

Are You Ready for Spring Bass?

- Bill Walker, Tournament Director, Keowee Anglers

Salem, February 15, 2015

Right now, Spring seems far into the future, especially since I've heard 4 inches of snow are forecast for tomorrow here on Lake Keowee (do you believe it?). But the snow won't last long, and by the time you read this the water temperatures in Lake Keowee will be getting ready for their annual Spring rise. And the bass will be starting their approach to their spawning beds.

The attached figure shows my data for the annual water surface temperature around Mile Creek Park for the last 10 years. In March the data shows a lot of variation, but by the beginning of April the temperature is definitely rising toward its summer high. In the south end of the lake, the Spring water temperatures tend to be 5 to 10 degrees colder than shown on the chart.

For help finding bass under these conditions, see my article written last year at this time and now posted on the FOLKS website. Go www.keoweefolks.org, click on the ON THE LAKE icon, and then click on the FISHING icon. Finally click on the link to the article entitled: *Mar2014 Early Spring Bass*.

When you read this, if you haven't already prepared your fishing gear for the Spring season, now's the time to get your gear into top shape so you won't lose a bass first time out due to breaking line or a bad hook set.

First take a look at your fishing reels. Spin them to make sure they spin freely. You may want to add a touch of reel oil to the moving parts. If you've saved the user's manual for your reel, it should tell you where to add the oil.

Next look carefully at your line. As you dream of your first Spring bass, run the line between your fingers to see whether it is nicked or frayed. Do you really trust that line to hold your first big Spring bass? Next, take the last few feet of line in both hands with all your knots between your hands, and being careful to hold it so it won't cut you, yank on those knots with all your might to see whether anything snaps. If your line snaps, think about putting new line on your reel. If you're using monofilament line, you may want to replace it every year, and more often if you store it somewhere that sunlight can get to it. Sunlight, even reflected sunlight reaching a rod hung under the roof of a pontoon boat, can degrade and weaken monofilament line.

When I replace my monofilament line, I use Spiderwire Super Mono, 12-lb.-test, clear line. It's strong enough for Lake Keowee bass, yet extra thin so that it casts well. The problem with it is that it's so thin that the teeth of spotted bass abrade the line. If I have it next to my lure, I know it will break on the 4th or 5th spotted bass. So with that line I use a 2 ft. leader of Berkley Vanish, 12-lb.-test, clear fluorocarbon that I attach to my mono using a barrel swivel. I then attach my lures to the fluorocarbon line. The fluorocarbon line is tougher, and the teeth of spotted bass don't abrade that line nearly as much.

On the rods that I use braided line, I don't replace the line nearly as often. But each Spring I do cut off about 8 ft. of line to remove the most used and most frayed segment. Then using a barrel swivel as a connector, put on a new fluorocarbon leader here too.

When tying knots to barrel swivels, clips, and lures, I always use the Palomar Knot. If you want to learn to tie knots, I recommend you go to www.animatedknots.com. That site has all kinds of knots for almost every business or sport. There you can find step-by-step pictures for tying each knot along with an animation video you can speed up or slow down showing how the knot comes together. To find how to tie the Palomar Knot, click on the Fishing icon and then on the picture labeled Palomar Knot.

Once you have your reels, line, and leaders ready, the last maintenance step is to examine your lures. You may want to clean them up a bit so they look more fresh and natural. If they need cleaning, clean them first, before you sharpen the hooks! The last step is to rub along each hook, along the shank out toward the point, a whetstone or fine file to touch up the point of each hook so your hooks are nice and sharp for sinking easily into the fish to give you a good hook set.

All this maintenance is a great rainy day activity. I'm planning to do mine in the next few days that are forecast for snow!

It's hard enough to hook a bass in the clear waters of Lake Keowee. Once you hook one, you don't want to lose it through some failure in your gear! So be sure you've done your maintenance. Then you can go out and enjoy fishing without worrying about the condition of your gear!

