From famine to feast



PHOTOS BY BARRY G. RICHARDS | SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

The Larry W. Abernathy Park is seen as it was in 2006, when the area was parched by severe drought.

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

CLEMSON — In 2006, drought conditions were prevalent throughout the Upstate, and that included the Larry W. Abernathy Waterfront Park.

Clemson residents Barry and Kay Richards made the park a part of their frequent walks in recent years. Barry, who recorded the drought conditions with his camera, recently submitted photos of a bone dry Abernathy Park circa 2006.

The picture is a stark contrast to those taken at the park last week, in which the docks are underwater due to flooding. The park is now closed and won't reopen until waters recede.

"It is almost unbelievable to realize the rise of the level of Lake Hartwell, especially when viewed in the Abernathy Waterfront Park," Barry said. "We have walked through the park so many times over the years and have found it almost as unbelievable for the lake's level to be so low in 2006 as it is today.

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>
> **Barry Richards**
> Clemson resident

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Lindsey Newton, tourism director for the Clemson Area Chamber of Commerce, said extremely high lake levels have nearly the same impact as lake levels that are extremely low.

"It gets to a point where you can't enjoy the lake," Newton said. "Abernathy is under water, Twelve Mile Beach is closed, some picnic tables at Twelve Mile and Twin Lakes were in 2 feet of water and Pike Road is closed because the lake ran across the road."

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FEAST: Lake levels inhibit travel

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Newton said the lake levels also inhibit travel across the lake, as many boats are unable to pass under the bridges.

Last week, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said the consistently heavy rains caused Hartwell Lake to be at flood stage. Hartwell stood at 664.8 feet, or nearly 5 feet above its normal full pool level of 660 feet and the Corps has since opened its spillway gates in an effort to reduce the water levels.

Billy Birdwell, spokesman for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, said the excessive rain led the Corps to close a number of its swim areas and campgrounds. In addition to Twelve Mile Recreation Area, the Corps has announced all courtesy docks and most ramps and Sites 27, 41-42, 61-67 at Oconee Point Campground were closed.

Clemson Public Works Director David Conner said power had to be cut off at Abernathy Park "because some of the light poles are standing in the water."

"It's dangerous because of the height of the water and the fact it's at the point where some of the areas of the boardwalk without a railing are underwater and a child could step off," Conner said.

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What a difference seven years has made. Constant and heavy rains this year not only have filled Lake Hartwell, which adjoins Abernathy Park, but the park had to recently close due to flooding of the dock area.