and browns up to 9 pounds have been recorded over the years. The fact that much of the water is difficult to reach means the creeks get only light fishing pressure and the water quality is excellent. Especially uring low-water periods in the summer and fall the flow appears transparent. It is possible to walk up on pools and find as many as a dozen fish visible, but one unguarded step along the creek bank will send them scurrying for cover.

Fishing licenses go on sale March 1 each year, the beginning of prime fishing, and are valid through the last day of February. You can purchase most licenses, except the Lifetime Sportsman License, from county court clerks, sporting goods stores, hardware stores, boat docks, all Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency regional offices, by calling 1-888-814-8972 to get your Tennessee fishing and hunting licenses instantly, and online at www.wildlifelicense.com/tn/. Remember: you must have a valid Tennessee license and appropriate permits

to fish in the Cherokee National Forest, and you are responsible for knowing the fishing regulations and seasons.

For more information, contact the Tennessee Overhill Heritage Association at 423-263-7232 or online at www.tennesseeoverhill.com

Photos available on request.