

Fall Bass on Lake Keowee

by Bill Walker, Tournament Director of the Keowee Anglers

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The surface temperature of Lake Keowee is dropping down from its late summer highs. As the shallow water cools down and holds more oxygen, the larger bass will spend more time in the shallows feeding up for the winter. And we will again be able to catch them there.

I live in the vicinity of Mile Creek Park and have recorded surface water temperature measurements at my dock for the last 15 years. The annual temperature cycle is well defined. The summer water temperature at my dock usually peaks in mid-August around 88°F to 90°F. High-temperature water holds very little oxygen and drives the bass deep into the cooler, more oxygen-rich water where they are harder to find and catch. This is especially true for the larger, more mature bass which appear more sensitive to light levels and oxygen content. However, bass still have to eat, so they tend to make forays into the shallows when the water there is the coolest, just before the sun rises. This is why in many parts of Lake Keowee, the big bass have been harder to catch for the last 6 weeks, except at the crack of dawn in those shallows that are only a short run from deep water.

Today, the morning surface water temperature near Mile Creek Park was 84°F. According to my charts covering the last 15 years, the water temperature starts dropping linearly around the first week of September. By the first of October it's 82°F +/- 2°F. By the first of November it reaches 73°F +/- 3°F. And by Christmas it starts to level off around 60°F. Then it drops slowly to a low in January and February of about 56°F. Near the "hot hole" where the power plant cooling water comes into the lake from Duke Energy just north of the 130/183 bridge, the water remains 5-10°F warmer through the winter generating a lot of local, early morning fog and in winter making the fish there more active than in other parts of the lake. And south of the 130/183 bridge the water temperature in the south end of the lake will gradually become about 5°F colder than at Mile Creek Park and remain that way for most of the winter as the general lake temperature falls.

So, what does all this mean for fishing now?

September is a month of transition from the summer pattern described above to the fall pattern. As the lake water

temperature drops into 70s during the fall, the cooler temperature allows the shallow water to hold more oxygen and the bigger bass tend to spend more time in the shallows looking for food. Early mornings, and further into the fall late evenings, are the lowest light times and the best fishing times in which to work the shallow points with surface lures and shallow-running soft baits and crank baits. At the crack of dawn and last evening light, fish feed in 2 to 10 feet of water. Later in the mornings and earlier in the evenings fishing is more productive in the approaches to those shallows in 10 to 20 feet of water with deeper running lures like X-raps, Rattletraps, diving crank baits, weighted flukes, and Carolina-rigged or Ned-rigged worms.

Also, as the lake water cools, the bass tend to fatten up for the winter by preying on balls of bait fish that start in the cool depths of the main lake and migrate further up into the creeks and bays. In late September and October look for those bait balls on your electronics. When you find them, try dropping a jigging spoon below or around them to entice bass following the school to attack your lure.

Deeper into the fall, especially on calm sunny days in October and November, look in the channels of the longer creeks for multiple fish jumps with minnows jumping clear of the water to escape surface-thrashing bass chasing schooling minnows. The spotted bass in particular will be chasing schools of baitfish. Casting a minnow-shaped jig or top-water lure into that surface



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