

Upstate outdoors year in review

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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With the year 2017 all but in the books, a look back over the last year from an outdoorsman's perspective, particularly where developments in the Upstate of South Carolina are concerned, reveals some interesting perspective.

The year began with optimism in the rebounding economy, which in turn meant more consumers were interested in spending money on outdoors-oriented items such as boats and recreational vehicles. The National Association of Marine Dealers reported a welcome upswing in watercraft sales in the past year, hopefully a sign that sagging sales over the past several years is turning around.

On the local front in South Carolina, state biologists continue to report a decline in the deer and



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In 2017, boat dealers like Palmetto Boat Center saw an increase in boat sales, spurred by a rebounding economy.

turkey numbers relied upon by big game hunters. The decline in turkey numbers was addressed two years ago by a reduction in the number of turkey tags made available to the hunting public.

On the waterfront, the Upstate of South Carolina, particularly Lake Hartwell, continues to establish itself and the local

fishery as a stronghold for bass fishing as well as large scale bass fishing tournaments.

The investment into the Greenpond Landing and Event Center on Lake Hartwell, initially established by the PCB settlement funds, and further funded by the Sports Fish Restoration Act and promoted by

Anderson County Parks, Recreation and Tourism has been a major player in hosting several large-scale bass tournaments at Lake Hartwell, including the upcoming Bassmaster Classic scheduled for March 2018.

The future of bass fishing in the Upstate has also grown by leaps and bounds during the past year and looks to only improve in 2018 as high school bass fishing team membership and participation skyrockets. The past year saw record-breaking numbers of school team participation across the Upstate area lakes as coaches, students, boat captains and supporting parents continue to make "travel bass fishing" a popular pastime for middle and high school students.

Starting in July, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources instituted and issued the first-ever statewide deer-tagging program following legislation passed by the state assembly. The tagging system had its challenges with public education and issuance of

Finally, the white-tail deer season, which provides a substantial economic impact across the entire state, comes to a close on Monday after a three-to-five-month

the tags, but was overall considered a success by the DNR. The tagging legislation also mandated a coyote reward program for hunters who harvest a specially tagged coyote. That program was geared toward reducing coyote numbers across the state which has been shown to negatively impact the state's deer numbers.

State park officials had their hands full again in 2017 after recovering from flooding conditions in 2015 and hurricane activity in 2016.

Several state parks, primarily along the coast were impacted by this year's Hurricane Irma while recovery efforts concluded from 2016 wildfires in the northern parts of the state.



Luck returns with

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

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legislation where hunters were allowed to purchase additional antlered deer tags that carried antler restrictions of a minimum four points on one side or a 12-inch spread. Many hunters applauded this as