

Hunting and Fishing

By Steve Hale

Three friends sitting around planning their next hunting and fishing trip are glad they live in South Carolina.

"If you love to hunt and fish, there isn't a better state in the nation than South Carolina," said local Bill Weeks. Weeks has hunted all across the state and the country with close friends, Bob Harte and Tom Galardi, all from Aiken.

"Where do you start talking about hunting and fishing in this state?" asked Galardi. "South Carolina goes from the mountains to the sea, so we have almost every kind of habitat and almost every kind of game in the country."

The three avid outdoorsmen love to go to the Lowcountry counties of Beaufort, Jasper, Allendale and Hampton for what they say are the largest numbers of white-tailed deer in the state.

But it seems the bigger boys are just north of there. Charles Ruth Jr., the deer project supervisor for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, says his research shows Aiken as the top trophy buck-producing county in 2002. The neighboring counties of Orangeburg and Barnwell were second and third respectively, making the west central part of the state the trophy buck mecca.

Hunting for duck and Canadian geese is great on all the major reservoirs in South Carolina, including lakes Hartwell, Russell and Thurmond on the Savannah River, and Murray, Marion and Moultrie in the state's Santee Cooper area. But all three friends agreed that their favorite spots to bag a limit of duck is around Bear Island near Georgetown and on the estuaries of the Little River north of Myrtle Beach.

Dove hunting is primarily done on private land, but these clubs are open to the public -for a small fee- they say. They like to travel to the Pee Dee River area for their dove hunting trips,

but they say private landowners all across the state have created abundant habitats for the sport. There are however public dove fields in the wildlife management areas.

"The wild turkey is the greatest success story in wildlife management," Harte said, claiming that they were threatened all across the state and now there are significant populations everywhere.

For a little more excitement the three friends go hunting for wild boar in the low country near the Savannah River. All of them say that South Carolina's long hunting seasons make it a tremendous lure to sportsmen from around the country.

"Out West, a lot of their seasons for big game are two weeks long and ours is four months," Weeks said. "I've hunted five species in the same day- duck, goose, deer, dove and wild hog."

The three friends are just as enthusiastic about their fishing stories.

"The Santee Cooper lakes -Marion and Moultrie- are famous for their striped bass and huge catfish," Galardi said. They go to Lake Jocassee in the mountains for trout, lakes Russell and Thurmond for largemouth bass and crappie, the tidewaters of the Lowcountry for shrimp and crab, plus pan fish, bream and redbreast from rivers and lakes all over the state.

"You can't live in a better place for hunting and fishing," Weeks said. "There's only about two months out of the year you can't shoot in some season, and you can fish all year long. We have a special state, and with the game management policies we have, it will be here for generations of people to enjoy."



in South Carolina

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