Are you ready for the boating season?



Sgt. Vince Busha, left, of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources writes a warning to boater Cory Ballenger during a recent safety check on Lake Keowee. Busha said officers "will be out in full force" during the Memorial Day weekend.

JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

BY NORMAN CANNADA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — As the Memorial Day weekend kicks off the summer season on Oconee County lakes, boating safety is a primary concern.

Sgt. Vince Busha, who works locally with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR), said he and the other seven DNR officers who cover the lakes in Oconee and Pickens counties will be out checking equipment and looking for safety violations.

"We'll be out in full force this weekend," said Busha. "Making sure that people are boating sober is our main concern. If someone is drinking there should be a designated driver. It's important to watch out and make sure you pay attention."

Busha said nine of 111 boating accidents in South Carolina in 2012 were in Oconee County, including one of the state's 14 boating deaths.

He said he charged about seven people for boating under the influence of alcohol last year with more arrests coming from other DNR officers.

SEE BOATING, PAGE A5

lights if the boat operates at night.

"The main concern we see with life jackets is they're not always readily accessible or they don't fit the kids," Busha said. "The law states you have to have a life jacket on board for everyone. It's got to be in good condition and be the proper fit for the people on the boat."

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BOATING:

FROM PAGE A1

"It's not against the law to drink a beer and drive a boat, but it is against the law to drive impaired," said Busha, who added that the 0.08 alcohol limit for DUI in vehicles is also the limit for a DUI in a boat. "The difference between a car and a boat is that you can have an open container on a boat, but if the driver is intoxicated, it's still going to be the same."

He said negligence, in which people operate watercrafts too close to docks, swimmers or other boats, is also a concern, particularly with higher water levels bringing more people to the lakes.

"We see a lot of jet skis spraying each other and going too close to swimmers in the water. They like to spray each other, which is fun and all, but we have had a death occur on Lake Keowee with one. We just had a death a couple of years ago with a boat pulling a tuber too close to the dock. There's just more people out there to watch out for. That's the main concern with a lot of people on the lakes."

DNR officials will be offering free boat inspections in all the lakes to check for life jackets, fire extinguishers, a sound device and

Open container allowed on boats