

Fishermen quick to start enjoying new pier at Hartwell dam

By Liz Carey

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HARTWELL DAM — As a child, Bob Skelton came to the Georgia River Recreation area on Hartwell Lake to fish with his dad, Louie.

On Friday, the two men, bundled in heavy jackets, were among the first to put their lines in the water after the dedication of a new pier that replaced the old one at their fishing grounds. And Bob Skelton was the first to pull a fish out.

Only moments after he put his bait and hook in the lake, Bob Skelton's line tugged, dipping under the clear green water. He pulled the rod back and started reeling in his line.

"I missed him," he said. "Got a hit, but I missed him."

The pier was made possible through a natural resource damage settlement related to the PCB contamination of Twelve Mile Creek. It connects an existing pier on the dam and allows public access to it again. The pier was closed following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, because parking and entry to the pier allowed vehicles too near the dam's power plant, officials said.

"We used to come down here a lot," said Skelton, who now lives in Six Mile. "I grew up around here. It's always been a good place for trout."

Later on as a dad, Skelton said, he took his daughters to fish in the water below the electricity generating plant.

The largest trout he ever caught here, he said, was about four pounds. He said the fish made a pretty good dinner. He said he was not worried about PCB contamination.

"They taste too good to throw back," he said. "The fish in here now, they're not from around here. They just put them in the water."

After a dedication for the pier, the state of Georgia turned it over to the Savannah District of the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. More than 1,000 brown and rainbow trout were released into the water just before a test of the dam's gates, officials said.

"Fishing is just a lot of fun, but it's also big business in Georgia," said Dan Forster, director of the Wildlife Resources Division of Georgia's Department of Natural

Resources. “We have an estimated one million anglers who will spend more than \$1.1 billion in Georgia just fishing ... the release of this trout will give you just a taste of the future of angling on this pier.”

For Jim Harrison, a Hartwell, Ga., resident, fishing along the new pier meant getting closer to the fish.

“This pier means accessibility,” Harrison said. “Without it, you’d have to wade into the water, and if the gates opened, you’d end up downstream.”

Harrison said he comes to the pier about once a week. The cold water below the dam, he said, is perfect for catching trout. Harrison said he’s caught about 40 trout in the river worth mounting, and his wife lets him put up about 20 throughout the house.

While school children and more than 100 other onlookers watched as water poured through the gates of the dam during the routine gate test, Harrison, Skelton and other anglers kept at it, putting their lines in the water, waiting for a hit.

And while others were awed by the double rainbow made by the water’s spray as it hit the rocks below the dam, Skelton’s line went taut, his rod bending. He’d caught the first fish since the pier’s dedication.

Pulling in the rainbow trout, measuring about 11-inches long and weighing about a pound, Skelton had only one word to describe it — “dinner.”



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