

The Lake at Durham County Wildlife Club and Its Recreational Uses

The lake at DCWC affords many enjoyable recreational opportunities to club members, their families, and friends. Fishing and boating are the most popular recreations, but birding, dog training, picnicking, hiking, and camping are other activities possible at the lake. For those who welcome quiet, enjoying the natural serenity of the lake can be relaxing. The lake is also used by scouting, church, and veterans groups for outings with the approval of the club's board of directors.

The eleven-acre lake is natural, formed by a dam at its southern end, built shortly after DCWC moved to its current Hopson Road location in 1965. Since then, the club has continued to invest in making the lake an important resource for members, including constructing a shelter and picnic area with barbecue pits, installing a Sweeney Fish Feeder in 2009 and, most recently, building an underwater habitat and fish attractors in 2010 and a fishing dock in the same year. Beginning fifteen years ago, club members cleared willows and brush from around the entire lake to make fishing from the bank easier and to create more space for picnicking. The club periodically stocks the lake with fish, including largemouth bass, bream, and grass carp. The club also adds lime and fertilizer as needed—in 2010, six tons were applied—to improve the biochemistry of the water.



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A walking trail skirts the circumference of the lake, and the club plans to improve it by bridging muddy sections and planting berry bushes for trail snacks.

A committee made up of volunteers is in charge of lake maintenance and use. Committee members offer help with fishing advice and other information during the club's public open hours. Further information is available from the current committee chair. A forum devoted to the lake and its recreational uses can be found on the DCWC website. Members can post messages giving fishing information, such as lures used and fish caught, and fly-casting clinics are also announced here.

DCWC regards the lake as an important resource for all its members, but especially for their children. At the lake, members can teach their kids the skill of fishing, in the same way that they use the club to teach their children the shooting sports and gun safety.

Rules for Use of the Lake

- Badges to be displayed at all times

- Guests permitted, up to a total of four, only when accompanied by club members or approved by club directors (for organizations)
- Only boats without gasoline motors
- No swimming and no hunting
- No minnows for bait
- No extended parking in boat launch
- Dogs always on leash except when training in lake
- Fish size rules, as posted at lake, to be followed
- No storage of boats on club property
- Club boat to be used only for approved lake work
- Fishing takes precedence over dog training

Fishing at the Lake

Fly fishing, spin fishing, and casting with artificial lures or live bait (worms and crickets only) are all methods of fishing to be found at the lake. Most members practice “catch and release,” but fish can be harvested for personal consumption, in compliance with the rules posted at the lake. Fishing from the shore or the dock is good, but members also use all manner of boats—canoes, belly boats, kick boats, and kayaks.



Largemouth bass, crappie, bluegill, sunfish, and grass carp are fish species commonly found at the lake. Most, except for the carp, can be caught throughout the year but seasons and weather have an impact on how successful you might be.

The bass are everyone’s preferred target. Their feeding activity is dictated by water temperature, in the winter they stay deep and eat less. As it gets warmer they get more aggressive and become predators seeking anything that resembles food. This can be anything from leeches along the bottom to one of their favorite meals the bluegill. By late March to early April, when the spawning season begins, the bass cruise along the lake banks, actively feeding. After spawning, and as the water temperature rises, the bass retreat to deeper water. But throughout the summer, especially the early morning and the evening can bring the fisherman great action. The cooler waters of the fall see the bass return to more aggressive activity.

The bream, bluegills and sunfish, follow somewhat the same schedule as the bass and can be found around the dock and brushy areas along the bank. On lightweight gear they can be real fighters and fun to catch for young and old anglers.

Part of the fun of fishing is selecting the lure or fly that best fits the environmental conditions, the fish species, and the fishing technique. The typical sporting goods store will sell hundreds of different lures and flies, all ostensibly guaranteed to bring success. The basic idea is to come up with something that best imitates the natural food source for a particular fish species, and all anglers have to experiment with works best for them.

Among the many flies available to anglers, Woolly Buggers, Woolly Worms, Muddler Minnows, and Clousers work well under the surface. Floating Bass Bugs and poppers can bring exciting top water action. For spin and casting artificial worms for under the surface or spinner and crankbaits on top can be an excellent choice. Live worms and crickets always work for bass as well as bluegills and sunfish. Anyone fishing at the lake will be happy to share information on what seems to be working.

Figure 1 Black Crappie, Bluegill, and Large-Mouth Bass



Local fishing clubs are also important sources of information. The Triangle Fly Fishers (www.triangleflyfishers.org) meet at the DCWC clubhouse at 7 PM on the last Monday of every month except December for presentations on fish species, tying flies, and fishing in general.

Kids at the Lake

The lake is especially good for taking kids fishing. No license is required to fish at the lake, either for children or adults. Even the youngest children can catch bluegills and sunfish from the dock, and hooking a big bass is always a possibility. Often all that's needed is a hook baited with a worm on the end of a line, but there are also fishing outfits designed for kids. Debarbing the hooks makes them easier for kids to remove. Catching a fish as a child can lead later on to a lifetime of fishing enjoyment and sport.



The fish feeder near the dock goes off several times a day and the resulting feeding frenzy is something exciting for kids to see. During these times and whenever they are fishing on the bank and at the dock, children should always be supervised by an adult club member.

Recreational Boating at the Lake

Any manner of boat, so long as it does not have a gasoline motor, is permitted on the lake and can be used for fishing or other recreation, but not for swimming. There is a boat launch just beside the dock, which permits easy access to the lake. Once a boat is launched, the rig should be driven away from the boat launch and parked elsewhere, in order to permit others to use the launch.

Figure 2 Great Blue Heron



Birding around the Lake

Members report observing osprey, great blue herons, several duck species, red-tailed hawks, a bald eagle, and many species of passerines around the lake. No hunting is permitted at DCWC, and binoculars are the “weapon of choice” for the many birding opportunities the lake offers.



Dog Training

The lake may be used for retriever training, although fishing takes precedence. Dogs must be on leashes except when they are under training at the lake.

Programs for Scouts

Cub and Boy Scout troops from around the Triangle—at last count there were seven or more—use the DCWC lake for camping and fishing. For example, every March one troop holds what they call a “Pedro Boot Camp,” the first overnight camping trip for former cub scouts being initiated as boy scouts. At the Pedro Boot Camp, older scouts teach the new ones basic camping skills, such as how to pitch a tent or build a fire. In praise of DCWC, one advisor to this scout troop writes that the lake offers scouts the look and feel of camping in the deep woods, even though it is close to home in case one of them gets homesick. For more information on scouting activities at the lake, contact Robert E. King roberteking@bellsouth.net.

Veterans’ and Other Outreach Programs

DCWC wishes to make the lake available for use by other groups, as in its use for retriever training. Still another effort is Project Healing Waters, which brings small groups of veterans to the lake in the spring and summer for lessons in fly casting and fishing. Sponsored by the Triangle Fly Fishers, which is the local chapter of Trout Unlimited, this program is administered by the Raleigh Veterans Center.

Organizations wishing to utilize the lake should apply to the President of the Durham Country Wildlife Club.