

Keep the wake off the bank.

Lake Hartwell is one lake with two different rules, and its permanent target is now 656 feet for the better part of a decade. We are asking South Carolina and Georgia for **one lake, one standard**, with wake enhancement where the water is wide enough and deep enough to absorb it.

500 FEET FROM SHORE While ballast, wedges or shapers are in use.	20 FEET OF DEPTH Measured at the lake level of the day.	1/4 MILE OF WIDTH What a reach needs to hold the standard.
---	--	---

The rules were written for a lake we no longer have

Hartwell's normal operating target is now 656 feet year round. The Corps set it there in August 2026 because of seepage at the Clemson Lower Diversion Dam Saddle Dike, and nobody disputes the need to act on that. The Corps is not draining the lake, and today's low water is drought. What changed is the ceiling.

The Corps' own bank stabilization application says that **"in no instance will materials be placed below 655' msl elevation."** The new operating target sits one foot above that line.

	OLD REGIME 660 ft summer target	SAME HYDROLOGY, target 4 ft lower
Median May to September elevation	658.15	654.15
Summer days below the 655 ft armoring floor	24.9%	56.1%
Summers with at least one such day	10 of 22	19 of 22
Margin between the target and the floor	5.0 ft	1.0 ft

USGS gauge 02187010, 7,726 daily readings, 2005-03-05 to 2026-09-21. The right-hand column is **an estimate, not a forecast**: it applies the same historical shortfalls to a target four feet lower. Hydrology does not change, so the direction

is right, but it is not a prediction of how the Corps will operate.

The median summer day moves from three feet above the armoring floor to one foot below it. Armoring your bank goes from a drought-year problem to the normal condition of the lake.

As of 2026-09-21 the lake stood at **649.39 feet**, which is 5.6 feet below the elevation at which a property owner is permitted to place stone. [Check today's reading.](#)

One lake, one standard

South Carolina and Georgia both adopted a 200 foot wake surfing rule, and the two statutes are not the same. Georgia's covers the shoreline itself next to homes, parks, beaches and marinas. South Carolina's covers docks, piers, bulkheads, moored vessels and people in the water, and stops there.

THE PRACTICAL RESULT

On the South Carolina side of Lake Hartwell, a residential bank with no dock on it has **no wake surf protection at all**. Cross the state line and the identical conduct is a violation.

Nobody designed that. It is what happens when two states write a rule for the same water in different years without comparing the text.

500 feet. 20 feet. Main body.

We are asking South Carolina and Georgia to adopt the same standard for Lake Hartwell, and to set it where the measurements point.

The Hartwell standard

- **500 feet.** No wake enhancement within 500 feet of any shoreline, dock, pier, bulkhead, moored vessel or person in the water.
- **20 feet of depth.** No wake enhancement in water shallower than 20 feet, measured at the lake level of the day.
- **Big water only.** Wake enhancement in the main body, where the lake can hold the standard, and not in the narrow arms where it cannot.
- **Wake enhancement means the mode, not the boat.** Ballast tanks and bags, wedges, mechanical fins, aftermarket shapers, or sustained bow-high plowing to build a surfable wave. A boat running on plane at cruising speed, with none of that in use, is not covered.

Why the third point needs no map

A buffer off the near bank, a usable lane, and a buffer off the far bank is arithmetic.

Why narrow reaches are out

$$500 + 200 + 500 = 1,200 \text{ feet}$$

Roughly a quarter mile, bank to bank. The 200 foot lane is not our number: it is the minimum zone width Vermont adopted in its own rule.

This is a policy calculation, not a hydrodynamic one. The distances come from the measurements and the lane width comes from a rule another state already passed. What it produces is simple: any reach narrower than about a quarter mile cannot physically hold the standard. There is no line to draw and no judgment call to make. The water either has the room or it does not, and a chart says which.

On Hartwell that means the wide main body carries the activity and the narrow upper arms do not. Going north on the Tugaloo arm, above the Interstate 85 bridge and past Harbor Light Marina, the channel is not wide enough to put a surf wave 500 feet from both banks.

This is not a ban

- Wakesurfing and wakeboarding stay legal on Lake Hartwell.
- The main body is wide enough and deep enough to hold the standard, and that is where most of the sport already happens.
- No one's boat becomes illegal. The standard is about how and where a boat is operated, not what anyone owns or what they are towing.
- We are asking for the same rule on both sides of a lake that already has two different ones, which helps every operator who has to guess which state they are in.

Most people running these boats are our neighbors, and many already keep well off the bank without being asked. A clear standard protects them too. Right now an operator who wants to do the right thing gets a different answer depending on which side of an invisible line they are on, and no guidance at all about depth.

The Corps' floor and the Corps' gauge

The strongest fact about this lake needs no laboratory. It is one federal record against another.

The Corps' Hartwell bank stabilization application states that **"in no instance will materials be placed below 655' msl elevation."** That is a rule about the elevation of the stone, not about working conditions, so having a dry bank does not let you armor it.

