COLUMBIA, S. C.
STATE
D. 101,500 S. 115,500

OCT 24 1976



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The Fall Bonanza Begins

Fall fishing got off to a bad start because of all the rain, mud and sludge recently that has filled South Carolina's rivers, streams and lakes. But things are picking up again, and the forecast is good to excellent — dependent, of course, on the quirks of autumn weather.

In most of South Carolina's big lakes, bass and crappie are being caught in good numbers and heavy schooling activity is reported on striped bass, hybirds and white bass. The one exception is Lake Marion which is still swollen with flood waters.

The lower lake in the Santee-Cooper impoundment has suffered little ill effects from the deluge of a couple of weeks ago. Scattered schools of stripers are offering good fare all over the lake, largemouth bass are taking topwater baits and crappie are good off the beds.

Don Millus of the Coastal Carolina Fishing Club based in Conway reports that bluefish and winter trout are providing great fall angling along the Grand Strand. "The drop in temperatures seems to be just the ticket to get the fish biting," announced the founder of the only college fishing tournament in the nation.

Good catches of flounder were also recorded in Murrell's Inlet and anglers out of Winyah Bay took spottails and trout on mullet and plugs. The surf along the Grand Strand is producing excellent angling for bluefish, often in the two-pound class.

King mackerel are running offshore and the Coastal Carolina Fishing Club, which probably tags more kings than any other single outfit in the state, resumed its tagging operation this weekend.

Dean Poucher relays the news that the Spanish mackerel, mysteriously elusive during the summer, are running in big schools around Hilton Head and the fishermen are taking big catches of them.

The mackerel are averaging about two pounds, but some run as high as nine pounds — which is plenty big for Spanish. Kings are also running offshore and attracting plenty of attention.

"There's a lot of action in the surf, too," Poucher said. "Channel bass, bluefish, summer trout and spotted weakfish are all moving into the surf now. It's especially good up on the north end near Port Royal and the sluice by the Hyatt House."

Last week Tommy Willis brought the Stormy Petrel in to Harbour Town Marina and unloaded a mixed catch of 80 blues and Spanish mackerel. On the same day, John Hooper took a party out to the new artificial reef aboard the Windy and returned with nine hefty kings.

Flounder, red drum and spotted trout are coming into the salt creeks after shrimp. Three island fishermen recently filled their boat with croaker and whiting just off Pine Island.

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THE FLAP about PCB contamination is not over yet. While officials decide what to do about the problem in Lake Hartwell, the state of Georgia has ordered three rivers — the Coosa, Etowah and Oostanula — closed to commercial fishing and has issued a warning to sport fishermen against eating fish caught from these waters.

Apparently the warning is being heeded since many popular fishing spots are now nearly deserted.

A group of Georgia and Alabama businessmen have filed a $500 million suit against General Electric and Monsanto, charging the firms with polluting the Coosa River. Monsanto is also a co-defendant in a $1 billion class action suit filed by property owners from South Carolina and Georgia for polluting Lake Hartwell with PCBs.

PCB contamination has also led to the closing of waters in New York, the Great Lakes area and the Mississippi drainage.

MONS 050851