

JOCASSEE GORGES WMA

Pickens / Oconee Counties, SC · Blue Ridge Mountains · 38,000 Acres

Black Bear Whitetail Deer Turkey Ruffed Grouse Feral Hog

OVERVIEW

Acreage	38,000 acres	Game Zone	Zone 1 / Zone 2
County	Pickens & Oconee	Type	State WMA
From Spartanburg	~1 hour west	Agency	SCDNR

One of the largest WMAs in South Carolina, encompassing rugged Blue Ridge terrain across 38,000 acres in Pickens and Oconee Counties. Jocassee Gorges holds one of SC's best black bear populations and offers excellent deer and turkey hunting for hunters willing to hike deep into the mountains. Ruffed grouse — rare in SC — can be found at higher elevations. The WMA straddles Game Zones 1 and 2. Multiple trailhead access points off US-11, SC-107, US-178, and SC-130. Remote terrain requires topographic maps and GPS. WMA license required. No motorized vehicles beyond designated roads.

SPECIES & SEASONS (2025–2026)

Species	Season Type	Dates (WMA)	Bag Limit
Whitetail Deer (Zone 1 WMA)	Primitive Weapons Archery Only Still Gun Hunt Youth Day	Oct 1–10, 2025 Oct 17–30, 2025 Oct 11–16 & Oct 31–Jan 1 Jan 3, 2026	2/day 5/season
Whitetail Deer (Zone 2 WMA)	Archery Only Primitive Weapons Still Gun Hunt	Sept 15–30, 2025 Oct 1–10, 2025 Oct 11–Jan 1, 2026	2/day 5/season
Black Bear (Zone 1)	Still Hunt (No Dogs) Party Dog Hunts	Oct 11–16, 2025 Oct 17–30, 2025	1/season statewide
Wild Turkey	Spring Gobbler (Private & WMA Statewide)	Apr 3 – May 3, 2025 (max 1 before Apr 10)	1/day 2/season
Ruffed Grouse (Zone 1 only)	WMA Season	Nov 27, 2025 – Feb 28, 2026	3/day
Feral Hog	During open game seasons (daylight, still hunt only)	During any open game season	No limit
Squirrel	WMA Season	Oct 1, 2025 – Feb 28, 2026	10/day
Rabbit	WMA Season	Nov 27, 2025 – Feb 28, 2026	5/day

■ Verify all dates and quotas at dnr.sc.gov before hunting. WMA seasons differ from private lands. Bear harvest quotas may apply — check SCDNR for current quota status. No baiting on WMA lands.

TERRAIN & HABITAT

Ridge Systems & Saddles

Ridgelines connect primary summits with saddle crossings — key deer funnels. Bucks use saddles as travel corridors between feeding and bedding areas, especially during October rut.

Creek Drainages & Confluences

Multiple creek systems drain into Lake Jocassee. Creek confluences concentrate deer, turkey, and bear. Expect wet crossings — waterproof boots are mandatory.

White Oak Flats & Mast Producers

Mixed hardwood slopes produce heavy mast in good years. White oak and persimmon are key bear and deer food sources in September–October. Locate these in summer for fall success.

Laurel & Rhododendron Thickets

Dense mountain laurel and rhododendron provide thermal cover for bear and grouse. Use as staging areas for hunting nearby edges.

Foothills Trail Corridor

The 77-mile Foothills Trail crosses the interior and provides the primary backcountry access spine. Side drainages off this trail are rarely pressured.

ACCESS & DIRECTIONS

Primary Access Roads	SC-11 (Cherokee Foothills Scenic Hwy), SC-107, US-178, and SC-130
Orientation Point	Jocassee Gorges Visitor Center at Keowee-Toxaway State Park (SC-11)
From Spartanburg	I-85 South → US-25 or US-276 toward Greenville/Travelers Rest → SC-11 West toward Salem
Bad Creek / Musterground Area	From Salem, travel north on SC-130 for 11.3 mi, turn right onto Bad Creek Road. Musterground Road is open seasonally.
Corbin Creek / Howard Creek	From Salem, north on SC-130 for 5 mi, right at gated road entrance. Hike ~0.5 mi to Corbin Creek.
Road Gates	Green gates = seasonally open. Red gates = closed to vehicular traffic. Operating a motorized vehicle behind a closed gate is prohibited.
ATVs	Permitted on open roads only, Mon–Fri (1 hr before sunrise to 1 hr after sunset). 3-wheel ATVs and dirt bikes prohibited.
Nearest Town	Salem, SC (Oconee County) — nearest services and fuel

FIELD TIPS

Black Bear: Locate white oak flats and persimmon trees before the season. Scout in late September — find fresh diggings and scat concentrated around mast trees at mid-elevation (2,000–3,000 ft). Hunt these areas at first light during the October still-hunt window.

