OUTDOORS

Enjoy Memorial Day weekend on the water



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SCDNR law enforcement officers will be out in force this Memorial Day weekend handing out "Unprepared Boater Awards" to those lacking in equipment or maintenance. Three local locations will provide free courtesy inspections to prevent you from becoming a recipient of one of these awards.

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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Memorial Day marks the official beginning of summer in most folks' book, so that means it's time to take the cover off the boat and head out to the lake.

To be honest, if you're a fisherman, there's still some good fishing to be found, though it's suggested that you be on the water as the sun is coming up and be off the water by maybe 9 or 10 a.m. at the latest. You can always go back just before dark and have the whole lake to yourself, save for a few choice locations under some bridges, until the next morning.

With water temperatures well into the 70s, water skiiers, jet skiiers and general joyriders will be out and about for the three-day weekend.

The name of the game for this weekend — and every weekend for that matter — is safety and courtesy.

Safety means to be safe both in your boat and in your operation of the boat. Remember, brakes, stop signs and traffic signals don't exist on the water. The SCDNR is conducting free boater safety inspections this weekend. The Memorial Day weekend courtesy boat inspections correspond to the National Safe Boating Week (May 18-24). The times and locations for these inspections can be found at the end of this article.

It might be a good idea to have the officers check you over before you hit the water before they find you out on the water and provide you with the "Unprepared Boater Award".

The SCDNR reports that 13 people lost their lives in boating-related incidents last year. Law enforcement officers and campaigns are adamant that the single-most effective deterrent to this is to wear your life jacket on the water, estimating that up to 80 percent of all fatalities could be prevented by wearing a life jacket.

Everyone already knows that DUI kills, and law enforcement officers will be out in force this weekend patrolling the streets looking for impaired offenders. The same thing goes for the water, as boating under the influence is just as serious and deadly and can get you a sizeable ticket, jail time or both.

It might be a little late to suggest taking a boating safety course before the weekend, but with a long hot summer ahead, you might want to consider taking one. An on-line boater safety course, recommended and approved by the SCDNR, can be found at www.boat-ed.com/sc/index.htm.

Taking and passing the online exam will help prepare you for safe operation of your watercraft, especially if you are new to boating, and the completed certificate could save you money on your watercraft insurance rates.

Finally, a word about courtesy. The dock owners who post those "no wake" signs on their docks are not doing it for decoration.

Consideration for others, including their property, is important, including having everything ready to go when you back down the launch ramp rather than block the whole ramp while waiting for somebody to retrieve something they forgot in the car.

Let's be safe out there.

Courtesy boat safety inspections
Today: Lake Keowee — South Cove Park, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. (Oconee County)
Sunday: Lake Hartwell — River Forks Boat Ramp, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. (Anderson County)
Monday: Lake Greenwood — Greenwood State Park, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. (Greenwood County)
Lake Keowee — Gap Hill Landing, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. (Pickens County)
Lake Thurmond — Dorn Landing, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. (McCormick County)

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