

Dealing with fishing pressure

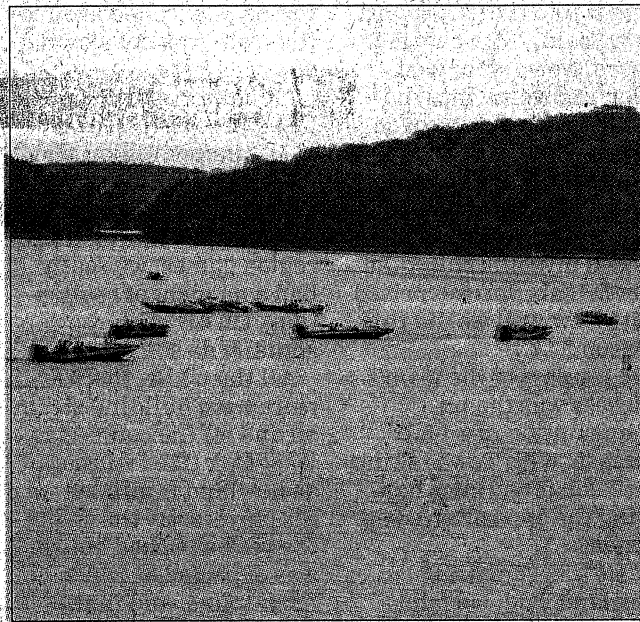
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FOR THE JOURNAL

A discussion of fishing pressure may not seem very scientific but fishing pressure can play a part in whether you catch fish. First, the number of anglers who use our freshwater fishing resource has increased threefold over the last five years. A loss of fish through harvest decreases the population on a given lake and requires restocking by resource managers. Because of this it is important that resource managers maintain accurate statistics of the number going out so they can maintain the number going in.

Since it takes several years for gamefish to attain "catchable" size and even longer to achieve trophy status, the result of increased fishing pressure on the population is a decrease in catch size. Fortunately, catch and release ethics continue to grow as more anglers discover the thrill of freshwater fishing.

The other side of fishing pressure is the effect it has while you are fishing. Unlike leased hunting land or a private fishing pond, most freshwater fishing takes place on public water and other than common courtesy, there are no rights to a specific spot. Problems can arise when two anglers are vying for the same fishing spot using two different tactics for different species of fish. An angler hoping to catch crappie by trolling down a narrow cove won't be thrilled to see a bass boat motor past him to make a few casts on the last two docks and vice versa.

A large part of being an angler is recognizing that other boats around you also want to catch fish and recognizing how the other boat is going about it. Courtesy should



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Dealing with increased fishing pressure on our area lakes is a mental game, and has become a part of fishing strategy.

be the rule. Give others plenty of room and recognize that motoring in at half throttle leaves boat wakes that can really ruin an outing for an anchored boat.

If the spot you intended to fish is occupied, stay back and watch awhile. If

the other boat is on fish, then your original plan was probably correct. Find another spot on the water with the same features and go there. If he's not, he just saved you the time trying to figure it out.

Schooling fish also present another fishing pressure situation. Quite frankly a boat motoring into a school of fish at the surface will ruin the fishing for every boat. If the area is large enough to permit additional boats, stay back, look for the direction the school is moving, then use the electric motor to quarter over to an intercepting spot. Hopefully others will show you the same courtesy but at some point, the fish will sound.

Some anglers will chase what they believe to be one school of fish all over a lake. When a school surfaces on one

point then sounds and suddenly surfaces across the lake a mile away, it's not the same school. Stay with the original school. Chances are the bait sounded because of boats (or fish) and are suspended less than 100 yards away.

Let the other boats chase after the school on the other side of the lake while you determine which direction your school moved to. Look at a topo map. The nearest hump, point, or channel drop is a likely choice. Hook one fish from your

school and bring it up. Chances are you'll bring all or part of the rest of the school with it.

One final note about fishing pressure: Whether you are fishing in a tournament for money or just out for a day of fun on the lake, you need to stay mentally focused on the fish. Treat other boats and anglers as you would treat a change in wind direction. Getting mad and losing focus only hurts you. How will the fish react to this new situation?

PHILLIP GENTRY is a freelance outdoor writer who has been writing a wide variety of outdoor articles across the Southeast since 2004.