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Anglers tackle Lake Keowee

Staff Reports

Thursday March 21, 2013

The Wal-Mart Bass Fishing League (BFL), a regional division of the Forrest L. Wood (FLW) circuit, converged on South Cove County Park and Lake Keowee recently for the first tournament of the year. This division covers the Savannah River basin and holds tournaments on Lakes Keowee, Hartwell, Russell and Clarks-Hill.

Anglers from four states competed in this year's opening tournament, which builds points throughout the season leading to the Championship tournament in September on Clarks Hill Lake. The BFL event drew 168 boats and 336 anglers who fished from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Lake Keowee.

Boater's Darren Ashley of Calhoun Falls, and Adam Rice of Anderson, both hauled in a five (5) fish total of 15 pounds and 12 ounces, earning 250 points and splitting over $10,000 in winnings. Dustin Shirley of Royston captured 250 points winning the Co-angler division with a total of 12 pounds and 11 ounces. Big Fish trophies were captured by Boater Furman Thompson of Clayton with a 5 pound 11 ounce Bass and Co-angler Tyler O'Kelley of Seneca with a Bass of 3 pound 11 ounces.

The anglers are not the only winners when fishing tournaments come to town. This is a big time sport and anglers have major investments tied up in their fishing gear in hopes of landing that trophy Bass, said Phil Shirley, director of Parks, Recreation and Tourism for Oconee County.

Boaters have thousands of dollars invested in top of the line Bass boats, vehicles and the latest fishing gear. With a regional tournament like this, we have anglers fishing up to two weeks on the lake searching and planning for the best spots to spend their time on tournament day.

"The pre-tournament fishing and the tournament provide a great economic boost to our local lodging, restaurants, gas and retail markets," said Shirley. "We invest about $1,000 in recruiting through the Mountain Lakes CVB to get a tournament like this to Lake Keowee, but the direct economic impact for a one day tournament will be $70,000 to $100,000 for our community."

This year, South Cove Park and Lake Keowee will host fishing tournaments with FLW, Bass Anglers Invitational Trail (BAIT), High School Fishing League, Michelin, Open Bass, Rotary, Lions Club, Oconee Aid and multiple other smaller tournaments resulting in a major economic driver for our local economy.