	OLD REGIME 660 ft summer target	SAME HYDROLOGY, target 4 ft lower
Median May to September elevation	658.15	654.15
Summer days below the 655 ft armoring floor	24.9%	56.1%
Summers with at least one such day	10 of 22	19 of 22
Margin between the target and the floor	5.0 ft	1.0 ft

USGS gauge 02187010, 7,726 daily readings, 2005-03-05 to 2026-09-21. The right-hand column is **an estimate, not a forecast**: it applies the same historical shortfalls to a target four feet lower. Hydrology does not change, so the direction is right, but it is not a prediction of how the Corps will operate.

The median summer day moves from three feet above the armoring floor to one foot below it. Armoring your bank goes from a drought-year problem to the normal condition of the lake.

As of 2026-09-21 the lake stood at **649.39 feet**, 5.6 feet below the elevation at which stone may be placed.

What this does not prove, said before anyone asks

- **The floor already bound some summers.** Under the old target, 24.9% of summer days were already below 655 feet. This is not a new problem. What changes is its character: from ten of twenty-two summers, concentrated in droughts, to the typical day in nineteen of twenty-two.
- **The right-hand column is an estimate.** It applies observed shortfalls to a lower target. It is the right direction, not a forecast.
- **This year is mostly drought.** The 2026 days below 655 feet are largely drought, not the new target, which has only just taken effect.
- **This is not a wake boat argument.** It says the permitting regime no longer matches the pool. It does not say what caused any particular bank to fail.

How long this lasts

The Corps set the year-round guide curve at 656 feet with a hard ceiling of 662 feet, because of seepage and internal erosion at the Clemson Lower Diversion Dam Saddle Dike, a condition first identified in 2015. On the timeline, the Corps says a Dam Safety Modification Study takes up to two years, and after that design, funding approval and construction. **The Corps estimates five to ten years or more.**

What a lower target does to a bank

It creates a waterline that has never been a waterline. Ground that sat underwater through decades of normal operation is now the edge of the lake. It carries neither the vegetation nor the stone that the old edge had.

It puts existing protection above the water. Riprap and retaining walls here were permitted and built for a 660 foot summer pool. Much of that work now sits above the waterline with the wave energy arriving at or below its toe.

It makes every cove shallower at once. A cove that held exactly 20 feet at the old full pool holds 16 feet at the new target. To give a boat 20 feet today you need water that held 24 feet at 660. That arithmetic is definitionally true. How much of the lake it moves is a question for the Corps' bathymetry, which we have asked for and do not yet have.

None of this is anyone's fault. It is the lake we have for the next decade, and the rules were written for a different one.

Where 500 feet and 20 feet come from

These two numbers were measured on other waters, by independent laboratories, a peer reviewed journal and a state fisheries agency. We quote them verbatim and link to the originals rather than paraphrasing.

It is likely that some rational benchmarks may recommend a greater distance, likely to be in excess of 350 ft when considering wave height and 500 ft when considering wave energy.

Macfarlane, G.J. (2025), *River Research and Applications*. Peer reviewed, open access. Australian Maritime College, University of Tasmania.

For both these example benchmarks, the WSIA recommended distance of 200 ft from the shoreline, docks, or other structures would be inadequate.

Macfarlane (2025).

Wakeboats should operate in 20 ft of water or greater when in semi-displacement (surfing) mode to minimize impacts on the lakebed.

Riesgraf, Marr, Herb, Lueker & Kozarek (2025), St. Anthony Falls Laboratory Project Report 611, University of Minnesota. Sediment resuspension was confirmed at 14 feet.

In no instance will materials be placed below 655' msl elevation.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Hartwell SC Bank Stabilization Application, Shoreline Management, Hartwell Project Office.

What other jurisdictions adopted

JURISDICTION	DISTANCE	DEPTH	STANDING
Vermont , Use of Public Waters Rules	500 ft	20 ft	In force. Zones must also be 100 contiguous acres, 3,000 ft long and 200 ft wide.
Michigan DNR , Fisheries Report 37 (2023)	500 ft	15 ft	Published state agency recommendation.
Maine , 12 M.R.S. § 13001	300 ft	15 ft	In force statewide since August 2024.
Lake Hartwell , what we ask	500 ft	20 ft	Plus main body only, so the standard is achievable where it applies.
South Carolina today, § 50-21-870(B)(9)	200 ft	—	Docks, piers, bulkheads, moored vessels, people. Shoreline not named.
Georgia today, OCGA § 52-7-13.1	200 ft	—	Includes shoreline adjacent to residences, parks, beaches and marinas.

Measured on Georgia reservoirs

An instrumented study on Lake Rabun and Lake Burton found surf-mode wave energy at 100 feet from shore running 2,546 percent above the monthly maximum wind wave energy at the same site, and still 679 percent above at 500 feet. Its recommended buffer for wakesurfing was 450 feet. **This was consultancy work commissioned by two lake associations, not peer reviewed**, and we cite the instrument readings rather than the member survey attached to it.

Help us measure our own lake

Everything above was measured somewhere else. That is the honest weakness in this file and the fastest way to fix it is local data that nobody is currently collecting.

