

Air-conditioned fishing in June

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
FOR THE JOURNAL

While the current air and water temperatures in mid-June offer some of the best pleasure boating, sunbathing and swimming opportunities on Upstate lakes, the fishing comfort caused by rising temperatures has started its annual decline.

If only there was a place to fish in air-conditioned comfort throughout the entire summer...

While it may not be exactly air-conditioning, there's certainly plenty of cooler water to be found along with clear, running water and it's as close as your local tailrace. For the uninitiated, a tailrace is where the waters from an impounded dam upstream are released into the river below.

Most of these areas are rocky, with frequent water level fluctuations, and may be difficult to maneuver in a big powerboat unless you start well below the dam.

For some anglers like Stewart Venable, a summer tailrace is the perfect place to launch a kayak and just go with the flow.

Most of Venable's outings involve one-way floats, where a group of anglers puts in below the dam, floats and paddle a few miles and then take out without having to go upstream. Timing these floats with water releases from the upstream dam has its advantages for fishing but is a little more difficult to navigate.

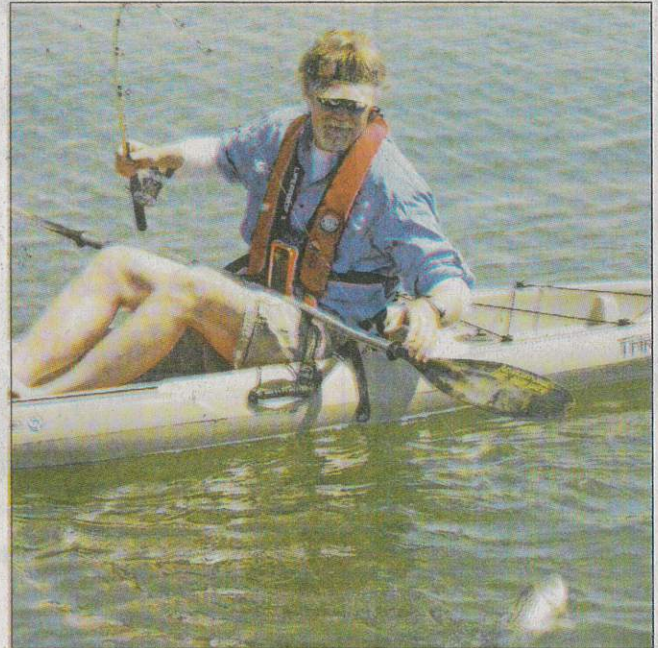
"With experienced paddlers, it's not as big an issue because the releases are don't necessarily become a safety issue," he said. "We stick to the skill level of average kayak anglers and usually do try to time it somewhat, coinciding with water releases, as long as the company that operates the dam is following the schedule, which, of course, the power companies don't always do."

Fishing during a water release isn't mandatory. Venable said the fish don't leave the area. In fact, most fish who commit to an upstream lifestyle aren't likely to leave and may even reside in the tailrace areas their whole lives.

"We can catch fish anytime," he said. "The advantage of running water is the fish move up directly below the dam. If they're not running water, we can hunt them down in the deeper pockets below the dam because the fish will back off the dam into deeper holes. We can find them there, even when they're not generating water."

Another big advantage to fishing in the river is that river fish tend to be less finicky in their eating habits. If an opportunity presents itself, typically they'll bite whereas lake fish have more down time where conserving energy is more important than feeding.

"The good thing about the fish in the tail race areas is they don't necessarily have a defined feeding schedule like



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Fishing from a kayak in one of the tailrace sections below one of our Upstate lakes is a great way to enjoy "air-conditioned" fishing.

you experience in a lot of the lakes," he said. "The moving water stays relatively cool all day. The fish will be more active throughout the day than they would be in the lake."

According to Venable, the size fish you'd expect to find in the tailrace are usually comparable to what you'd find in the lakes, but there are exceptions where really trophy sized specimens can be caught as well.

Unlike fishing from a stationary boat, kayaking anglers will learn to fish on the fly. Occasions also arise where the angler can get out of the boat and fish from a rock or shoal before continuing downstream.

"I rarely anchor. I go with the current and then I'll paddle back up and drift down

again," said Venable. "If it's faster than that, where you can't fish by drifting, it's too fast to anchor. When fishing artificial baits in fast current, which is usually what I do, I'll find a rock somewhere where I can park the boat, make my casts, then continue on."

Because most of the fish he's after are either striped bass, black bass, or sometimes big perch, Venable prefers to use artificial baits over live baits.

"Even on days when the bite is slow, the water and air above it are very comfortable and it's hard to beat the natural scenery," he said.

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