One of the world's 'greatest' destinations



TRAVEL

KEN SLOAN

I made my first trip to Lake Jocassee more than 30 years ago and proclaimed it to be the most beautiful place in the world — to me at least. Now, I have National Geographic backing up my claim.

They recently released a special publication titled "50 of the World's Last Great Places - Destinations of a Lifetime" and the Jocassee Gorges is one of them! The article is focused on our "intense concentration of waterfalls", wildlife, and our rare eco-system that includes 60 species of rare plants such as the Oconee Bell. Did you know that we have the highest number of salamanders found anywhere else in the world?

The Jocassee Gorges contains 33,000 acres in Oconee and Pickens counties and another 10,500 just across the border in North Carolina. If you are a bird watcher you will find a wide range of sighting opportunities from bald eagles and loons to peregrine falcons and the rare Swainson's warblers.

If you enjoy hiking, the Palmetto and Foothills trails, combined with old logging roads, provide more than 200 miles of opportunities including numerous streams and waterfalls. This time of year hikers can see for miles, but come back in May and you will be welcomed by nature's bouquet of wild azaleas, Mountain Laurel and Rhododendron. If fishing is your thing, Lake Jocassee and numerous mountain streams are stocked with brown, rainbow and native brook trout.

All of this exists right outside your back door. With this incredible spring-like weather we are experiencing, I encourage you to open up that door, get outdoors in your car, on foot or in a boat and explore one of the last great places in the world, a "Destination of a Lifetime!"

For more information on the Jocassee Gorges area, check out the SC Department of Natural Resources at www.dnr.sc.gov.

Until next time, get out, enjoy and have a very merry Christmas!

KEN SLOAN is the president & CEO of the Mountain Lakes CVB. He can be reached at 864-380-3976 or Ken@SCMountainLakes.com or www.SCMountainLakes.com.