



Natural Fish Losses in Reservoirs – Spring/Summer

Frequently Asked Questions

Why are bluegill fish losses occurring in the Spartanburg Water reservoirs?

While we can attribute the most recent large loss of fish on March 30 in Lake Bowen to a routine algaecide application used to remove algae that causes taste and odor concerns in drinking water, fish losses can actually occur naturally at certain times of the year for a variety of reasons.

During the spring season as the weather begins to warm, fish are in the middle of their spawning season. The spring spawn can be a particularly stressful time for fish, and in their weakened state, fish are more susceptible to any infections. This is commonly referred to as “Spring Kill,” and can impact bluegills (bream), bass and crappies that spawn in the spring. Here are articles from two different sources regarding this phenomenon:

Iowa Department of Natural Resources: <https://www.iowadnr.gov/About-DNR/DNR-News-Releases/ArticleID/2492/Spawning-stress-causes-panfish-kills-in-Iowa-lakes>

Aquascape Environmental: <https://aquascape.net/2014/03/25/spring-brings-new-life-possibly-dead-fish/>

What kinds of illnesses are of the most concern for fish?

Depending on a variety of factors, including water temperature and time of year, various diseases and parasites can contribute to fish losses. As noted above, spawning after a weakened state from the winter months can leave fish more prone to specifically bacterial infections. Here is a very informative article on fish disease, which specifically discusses the impact of spawning and bacteria:

Indiana Department of Natural Resources: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/fish-and-wildlife/wildlife-resources/wildlife-diseases-in-indiana/fish-disease/#bac>

Are the fish still safe to eat if caught?

In most cases, diseases and parasites that affect fish pose no threat to humans when the fish is properly cooked. The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) oversees the safety of all bodies of water and fish in the state, and provides regular updates for fisherman, including a

new, Fish Consumption Advisory App: <https://scdhec.gov/bow/aquatic-science-programs/fish-consumption-advisories>

No advisories exist for fish caught and consumed from the Spartanburg Water reservoirs.

What can be done to prevent fish losses in the reservoirs?

Though any type of fish loss is concerning, large scale losses are quite rare in the Spartanburg Water reservoirs. Prior to the end of March this year, the last fish loss occurred in 2018, and was also attributed to a routine algaecide application. Between then and now, numerous applications have been made, without incident.

Natural fish losses, however, do occur regularly throughout the year, due to environmental factors, diseases and natural population control. Similarly to the “Spring Kill” mentioned previously, there is a well noted “Winter Kill” and even “Summer Kills” that take place in bodies of water all over the United States.

Here is an academic article that provides more details:

The Ohio State University Extension:

<https://woodlandstewards.osu.edu/sites/woodlands/files/imce/0008.pdf>