Whitetail Deer: Hunt ridge saddles and creek confluences. Bucks use saddles as travel corridors between ridge systems, especially during the rut. Creek confluences concentrate doe traffic — set up downwind.

Wild Turkey: Focus on benches and flats just off the ridge crests. Birds roost high but feed on benches with sparse understory. Work drainages in early morning along the Foothills Trail area.

Ruffed Grouse: Target young forest edges — overgrown clearings, alder runs, berry patches — at elevations above 2,500 feet. Walk logging roads slowly and hunt into the wind. A flushing dog is a major advantage.

Navigation: Topographic maps and GPS are required — cell service is unreliable across most of the WMA. Download offline maps (OnX Hunt, Gaia GPS) before entering. Mark your parking and key waypoints.

Terrain & Footwear: Waterproof boots are mandatory, not optional. Trekking poles reduce knee strain on long descents. Pack light but pack smart — you're packing out your own game from steep country.

Pressure: Hike deep for less pressure. The first mile from any trailhead sees the most hunting activity. Hunters who push 2+ miles into drainages see significantly less competition.

Weather: Weather changes fast at elevation. Pack rain gear regardless of the forecast. Afternoon thunderstorms are common in fall — plan your exit before dark if conditions are uncertain.

WMA REGULATIONS

WMA License Required	Valid SC hunting license AND WMA permit must be on your person at all times.
No Sunday Hunting	No hunting permitted on any WMA land on Sundays.
No Baiting	Baiting is prohibited on all WMA lands.
No Shooting Across Roads	No hunting or shooting from, on, or across any road open to vehicle traffic.
Buckshot Prohibited	Buckshot is prohibited on all WMA lands for all hunting.
No Alcohol	Possession or consumption of intoxicants while hunting on WMA lands is prohibited.
Youth Hunters	Hunters under 16 must be accompanied by a licensed adult (21+) in sight and voice contact.
Blaze Orange	Required while hog hunting. Strongly recommended during all deer gun seasons.
No Live Hog Transport	No feral hogs may be transported alive from any WMA.
Backcountry Camping	By permit only (apply at SCDNR website). No fires. No camping within 50 ft of water.
SC Game Check	All harvested deer must be tagged immediately and reported via SC Game Check by midnight.
Closed Gates	Operating a motorized vehicle behind a closed gate is prohibited at all times.

Always verify current regulations at dnr.sc.gov/regulations.html before each season. WMA-specific special regulations may supersede general rules.

GEAR RECOMMENDATIONS

Navigation (Essential)

- Paper topo maps (USGS quads — backup if GPS fails)
- GPS device or smartphone with OnX Hunt / Gaia GPS (offline maps downloaded)
- Compass (never rely solely on digital navigation)
- Emergency whistle

Clothing & Footwear

- Waterproof hunting boots — mandatory, expect creek crossings
- Wool or synthetic moisture-wicking base layers
- Insulated mid-layer (temps drop significantly at elevation)
- Waterproof rain jacket and pants
- Blaze orange hat and vest (required for hog hunting)

Pack & Safety

- Trekking poles — mandatory on steep terrain, protect your knees
- Headlamp with extra batteries (pre-dawn entry, post-dark exit)

- First aid kit (blister care, SAM splint, tourniquet)
- Water filter or purification tablets
- High-calorie snacks and at least 2L water
- Emergency bivvy or space blanket
- Satellite communicator (SPOT / Garmin inReach) recommended for backcountry trips

Licenses & Tags

- SC hunting license — must be on your person
- WMA permit — must be on your person
- Deer tags / species-specific tags as applicable

Game Recovery

- Lightweight breathable game bags
- Field dressing kit (knife, gut hook, latex gloves)
- Paracord or drag rope
- Pack frame or meat hauler — bear/deer recovery is serious work in this terrain

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Emergency	911 — Limited cell signal in gorges. Know your GPS coordinates.
Oconee County Sheriff	(864) 882-6655
Pickens County Sheriff	(864) 898-0800
SCDNR Law Enforcement	1-800-831-3705
Oconee Medical Center	(864) 882-3351 — Seneca, SC (nearest hospital)
SCDNR Region 1 (Upstate)	(864) 537-9120

■■ Cell service is unreliable across most of Jocassee Gorges. Tell someone your planned access point, route, and expected return time. Consider a satellite communicator for backcountry trips.

HERE Spartanburg Field Guide — Jocassee Gorges WMA | herespartanburg.com/field-guides/jocassee-gorges

Season dates based on 2025–2026 SCDNR regulations. Always verify current regulations before hunting.

Sources: dnr.sc.gov/mlands/specregshp.html · dnr.sc.gov/managed/wild/jocassee · berkeleyoutdoors.com/blog/south-carolina-hunting-seasons-2025-2026--103085