ATLANTA JOURNAL AND CONSTITUTION

9/12/76

. . .And Hartwell's Singin' 'Em

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HARTWELL, Ga. — Bob Winn, the manager of the Hart County Chamber of Commerce, says the PCB scare on Lake Hartwell "has had very little effect" on business here.

But Winn obviously hasn't been trying to sell fish bait or boats to disciples of Isaac Walton, the father of sport angling.

Since biologists in South Carolina and Georgia announced in August that fish in the Twelve Mile Creek area of the 56,000-acre lake had dangerously high levels of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), fishing has virtually halted.

Marine dealers in the Lake Hartwell area are having difficulty selling fishing boats, particularly the expensive bass boats, and bait shop operators say minnow sales have dropped drastically in the past three weeks.

Winn, who enjoys a daily swim in Hartwell, confessed that he saw fewer boats than usual on the lake last weekend

Georgia Rambler



and conceded there "possibly" has been a decline in fishing activity.

Winn said the chamber office has had "absolutely no complaints," and, referring to the PCB situation, declared, "We are sorry this thing came up." Asked if he would have preferred keeping the PCB contamination of fish a secret from the public, he said, "I think it would have been much better until we have more information from authorities."

Although fish in the Twelve Mile Creek area in South Carolina were found to be so contaminated with PCBs as to be unfit for human consumption, biologists said samples of fish in the Georgia area of the lake indicate that these are safe to eat.

South Carolina health officials pinpointed Sangamo Electric Co. near Pickens, S.C., as the source of the PCB contamination. PCBs are organic compounds used in the manufacture of electronic transformers and capacitors. Scientists suspect, but have yet to prove, that PCBs are linked to cancer of the liver and gall bladder.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has given Sangamo until the end of this month to reduce its PCB discharge to "non-detectible" amounts.

MONS 037314

"At this point, they have not reduced the levels enough," said Alec Little of the EPA regional office in Atlanta. "We are trying to set up a meeting with Sangamo officials next week to discuss this."

Winn said two chemists or biologists from the Environmental Protection Agency in Athens are scheduled to address businessmen and property owners Friday at the Georgia Power Co. auditorium at Hartwell.

Mrs. Julian Mann, who with her husband operates a bait shop near the lake shore, was asked about fish bait sales.

"We aren't selling any at all," she said. "It's just like when we didn't have any gasoline. Our business has dropped over $100 a day and way over $1,000 a week."

Mrs. Mann said that over the Labor Day weekend, the highways were nearly empty, fewer people went camping here and a fisherman was an extremely rare customer.

A customer, Max Cleveland, said that one day late last week, he saw only one boat on the lake.

"When the minnow man comes by the store, we just tell him we don't need them," she said.

Jimmy Cochran, who moved here from Atlanta six weeks ago, said, "I haven't eaten fish since this came out, but really and truly, I wouldn't be afraid to eat them.

"I haven't seen a bass boat or any crappie fishermen in my cove in three weeks."

Two months ago bread truck driver-salesman Barney Hart of Hartwell bought a $4,500 bass boat, but he said, "I can't even use it."

During the past week, he saw only two boats on the lake, and he still hasn't decided whether he'll join the local bass club. Hart said he eats without fear trout that he catches in the Savannah River below the Lake Hartwell dam.

Jack Benson, who works at a nearby bait shop, said the "minnow business has been terrible." A customer told him that "little businesses around the lake are drying up on the vine."

"It is obviously hurting the real estate companies," he said. "I have a friend in real estate who says he just goes up to the office and sits. I have heard this from more than one person."

Benson believes the Corps of Engineers should solve the PCB problem "instead of bugging the people on the lake about their dock and putting swing sets on government property."

Doc Rits, manager of Hartwell Hi Dri Marina, says business is slow, and he doesn't think any fishing boats have been sold in three weeks. Last weekend he saw one fisherman at the marina.

"Other marinas are hurting," he said. "I heard of one that hasn't sold a boat. They tell me they are getting out of the boat business."

He said owners of runabouts and other pleasure craft are buying gasoline to ride or pull skiers, but bass fishermen are rarely seen anymore.

Hartwell Mayor Thomas Myers said, "If one of my friends wants to bring me a big, fat crappie, yes, I'd eat it."

The mayor added, "The general comment around town is, 'What I've got in my freezer is not gonna be thrown away. I'm gonna eat 'em.' "

Mayor Myers emphasized that some people are still "gun shy," but many local fishermen say they will continue to catch Lake Hartwell fish and eat them.

"My understanding is that money is being spent now to take corrective measures, and I think it will be corrected within 12 months or 18 months," Myers said.

Mike MacNabb, a Hartwell hardware store owner, said business has dropped slightly, but he is optimistic about the future. He said he would not hesitate to eat fish from Georgia waters of Hartwell.

He noted there has been mixed reaction among fishermen. Some bass anglers welcome the chance for plenty of elbow room in their favorite coves, while others are not fishing. Many crappie fishermen here told him they will continue fishing and eating their catches.

Warren Moore, manager of Harbor Light Marina, said fishing boat sales have been "extremely slow," and he has sold very little fish bait. Pleasure boaters, however, are continuing to enjoy the lake, he said.

Moore wouldn't be reluctant to eat fish caught on the Georgia side of Hartwell, and he expressed optimism about the future here. He doesn't think the PCB situation will have any long-term effect on development, prices of property or marina growth.

Sidney Moore of Hartwell, a land developer whose company owns over 100,000 linear feet of waterfront property on Hartwell, declared he has not noticed "any downward trend" in land sales.

He estimated that "probably not over 20 per cent" of lake lot buyers consider themselves avid anglers.

Moore conceded that a few potential property owners might have been scared off by the PCB incident, but said he believes "the effect of it has been very neglible."

MONS 037315