

Where private shoreline use is and is not permitted – and why

Private shoreline use may be permitted on Thurmond and Hartwell lakes but is prohibited on Russell Lake.

Many Corps lakes, like Thurmond and Hartwell, were built between 1940 and 1970 in rural areas. To encourage public use of the lakes, the Corps implemented liberal management practices, allowing private facilities such as boat docks, boat ramps, roads, picnic shelters, improved walkways, and utility rights-of-way to be built on public lands and significant amounts of vegetation to be removed (underbrushing).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, environmental concerns moved to the forefront of the nation’s consciousness. While continuing to promote the safe and healthful use of public land and water by the general public, the Corps began developing management practices and environmental safeguards to ensure the quality of those resources for future generations. Changes in Corps policy prohibited private shoreline uses on lakes built after Dec. 13, 1974, or on lakes where no private uses existed as of that date. Russell Lake, completed in 1985, falls under this guidance. Lakes like Thurmond and Hartwell, where the practice already existed, could continue permitting certain private shoreline uses such as boat docks, walkways, utility rights-of-way, and underbrushing. These new policies required zoning the shoreline (limited development, public recreation, protected, and prohibited) and developing a Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) for each lake allowing private shoreline uses.

Federal Reg. 36 CFR states that private shoreline uses would not be allowed on lakes built after Dec. 13, 1974, or where no private uses existed as of that date. Russell Lake falls under this guidance.

The SMPs and zoning were developed with public input. Both focus on

maintaining a healthy balance between permitted private uses and long-term protection of natural resources. The amount of public land surrounding each lake influenced the zoning and, in conjunction with other factors, such as accessibility and proximity to metropolitan areas, contributed to the development of three distinct lakes that offer the public quality recreation alternatives.

Thurmond Lake has a combination of areas. Eighteen percent of its shoreline is zoned as limited development, where boat docks may be permitted. Segments of the shoreline in this zone have underbrushed areas on public land and private facilities on public land and water. However, much of Thurmond’s shoreline is pristine and undeveloped, with abundant wildlife habitat and no visible adjacent private development.

Adjacent private development is visible along most of Hartwell Lake’s shoreline, given that 50 percent of the shoreline is zoned as limited development. With significant numbers of permitted private facilities on public land and water and much of the shoreline underbrushed, Hartwell has the largest Shoreline Management Program of any Corps lake nationwide.

With a 300-foot collar of public land around Russell Lake, most development on adjacent private property is not visible on the lake. This, coupled with the prohibition against private shoreline development, has resulted in Russell having a pristine shoreline that provides abundant wildlife habitat.



Typical cove on Hartwell Lake, zoned limited development, where private shoreline use may be permitted. Below is the pristine shoreline of Russell Lake where private shoreline use is prohibited.



FAQs

Q. How often are Hartwell and Thurmond’s Shoreline Management Plans (SMP) reviewed and updated?

A. The Savannah District Commander reviews SMPs at least once every five years to determine if they need to be updated. Historically, updates are needed every 8-10 years. Hartwell and Thurmond began developing their SMPs in 1974. After considerable public input, Hartwell’s plan was finalized in 1979, with updates in 1989 and 1998. Thurmond began implementing its first SMP in 1974, with updates in 1983, 1993, and 2001.

Q. What determines if private property adjacent to Thurmond or Hartwell lake is dockable?

A. Dockability depends on many factors, such as shoreline zoning and spacing from other structures. A field inspection is required to determine the dockability of adjacent private property because each site is unique. Prospective buyers are encouraged to inquire about dockability prior to purchasing property adjacent to Thurmond and Hartwell lakes.

Q. If I purchase adjacent private property with a permitted dock or other facilities, can they automatically be permitted to me?

A. No. Although the vast majority of permitted facilities can be permitted to a new owner, this is not always the case. Prospective buyers are encouraged to contact the lake office to inquire whether facilities may be permitted to a new owner.

Q. Why is it important to maintain trees and other vegetation on public land around the lakes?

A. Maintaining vegetation along the shoreline is important to prevent erosion, maintain good water quality, and provide necessary habitat for fish and wildlife. Vegetation helps hold soil in place and traps sediments and pollutants, providing an area where chemicals, pesticides, and fertilizers can decompose rather than flow directly into the lakes, adversely affecting water quality. A healthy vegetative buffer also shields water areas near the shoreline from extreme summer temperatures, providing cooler areas for aquatic life. Cooler areas hold more dissolved oxygen, which fish need to breathe. Shoreline vegetation provides food, cover, nesting, and sanctuary for animals and is essential to maintaining the natural beauty of the lakes.

Q. Why are there reddish-orange markings on many of the trees near the lakes?

A. These markings are located on “witness” trees along the government boundary line to help identify where private property ends and public property begins. Drawings 1 through 4 (below) illustrate the different types of markings and describe their meanings. It is important to remember that the marked trees are not the exact boundary line, but instead identify the general location of the line. To identify the exact location of the line, adjacent private property owners are encouraged to use a licensed surveyor to prevent encroachments of unauthorized private structures onto public land.

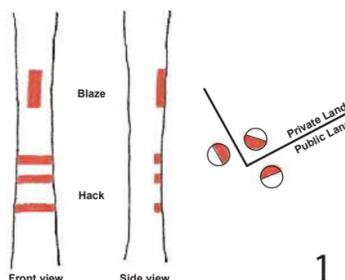


Orange paint is used to paint witness trees near the boundary line. Drawings 1 through 4 illustrate the different types of markings and describe their meaning.

Boundary Line Witness Markings

Corner Witness Tree

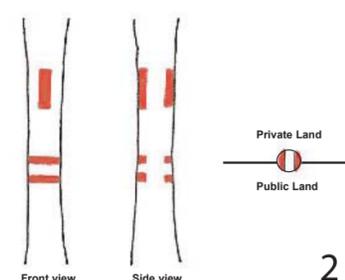
Tree is painted facing the corner. It is marked with one vertical blaze and three horizontal hacks.



1

Center Line Tree

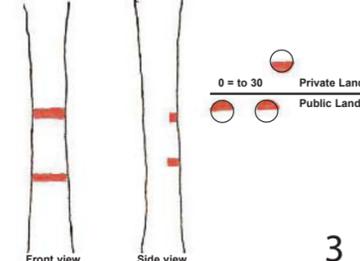
This witness is used when the line goes through the tree. The tree is painted on both sides with one vertical blaze and two horizontal hacks.



2

Line Witness Tree

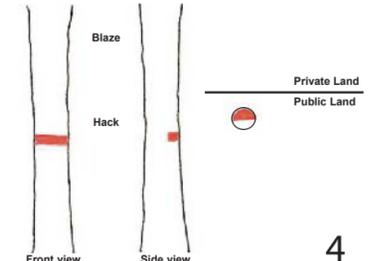
The most common witness tree. Two horizontal hacks face the boundary line. This marking is only used on trees located within 30 inches of the boundary line.



3

Banded Directional Tree

This type of witness is used only when there are no trees within 30 inches of the boundary line. One band is painted facing the line to show the general location of the line.



4