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Fishing tournament on Lake Keowee boon to local economy

By Ray Chandler

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SENECA — Competitive bass fishing will arrive on Lake Keowee on Feb. 1, bringing fishermen, their families, tournament officials and money.

Estimates are that the one-day 2014 Walmart BFL bass fishing tournament could pump at least $220,000 into the local economy, according to Phil Shirley, Oconee County's director of parks, recreation and tourism.

The projection is based on 200 boats, translating to 400 anglers.

"Last year we had approximately 175 boats," Shirley said. "But we won't know the exact number of anglers until the week of the event."

The boaters and co-anglers will be competing for prizes of up to $8,000 and $3,000 respectively, according to Jody White, public relations communications specialist with the tournament organizers.

"The bass fishing on Keowee is expected to be good," White said, in an email. "The fish will be in a winter pattern and much of the action will focus on deep structure and cover. Jigs, drop-shot rigs, shaky heads and perhaps jigging spoons will likely be successful baits on deep structure or deeper docks.

"Some anglers might also choose to target shallower water or schooling fish with jerkbaits or umbrella rigs," White continued. "The winner of this tournament is expected to bring a five-fish limit weighing around 15 pounds to the scales."

The projected $220,000 boost to the local economy, according to Shirley, is based on estimates of 120 hotel nights used for the tournament weekend, $70 per angler for food over the weekend, $200 per boat for gas and oil and $30 per day per angler of retail expenditures. But that could be too conservative.

"We have been seeing these guys practice pretty regularly over the past couple of weeks so I know there is more hotel nights than just the weekend of the tournament," Shirley said. "But we have not done any specific analysis to catch pre-tournament fishing impact."

The BFL is a 24-division circuit for weekend anglers, with 120 tournaments throughout the season, five in each division.

According to the organization's website, the top 40 boaters and co-anglers from each division qualify for a regional tournament and are competing to finish in the top six, which then qualifies them for the Walmart BFL All-American presented by Chevy.

The 2014 BFL All-American is being held June 5-7 on Wilson Lake in Florence, Ala..



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