- **Dated photographs of your bank.** Same spot, same angle, something in frame for scale, and the day's USGS elevation in the filename.
- **Depth at your usual surf line.** If you run a sounder, a reading and a rough location is worth more than any study we can cite.

Sources

- USGS gauge 02187010, Hartwell Lake near Anderson, SC. Daily elevation record.
- USACE Savannah District, Release 26-029 and the Hartwell Lake Level Restrictions page, 26 August 2026.

- USACE Hartwell SC Bank Stabilization Application, Shoreline Management, Hartwell Project Office.
- Macfarlane, G.J. (2025), *River Research and Applications*. Open access.
- SAFL Project Report 611 (2025) and Report 600 (2022), University of Minnesota.
- Michigan DNR Fisheries Report 37 (2023).
- Water Environment Consultants (2021), Boat Wake Impact Analysis, Lake Rabun and Lake Burton, Georgia. Consultancy report.
- Vermont ANR wakeboat rule.
- SC Code § 50-21-870 · OCGA § 52-7-13.1.

Fifty named letters beat five hundred signatures

There is no petition yet, and that is on purpose. A petition sitting at forty names is the number an opponent quotes. Letters from people who live here, with an address and a photograph, are what move an agency and a legislator. Start with one of these.

1

Write your legislator

Oconee County is Senate District 1 and House Districts 1 and 2. In your own words: where you are on the lake, what you have watched happen since the level came down, and that you want one standard on both sides. Attach one photograph.

[Find yours in SC](#)

2

Write the Corps

Tell the Savannah District what the lower target is doing to the bank in front of you, and ask when and how the public can comment on the record. The more people asking that question, the harder it is to leave unanswered.

CESAS-HartwellPoolRestriction@usace.army.mil

3

Photograph your bank

Same spot, same angle, dated, with something in frame for scale. Put the day's USGS elevation in the filename. A year of those from a dozen properties outweighs anything we can cite from another state.

[Today's elevation](#)

A letter you can send to the Corps

Subject: Shoreline and bank condition under sustained operation at 656 feet

To the Savannah District,

I own property on Lake Hartwell at [location], and I have followed the announcement of the 656 foot year-round guide curve and the work at the Clemson Lower Diversion Dam Saddle Dike. I understand the dam safety reasons and I am not writing to object to them.

I am writing about the bank. The Hartwell bank stabilization application states that "in no instance will materials be placed below 655' msl elevation." With the operating target now at 656 feet, that leaves one foot between the normal pool and the lowest elevation at which I am permitted to place stone. On the USGS gauge at station 02187010, the lake has been below 655 feet on a substantial share of summer days even under the previous target, and a sustained lower target will make that the ordinary condition rather than the drought condition.

My questions are these. First, is a National Environmental Policy Act document being prepared for sustained operation at 656 feet, and if so, when would a draft be available for public comment? Second, does its scope include shoreline and bank condition? Third, will the 655 foot placement limit in the shoreline stabilization permit program be reviewed in light of the new guide curve?

I have attached dated photographs of my own shoreline with the gauge elevation noted. I am glad to provide more.

Thank you for your time.

[Name, address, phone]

A letter you can send to your legislator

Dear Senator [Name],

I live on Lake Hartwell at [location] in [county]. I am writing about something small that would make a real difference, and it costs the state nothing.

Lake Hartwell is one lake with two different rules. South Carolina's wake surfing law, section 50-21-870(B)(9), protects docks, piers, bulkheads, moored vessels and people in the water within 200 feet. It does not name the shoreline. Georgia's law for the same lake, OCGA 52-7-13.1, does cover the shoreline next to homes, parks, beaches and marinas. The practical result is that on our side of Hartwell, a residential bank with no dock on it has no wake surf protection at all, while the identical conduct is a violation a few hundred yards away in Georgia.

At the same time, the Corps has set Hartwell's permanent target at 656 feet for what it says could be five to ten years or more. The Corps' own bank stabilization permit does not allow stone to be placed below 655 feet, so the band of bank now taking the waves is the band we are not allowed to protect.

I would ask you to consider one standard for Lake Hartwell: no wake enhancement within 500 feet of shore, none in water shallower than 20 feet, and the activity kept to the main body of the lake where there is room for it. This is not a ban. Wakesurfing stays legal, and the main body is where most of it already happens.

I have attached a photograph of my own bank. I would welcome the chance to show you in person.

Respectfully,
[Name, address, phone]

Help us get the file

These are requests we are making, not homework for every reader. If you have a relationship with any of these offices, or you want to carry one, tell us and we will send you the wording.

1. **Hartwell Project Office.** Annual counts of shoreline stabilization and erosion control permit applications, 2000 to present, with the stated rationale field where it exists.
2. **Hartwell Project Office.** Permitted private dock count and the shoreline allocation classification for the lake.

3. **SCDNR, Office of Government Affairs.** Citations issued on Lake Hartwell under sections 50-21-870(B)(6)(a) and (B)(9) for 2023 through 2026 to date.

The first of these is the one nobody has asked for. If owners on this lake are already citing boat wakes as their reason for armoring, that is in a federal file with no methodology anyone can attack.