

Geneva State Forest Offers Recreational Opportunities

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Fishing Lake Re-opened on October 1, 2008

The Geneva State Forest (GSF), owned by the Alabama Forestry Commission and located in extreme western Geneva County, encompasses 7,200 acres primarily of longleaf pine timber. It is the largest state forest in Alabama. All timber management activities are carried out in an ecologically sound manner with an eye to preserving and improving the native long-leaf pine ecosystem.

While production of timber with subsequent regeneration of forest stands is the primary objective on the Geneva State Forest, it provides Alabama's citizens with much more than wood products and revenue. In the true spirit of multiple use management, the GSF provides the public with recreational opportunities that include fishing, hiking, primitive camping, picnicking, bird watching, trail riding, and hunting.

Since the spring of 1984, the focal point for much of this activity has been the 100-acre Geneva State Forest Lake. Constructed by the Forestry Commission over several years, the lake quickly developed a reputation not only as a great place to fish, but also as simply a great place to go. Regrettably, plumbing problems associated with the lake dam resulted in low water levels (and sometimes virtually no water at all) beginning in 1999. However, repairs to the dam were completed and in February 2007, the Geneva State Forest Lake began to refill.

During the process of repairing the dam, the lake was drained as completely as possible. Remaining pools of water were treated with rotenone to eliminate any remaining fish and provide the opportunity to make a fresh start in managing the lake's fish population. Since water levels have risen, the lake has been stocked with 10,000 bass and 50,000 bream fingerlings, as well as 700 channel catfish. Management strategies have been developed in cooperation with Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Fisheries Section biologists. Creel limits will be set and posted after a final balance check.

On October 1, 2008, Geneva State Forest Lake officially re-opened for public fishing. All those over the age of 16 who wish to fish must be properly licensed and all other applicable

Alabama fishing regulations are in effect. Fishing is legal only during the hours between sunrise and sunset. Fishing from boats is allowed, but gasoline-powered motors are not permitted. A daily permit fee is also required for each person 16 years old or older for fishing and for other approved recreational activities on the forest. Permits can be obtained at the honor box located at the lake entrance. Permit stubs must be in possession to be valid.

In addition to fishing and other outdoor activities, Geneva State Forest also provides the public with quality hunting opportunities. Through a cooperative agreement with the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, the Alabama Forestry Commission has allowed both large and small game hunting for many years as part of the Covington Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Recently, rising demand for leasable hunting land and the income such leases potentially generate resulted in the loss of approximately 15,000 acres historically part of the Covington WMA. This loss of acreage brought into question the future of public hunting on the GSF as well. The questions were answered, however, and an official Memorandum of Understanding between the two agencies is in the process of finalization. This new cooperative agreement will solidify the status of what is now the **Geneva State Forest Wildlife Management Area** for the near future.

Though the name of the management area has changed and its acreage reduced, the format for its operation will remain the same. Small game hunters and those hunting deer with bow and arrow will be required to be in possession of a signed seasonal permit (map) in addition to appropriate state and wildlife management area licenses. Seasonal permits will be available from the Geneva State Forest headquarters on Forest Area Road and from other distribution sites in Samson, Kinston, Opp, Onycha, Florala, and Lockhart. Daily permits for scheduled gun deer hunts will be available on the days of the hunts at the check station which will be located at the Geneva State Forest headquarters. For more information on Geneva State Forest, visit www.forestry.alabama.gov or www.outdooralabama.com. 