

The Greenville News

GreenvilleOnline.com

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2008 ■ UPSTATE EDITION

Recent rains make Hartwell more accessible

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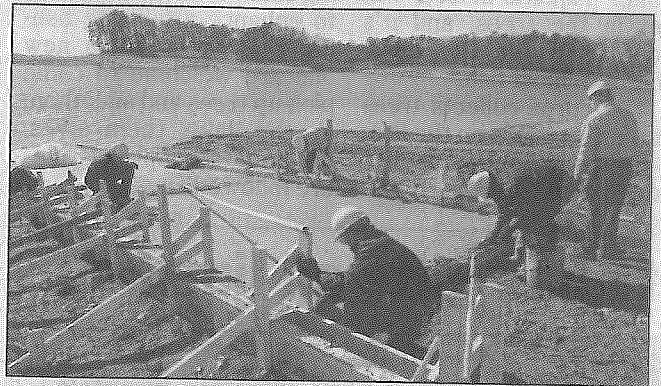
CLEMSON — Above average rain in the area that drains into Lake Hartwell has brought the lake up more than two feet from a Dec. 9 record low, but a long-range forecast predicts a slightly drier-than-usual winter.

So far this December, 5.13 inches of rain have fallen in what is called the

Hartwell sub-basin, just barely above the average December precipitation of 5.09 inches, said Virgil Hobbs III, operations project manager for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Hartwell.

The area still shows a precipitation deficit of 11.29 inches for the year, said Bryan McAvoy, meteorologist with the national Weather Service in Greer.

It isn't as large as the 21-inch deficit at this time last



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A construction crew puts in new section of concrete at the Broyles Recreation Area boat ramp.

year, but the effects of nearly two years of below-normal rainfall have taken a cumulative toll on area lakes, McAvoy said.

Hartwell has risen to a point where boaters again have access to the water. Six Corps boat ramps that

have been extended should be usable with the higher water, Hobbs said.

Ramps at Greenpond, Crawford's Ferry, Big Oaks, Hatton's Ford, Martin Creek and 18 Mile

See **RAIN** on page 4A

RAIN FROM PAGE 1A

Creek should be useable again, Hobbs said.

Work is being done now to extend Broyles Landing, and that is expected to be completed by Jan. 1, Hobbs said.

Weather systems expected to move through the Upstate on Wednesday and Sunday should bring fractional amounts of rain, probably less than an inch altogether, McAvoy said.

The three-month forecast indicates a slightly drier-than-normal pattern through March, McAvoy said.

Only four months of the past 40 months — going back to September 2005 — have had above average rainfall for the Hartwell sub-basin, which provides runoff to Hartwell, according to Corps data.

The recent rain has raised Lake Thurmond about three feet, enabling the Corps to supply all required downstream releases from Thurmond, Hobbs said. No water has been released from Hartwell for more than a week and no releases are projected for this week.

Hartwell was 639.78 feet above mean sea level Monday, which is more than 20 feet below full pool, according to Corps data.

The Corps of Engineers recently received federal approval to decrease the amount of water it releases from Upstate lakes, and so far there's been sufficient flow to meet downstream needs, Hobbs said, adding that the rain has helped.