

Comments of Hugh Stump, Executive Director – Etowah County Tourism Board

I want to talk about the impact of fishing, specifically, on our area because of Neely Henry Lake and the Coosa River. Phil Williams mentioned that agriculture is the second biggest industry in the state, tourism is third right behind it. We need to make sure that we have our ability here to keep our part and be able to increase, actually, our level of tourism here.

In 2012, the Gadsden Parks and Recreation Department reported 4048 tournament anglers from Coosa Landing, which is the site of the boat ramps and docks in downtown Gadsden. This doesn't account for any other tournament anglers from Rainbow Landing or other boat ramps in the city or Etowah County. In 2012, Gadsden Parks and Recreation counted 184 tournaments, including small local ones that were held out of Coosa Landing. Some of the major tournaments held here over the last three years include: BASS, FLW, PAA, BFL, ABA, Fishers of Men, Coosa Team Trail, Mayor's Invitational, and Lady Bass Anglers. The reason they are coming to Neely Henry is fairly clear. In the 2011 B.A.I.T. (i.e., Bass Anglers Information Team) report, which is a report organized by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Neely Henry scored fourth out of nineteen Alabama lakes with at least five tournaments in overall quality of bass fishing. Quality of bass fishing consists of the following measures: 1) percent angler success, 2) average bass weight, 3) number of bass per angler per day, 4) total pounds per angler per day, and 5) hours fished per bass over five pounds. Neely Henry's ranking is impressive when you consider other powerhouse fishing lakes that are measured, including Guntersville, Wheeler and Pickwick.

I have only been in Gadsden for three years, but I've already seen the impact that fishing has. This past year, the tourism board, along with the city of Gadsden, tried to secure a Bassmasters Elite Series tournament that would have brought 200 boats and ESPN television coverage to the area, something that has never been done here. It is something we are trying to do because we understand the importance of fishing to this economy. Let me give you an example of the economic impact of a tournament recently held in Gadsden. The Fishers of Men South Central Championship was held in Gadsden in October of 2012. 158 two-man teams from states that included Ohio, Tennessee, Indiana, Iowa, and Kentucky spent approximately five days here. The direct economic impact to the Gadsden area was conservatively estimated to be at least \$200,000. Thus, when you multiply that by multiple tournaments during the year, the annual economic impact is very significant. Alabama is making a significant mark on the world of competitive bass fishing and Gadsden and Neely Henry Lake are part of that. In this year's Bassmasters Classic, arguably the most prestigious bass tournament in the world, eight of the top 25 anglers, including the top three finishers, were Alabama anglers.

The Alabama Bass Trail was started this year as a cooperative effort between the Governor's office, the Alabama Tourism Department, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association. Think of the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail when you think of the Alabama Bass Trail. This is an initiative of eleven tournament-ready fisheries, of which Neely Henry is one. It is an honor to be selected as one of the lakes for this trail. The Alabama Bass Trail is now being promoted throughout the south, the Midwest, and Texas. The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail has been successful in attracting people to Alabama to play golf on the high-quality golf courses included on the trail. The objective of

Comments of Hugh Stump, Executive Director – Etowah County Tourism Board

the Alabama Bass Trail is to attract fishermen to Alabama to spend time here enjoying fishing on the high-quality fisheries we have in the state.

Lastly, Neely Henry Lake is different from many other fisheries in the state. It fishes like a lake and also like a river. Thus, there is opportunity for fishermen of varied backgrounds to fish their strengths and use different techniques and tactics. We need to do everything we can to make sure the Coosa River and Neely Henry Lake remain the way they are.