Couples Series to open season

By Scott Keepfer
OUTDOORS WRITER
skeepfer@greenvillenews.com

John Mills says that he and his wife, Susan, have both been fishing long enough "to be able to find fish occasionally."

Consistently might be a better description.

The Mills are the defending champions in the South Carolina Division of the American Bass Angler's Couples Series, a four-year-old tournament trail that is proving a big hit with male-female teams.

This year's Couples Series kicks off its six-event 2010 season Saturday at Lake Keowee.

"We do it for fun," John Mills said. "It's all about the other couples you meet."

Fun is the operative word, but they still conduct weigh-ins, and the Mills brought fish to the scales more oft than not last season.

They won one tournament, at Lake Russell, and placed "in the money" in four of the five events in which they competed.

Mills, of Leesville, said he introduced his wife to bass fishing in the early 1980s and Susan hasn't quit casting yet.

"She got addicted to it," Mills said. "Now I can't take anybody else fishing. She drives the boat, she runs the trolling motor when we're fishing."

Steven Broom, director of the South Carolina Division, said the division is one of the more popular on the nationwide circuit, typically attracting more than 20 boats per tournament.

COUPLES SERIES

- Schedule: Feb. 6, Lake Keowee; March 6, Clarks Hill; April 3, Lake Murray; May 1, Lake Russell; May 22-23, Lake Keowee; June 26, Lake Hartwell.
- Entry: $100/tournament
- Contact: Steven and Heather Broom (828) 508-0288
- More information: www.abacouples.com

The competitors include various male-female teams, including husband-wife, father-daughter, brother-sister or simply angling acquaintances. The only requirement is that each angler must be at least 16 years old.

Following next week's visit to Keowee, this year's series will make stops at Clarks Hill, Murray, Russell, and Hartwell. A two-day event also is scheduled for Keowee.

As many as 200 teams from around the country will converge at Georgia's West Point Lake next fall for the Couples Series' Championship.

Mills, 59, said he's excited about beginning a new season, but hopes that the weather warms up at least somewhat before their trip to Keowee.

"Lake Keowee is one of our favorites – I'm just not crazy about it this early in the year," Mills said. "It's probably going to be cold and probably a tough bite unless we get lucky and find a good group of fish somewhere."

- Reach Scott Keepfer at 298-4397

at Lake Keowee

OUTDOORS CALENDAR

BASS

- American Bass Anglers Couples Series, South Carolina Division tournament, Feb. 6, Lake Keowee (Gap Hill Landing), safe light-4 p.m. Entry $100. Register at ramp, call (828) 508-0288 or visit www.abacouples.com
- Bass Fishing League, Savannah River Division tournament, Feb. 27, Lake Keowee (South Cove), 7 a.m.-3 p.m. Entry $200 boaters, $100 co-anglers. Registration Feb. 26, 4-7 p.m. at Wal-Mart in Seneca. Contact: (270) 252-1000 or www.flwoutdoors.com

BOATING

- United States Power Squadron America's Boating Course, Lake Hartwell Chapter, Messiah Lutheran Church, Mauldin; meets consecutive Monday nights Mon., Feb. 1 through Mon., Feb. 22, 6:30-8:30 p.m.; $40 fee for materials; instruction is free. Contact: www.lake-hartwell.org or email education@lake-hartwell.org

DUCKS

- Youth Waterfowl Days, Sat.-Sun., Feb. 6-7; hunters 15 or younger may hunt ducks and geese in South Carolina when accompanied by an adult. Contact: (803) 734-3886.
- Ducks Unlimited Annual Banquet, Gaffney Chapter, Thurs., Feb. 18, Hampton Inn, Gaffney; tickets $45/single, $60/couple. Contact: Dennis Fowler (864) 761-6371.

FLY FISHING

- Headwaters Outfitters Free Fly Casting Class, Sat., Feb. 27, Sat., March 27, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.; six-person maximum per class, must arrive by 10:30 a.m.; reservations required. Contact: (828) 877-3106.

TROUT

- Lake Jocassee Trout Tournament Series, Feb. 13, Lake Jocassee, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Entry $40/angler; $10 optional big fish pot; under 16 fish free. Contact: Jocassee Outdoor Center (864) 944-9016.

TURKEY

- 34th Annual National Wild Turkey Federation Convention and Sport Show, Feb. 18-21, Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center, Nashville, Tenn. Contact: (800) THE-NWTF or www.nwtf.org
- National Wild Turkey Federation Hunting Heritage Banquet, Golden Strip Chapter, March 3, S.C. National Guard Armory, Fountain Inn. Contact: Chuck Hunter (864) 855-1052.

QUAIL

- Wild Quail Management Seminar, March 11-12, Webb Wildlife Center, Garnett; limited to 35 participants; $80 registration fee includes meals, overnight accommodations and seminar materials. Contact: Judy Barnes (803) 734-4306 or e-mail barnesj@dnr.sc.gov