

**Update**  
**Little evidence of Southern Pine Beetle infestation found**

The summer of 2002 was an active year for Southern Pine Beetles at the lake. These small, destructive insects affected more than 2,000 acres of Thurmond Project pine forests, but this year promises to be differ-



David Malone, Thurmond Project Forester, checks on the health of a sample pine tree.

ent. The combination of a wet winter and cold weather has diminished evidence of an over-wintering population of beetles. The drought-induced pine tree stress of last year has been replaced with vigorous pine growth.

"It looks like we're going to have a normal year, where Southern Pine Beetles won't be a major factor," said David Malone, Thurmond Project Forester. "Although the forests would eventually self regenerate, we're planning to give nature a hand with planting hardwood and pine seedlings. In a few years, there will be scant traces of the 2002 Southern Pine Beetle epidemic." Reforestation of affected areas will be accomplished over the next three years, according to Malone.

**Do you know someone who would like to receive a copy of Lake Times?**

Call 1-800-533-3478, ext. 1130 or send us the name to be added to the mailing list: ATTN: David Quebedeaux, Lake Times Editor, Route 1, Box 12, Clarks Hill, SC 29821. Your comments about the newsletter are welcome.



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# Lake Times

J. Strom Thurmond Project, Savannah District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers



Spring rains allow Corps officials to test the Thurmond Dam flood gates for the first time in five years.

## The drought's over! Water, water everywhere!

by Park Ranger Chris Spiller

Through the years, the water level of Thurmond Lake has been up and down. Over the last four years, the lake dropped steadily due to severe drought conditions; then, in September 2002, the water level plummeted to the heart-breaking level of 315.34 feet mean sea level (msl). During the drought years, many were heard to say, "The Lake will never come up again." False rumors of a permanent lower lake level also could be heard around the drought-stricken lake. Boat docks sat on dry land, with waist-high weeds and pine saplings growing up through the deck boards. Some docks were difficult to find due to the four-year-old stand of pine timber around them.

Then the rains came.

Fall is historically a dry period for the area. But starting last November, the watershed around Lake Thur-

mond received substantial rainfall, which caused a sigh of relief from everyone who boats, fishes, skis, swims or lives near the Lake. Owners of businesses that depend on tourists' spending habits began to grin at the rising lake level. Boat docks that haven't floated in four years rose to the occasion. Boats, docks and spirits were floating once again. The lake came alive with activity and blossomed to its full potential.

By New Year's Day 2003, the lake surpassed its normal pool level for the winter months. Then, as nature would have it, more rain came down and replenished the entire region's watershed, ending the drought. But it hasn't stopped there. For the past months, the area has received average-to-above-average rainfall. The lake went from a deficit of 16 feet below normal pool (330 ft.) to 3 feet above normal pool (333 ft.) in only five

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# Petersburg Park named one of top family campgrounds

by Park Ranger David Quebedeaux

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at J. Strom Thurmond Lake is proud to announce that the National Recreation Reservation Service provider, ReserveAmerica, has selected Petersburg Park as one of the "Top 100 Family Campgrounds" in the nation.

This first annual list of America's best family campgrounds was developed in part by park rangers, regional park management, and campers who write testimonials, rate campgrounds and provide feedback throughout the year. More than 2,500 parks were reviewed and the final 100 parks were chosen based on specific family friendly criteria ranging from educational programs and visitor centers to camping amenities and overall beauty and scenery.

Petersburg Park is one of 13 campgrounds operated by the Corps on Thurmond Lake. The park was named for the now submerged town of Old Petersburg. This family friendly park includes 86 lakeside campsites with electrical and water hookups and seven primitive campsites with beautiful views of the lake. Petersburg Park also boasts numerous clean restrooms with hot showers, two swim beaches, laundry facilities, a new playground, a boat ramp, a fishing dock, a covered group shelter, hiking trails, a fish cleaning station, and a sanitary dump station. The park offers enjoyable camping opportunities all year and is very popular with families.

"Our first annual 'Top 100 Family Campgrounds' was created as a resource to the camping consumer looking to plan and reserve a family camping trip for this spring or summer," said Brock Weatherup, president of ReserveAmerica.

"We are proud to honor these outstanding parks, which provide such a high level of service and dedication while protecting our beautiful natural areas for future generations."

Campsites at Petersburg Park are \$14 and \$18 per night and can be reserved online at "<http://www.ReserveAmerica.com>" or by calling toll free to 1-877-444-6777. Campers can make reservations up to 240 days in advance.

All camping parks and day-use facilities at Thurmond Lake are open.

**Edwin and Norma Hoglander, campers from Maryland, have come to Petersburg Park every year since they found it back in 2000. They get their reservations online.**



## Rangers spread the message

Rangers from the Thurmond Project are available to speak to your organization on a variety of subjects related to the operation of the Project, the Corps' mission, and water safety. By reaching out to boaters, hunters, fishermen, and swimmers, our Rangers may be able to save a life. Give us a call at 1-800-533-3478, ext. 1147 or 1130, and we'll arrange a time to bring the message to you.

# Thurmond Lake set for a banner year in fish production

by Park Ranger David Quebedeaux

Fishing has never been bad at J. Strom Thurmond Lake, but a fortuitous string of events may produce the best fishing ever at the lake. Four drought-stricken years of low lake levels followed by springtime flood waters may make 2003 one of the most significant spawning seasons this lake has known.

Each spring, the lake fish lay eggs that will eventually become the sport fish caught by fishermen in later years. The reproducing fish look for lake areas where they can feed, hide and raise juvenile fish known as fry. Ideal locations for spawning usually consist of shallow areas with vegetation, which provide cover for the mating fish. This vegetation also provides habitat for aquatic insects that are essential food during the early stages of most fish species.

The last four years of low lake levels have allowed

trees and vegetation to grow significantly on the exposed lakebed at the edges of Thurmond Lake. Due to the elevated springtime lake levels this year, there was an abundance of flooded vegetation, providing a wide variety of needed cover and food sources for the mating fish. Until the fry are old enough to make it on their own, they will use these same areas as a protective nursery. This year should be one of enhanced survival rates of the fry.

Corps hydrologists also held Thurmond Lake levels relatively steady during the spawning season. Spawning fish such as bass, bream, and crappie prefer a stable lake level so that their eggs receive constant sun exposure and water temperatures until they hatch. The Corps began stabilizing Thurmond Lake levels April 5 and continued for about five weeks until the fish-spawning season was over.

It may be years before lake fishermen reap the benefits of this spawning season, but the eventual result will be a strong year class of fish that will support a good fishery in the future.

## Water, water everywhere

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months. The lake has had an incredible comeback, and things are looking good for a great recreation season of fishing, boating, water skiing, swimming and just plain outdoor fun. People who live near the lake are getting ready for the season, too. Not too long ago the drought had adjacent landowners applying for permits to dredge in shallow locations, but now coves are full of water, enticing others to apply for a permit to build a boat dock on the lake. In fact, the J. Strom Thurmond Shoreline Management Section has had an increase in applications for boat docks.

Most certainly, Thurmond Lake will someday again suffer from another drought. Although some lake users may panic the next time the lake level falls, hopefully, most people will take the time to reflect on the past and tell everyone, "Ya know, I remember when the lake was down 16 feet and, like magic, it went 3 feet above pool level in only five months. It will fill up again when it starts raining." The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Thurmond Lake will be ready whatever nature has in store. Please come see and enjoy your J. Strom Thurmond Lake.



*Come on down — the fishin's great!*