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Floating bathroom could help clean up Lake Keowee

by Jason Evans
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Diapers, bathroom tissues becoming a problem on beaches, islands

Editor

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PICKENS COUNTY - Boaters, swimmers, fishermen all enjoy the waters of Lake Keowee.

But too many residents are using the waters and beaches at Mile Creek Park as their own personal restroom.

To combat that, and keep beaches and waters clean and safe, county officials are considering a unique solution - a floating bathroom.

County Administrator J. Chappell Hurst called Lake Keowee "one of our greatest resources."

"Lake Keowee is known for its clear, quality water," Hurst said.

The islands around the park are being used as restrooms and trash cans, with dirty diapers

and bath tissue being left behind, he said.

"It's really a shame and a disgrace what's going on," Hurst said.

The Department of Natural Resources contacted Hurst and asked him to look into a floating restroom, he said.

While the image of a floating restroom drew snickers from the crowd and county council alike, it should be seriously considered, Hurst said.

"We need it on Lake Keowee," he said. "I also think we need it on Lake Jocassee."

Under the Clean Water Act, a grant is available that would pay for 75 percent of the restroom's cost and up to $10,000 for its operation and maintenance, he said.

"We are looking at this as a possibility," Hurst said.

The restroom would be a floating barge that boaters could dock at in order to use the facilities.

"There's not currently one of these on an inland lake in South Carolina," Hurst said.

Hilton Head has a floating restroom on the Intercoastal Waterway and Charleston has one as well.

The restroom could be attached to the end of a dock, and hauled out in the lake

for festivities such as July 4 where traffic on the lake increases, Hurst said.

Hurst said he was not comfortable with leaving the restroom out on the lake at all times.

DNR officials are considering a county request to provide matching funds for the cost and operations of the restroom dock.

"This would be an opportunity to do something to preserve the quality of that lake," Hurst said.

Considering the restroom is very forward-thinking of Pickens County leadership, said Ben Turetsky, executive director of Friends of Lake Keowee.

"If the public uses them properly, I think it's a very good thing. It will keep contamination out of the lake," Turetsky said. "If the public abuses them, then it could be a negative thing."

Diapers and other debris is growing problem in the entire lake, he said.

"We've found in our sweeps of the lake, especially in very accessible areas such as near bridges, we've found diapers and other debris," Turetsky said.

Placing trash cans in the areas would send the wrong message, he said.

"It would tell people that you recognize this as legitimate place to pull up your boat, have a picnic and leave trash, when actually it's not," he said.

Trash cans would also have to regularly collected to have an impact on the problem.

Grants are available that would help pay for pump-out boats to clean out the restroooms, which are approved by the Americans with Disabilities Act and are equipped with guardrails.

Installing the restroom would send a clearer message, Turestsky said.

"The shoreline is not a place to go the bathroom," he said. "The lake is not a place to go to the bathroom."

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