

Law on the lake

Summer days will see more enforcement on local waters

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COLUMBIA — South Carolina's Department of Natural Resources will step up its efforts to keep boaters safe as the summer days known for attracting people to the lakes of the Golden Corner approach.

"What we're trying to do this year through education and enforcement is to keep fatalities down," Lt. Robert McCullough said. "So far this year there have been 11 statewide, and that's a bit high."

McCullough said there will be random "saturations" this summer on lakes Hartwell, Keowee and Jocassee, during which officers' presence will be much greater. A more pronounced law enforcement presence on the waters will not only help catch those in violation of boating laws but also keep operators of their vessels cautious and more mindful, McCullough said.

"What will happen is we'll take for instance Lake Hartwell, which on a normal Saturday or Sunday may have four to six officers on the lake," he said. "During a saturation, we'd double that. It's a lot like police officers on the highway. When you've seen a patrolman, it makes you not so heavy-footed, but if you go for miles on the highway without seeing anything, you tend to speed up more."

One violation patrolmen will be looking for is the dangerous practice some boat riders have of dangling their legs over the bow of an operating boat. That violation can cost as much as \$450 and can be deadly, McCullough said.

"That is one of the most dangerous things you can do," he said. "If you fall off the boat when you're doing that, the first thing you're going to meet

See LAKE, Page 5A

Wednesday, June 4, 2008

Daily Journal • Daily Messenger

Daily Journal • 1

LAKE

Continued from Page 1A

is the propeller. If you've never seen a recovered body after that kind of accident, I can tell you it's a terrible thing."

The most vigorously enforced law on the lakes will remain that against operating a boat while intoxicated. Accidents are worsened when boaters do not designate a driver and do not wear personal flotation devices, McCullough said.

"We're trying to aggressively enforce drinking and boating laws," he said. "By far drinking and operating a boat will be what we're looking for the most. Drinking and driving don't mix any more on the water than they do in a car. And I cannot emphasize enough the importance of wearing a life-jacket. Just this year many of the fatalities could have been avoided, and around 70 to 75 percent of accidents every year would not be fatalities if the people were wearing lifejackets."

McCullough said many people detest lifejackets because of their perceived lack of aesthetic appeal, but recent technology has improved the look and feel of the devices.

"They save lives," McCullough said. "It's just like seat belts in cars. We've had people that were excellent swimmers who have stepped off boats and not come up and would have been okay had they worn lifejackets. There's no excuse not to wear one."

McCullough said a prudent plan of action when taking to the local waters this summer would be for people to let their family and friends know what lake and area they are going to, where they plan on going and how long they plan on staying before they hit the lake.

Designating a driver if alcoholic beverages are part of the day's activities is also a must, as is wearing a life-jacket, staying hydrated in the summer's heat and being mindful of the day's weather forecast.