

# Fish and wildlife mitigation required at Russell Lake

Unavoidable and significant loss of wildlife and fisheries resources occurred due to the construction of the dams along the Savannah River. Terrestrial habitats of wildlife were converted to open water and fish habitat was converted from streams to open water. The Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1958 required the Corps to mitigate for the loss of habitat due to the construction of Russell Dam. Land purchased to mitigate for the loss of habitat at Russell are specifically managed for wildlife. They consist of 20,590 acres around Russell Lake (300-foot buffer lands), 6,858 acres at Thurmond, and 21,788 acres of “separable” land located away from the lake and managed by Georgia and South Carolina Departments of Natural Resources (DNR). The total area of mitigation land is 49,236 acres, which compensates for the loss of 26,650 acres of fish and wildlife habitat. In addition, specific fisheries mitigation measures include habitat structures, tree shelters, and fish stocking.

Thurmond and Hartwell have active wildlife management programs; however, they were not required to purchase and manage additional mitigation land to compensate for habitat loss since these projects were authorized and construction initiated before passage of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1958.

## Forest, Fish and Wildlife Management

All three lakes have natural resource management programs designed to enhance and maintain their forests, wildlife, and fisheries.

**Forest Management.** The pine ecosystem is managed for species diversity, wildlife, aesthetics, and other benefits. Harvesting or “thin-

ning” the pine stand is important to allow enough sunlight to reach the forest floor to produce plants desirable for wildlife food and cover. Pine thinning improves the growth and health of the remaining trees, making the trees more resistant to insects. Along with thinning, prescribed burning helps to manage the forest— many plants require fire to germinate. In contrast, hardwood forests are not harvested but are maintained to provide diversity and produce valuable wildlife foods such as acorns.

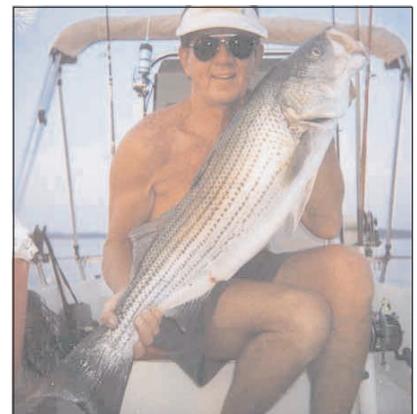
**Fisheries Management.** Fisheries management at the lakes blends programs carried out by both the Georgia and South Carolina DNR in concert with the Corps. The states regulate fishermen and stock fish, while the Corps operates the dams and manages the surrounding federal land affecting fisher-

men, fish and their habitat. Overall, the fisheries management program objectives are: maintain lake conditions favorable to fish spawning and survival, coordinate and assist state agency personnel with population surveys and other activities, and encourage and accommodate public use and appreciation of the fisheries resource.

**Wildlife Management.** Portions of Corps land around each lake are planted



The land surrounding the lakes contains some of the oldest pine and hardwood forests in the region.



Striped Bass caught in Hartwell Lake.



Food plots are a valuable source of food for the white tail deer.

in food plots in the spring and fall to enhance wildlife habitat by providing valuable sources of food and cover for deer, duck, turkey, dove, quail, and a variety of songbirds. Thousands of ducks use the impoundments, adjacent ponds and wetlands as staging areas (for feeding and resting) as they migrate south for the winter. Small impoundments, designed and managed specifically for waterfowl, are located at Russell and Thurmond. Nesting boxes are provided for the resident wood ducks at all three lakes. Appropriate management techniques are used to protect and improve rare plant and animal communities. Biologists and park rangers conduct surveys to evaluate populations and nesting success of both eagle and osprey.

With development pressures continuing around Thurmond, Hartwell, and Russell lakes, stewardship of the natural resources is and will continue to be necessary for the benefit of the Savannah River Basin and the southeastern United States.



Platforms like this one are designed to increase osprey nesting.

## FAQs

**Q. What is the disease that is killing eagles and other birds at Thurmond Lake?**

**A.** Avian Vacuolar Myelinopathy (AVM). It affects the central nervous system of birds by creating lesions within the brain and spinal cord. It appears that eagles contract the disease by feeding on infected coots and other waterfowl. Recent studies have suggested that AVM may be caused by a toxin produced by a previously unidentified species of blue-green algae, which is found in large concentrations on some aquatic plants. Coots and waterfowl may contract AVM by feeding on aquatic plants that harbor the blue-green algae; however, the exact cause is still unknown. There is no indication that the disease affects fish or mammals. The Corps is monitoring AVM as well as cooperating with various agencies researching the disease. Coots, waterfowl, or eagles exhibiting uncoordinated behavior, such as difficulty flying, swimming, or walking, should be reported to the lake office and the state department of natural resources.

**Q. What hunting or fishing regulations apply on the lakes?**

**A.** All state hunting and fishing regulations apply in the respective state where you are hunting or fishing. There is a reciprocal fishing agreement between Georgia and South Carolina whereby you can fish on the Georgia or South Carolina side of the lake with a fishing license from either state; however, all other fishing regulations apply for each state where fishing occurs. The reciprocal fishing license agreement applies to the impoundments, *not to tributary streams to those impoundments*. There is no reciprocal agreement for hunting licenses.

**Q. What can be done to reduce the damage pine beetles are causing to the forests around the lakes?**

**A.** Once the beetles have infested a forest stand, the only practical means of stopping their destruction is to harvest the infested trees along with a surrounding buffer area. There are many factors that may contribute to a pine beetle outbreak, such as weather (drought), tree age, and type of pine tree (shortleaf pines are highly vulnerable). One of the biggest factors preventing an outbreak is improving the rate of growth and health of the forest stand. Thinning the pine forest is the primary tool to improve the health and vigor of the forest stand.