

PHILLIP GENTRY | SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Bass anglers on both Hartwell and Keowee are struggling to understand bass behavior after the tremendous amount of rainfall during the early summer has raised the lake levels to record highs. The effect has been good for Keowee and not so good for Hartwell.

Water's moving, and so are bass on local lakes

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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There's water everywhere, which for Lake Hartwell is a sight to behold after surviving another lengthy drought.

The conditions at Keowee are similar, as there's certainly no shortage of water, although Keowee always seemed to fare better in drought condition than the Corps-managed lakes.

Of late, the talk on the lake has been about trying to get rid of some of the excess water on Hartwell. At last report the water level was 4 feet above full pool at 664.1 feet, while Keowee is at 99.3 feet, 3/10 of a foot over full pond.

True to its word, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been bleeding off excess floodwaters at the Hartwell dam. This is an arduous process since the water has to be stair-stepped through the Savannah chain of lakes, all of which are above full pond as well.

Typically, moving water is the same as ringing the dinner bell for any fish, but particularly largemouth and spotted bass in the two lakes.

According to Randy Childers of Lake Hartwell Fish and Marine in Anderson, many of his bass-fishing customers are reporting a fairly decent fishing pattern early and late in the day throwing surface swimming frogs and buzzbaits around submerged grass.

Of course that prompts an obvious question — what grass given the high water levels?

"It's changed the whole outlook of the lake for the typical summer pattern," Childers said. "Normally there's a good top-water bite early and late in the day, and the middle of the day is spent working shallow humps. Nowadays, there are no shallow water humps."

The other problem addresses the aforementioned current. In a normal pattern, the Corps will run water through the turbines at the dam to generate electricity to meet peak demand. That time frame is usually mid-morning until lunch and then again in the evening when electricity use skyrockets when residents come home from work.

By bleeding off water through the spillways, current runs both continuously and at odd hours. That affects the fishing as well, according to Childers.

"Bass may feel compelled to eat any time of day with current generated by water being run over the spillway. It even affects the fish way up the lake away from the dam," he said. "The unpredictability has made it difficult to catch fish during the middle of the day.

According to guide Brad Fowler of Pendleton, the summer pattern on Lake Keowee has not only been good, but the increased rainfall and resulting water flow has made it even better.

"Keowee has more spotted bass than largemouth," Fowler said. "The spotted bass are more prone to schooling activity. Like Hartwell, spots will school early and late in the day and any time there's any substantial cloud cover."

Since substantial cloud cover was forecasted for most of June and July to date, the top-water bite has been consistent through the day. That means casting surface lures such as Zara Spokks and Sammies to long points, humps and anywhere fish are seen swirling after baitfish on the surface.

A slight changing of the weather back to bright, sunny skies may return the top-water pattern back to early and late, but should also mean fishing long tapered points with drop shot rigs will catch fish when they head back to their deep water lairs to escape the bright sun.