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Park ranger Jonathan Murphy renovates the pier at South Cove Park this week. The dock is an ADA-accessible fishing pier, and the work is simply a maintenance upgrade, as the old boards were starting to show significant wear and tear. The work should be completed by Friday. PRT officials expect all three county campgrounds — Chau Ram, High Falls and South Cove — to be 100-percent full for the upcoming Memorial Day weekend, and with good weather in the forecast, they anticipate the day-use areas to also reach capacity.

With one of the busiest recreation weekends of the year approaching, local experts and officials are

Stressing safety



Golden Corner Lakes and Sail Power Squadron instructor Ron Osburn displays a pair of life jackets, which he says are one of the keys to safe boating.

BY STEVEN BRADLEY
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — With sunshine in the forecast and Oconee County's parks expected to be bursting at the seams for Memorial Day weekend, officials and boating experts alike are stressing safety while celebrating.

County parks, recreation and tourism director Phil Shirley said he expects all three county campgrounds — Chau Ram, High Falls and South Cove — to be 100-percent full for the upcoming weekend, and with good weather expected, he anticipates the day-use areas will also reach capacity.

Shirley stressed the importance of park-goers having a safety plan for all

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swimming and boating activities this weekend.

"Make sure all your (personal flotation devices) fit and are in good working order," he said, "and most importantly ... wear them when in or on the water."

At its regular meeting this week, county council threw its support behind the goals of National Safe Boating Week, which began Saturday and runs through Friday.

According to recent U.S. Coast Guard statistics, drowning was the reported cause of death in three-fourths of boating fatalities in 2014. Of those, 84 percent of victims were not wearing their life jackets, according to the National Safe Boating Council.

Ron Osburn, instructor for the Golden Corner Lakes and Sail Power Squadron, said his group is promoting that message as well, along with trying to raise awareness for the need to take a boating safety course and the need to consider safety while boating, including knowledge of the rules of the water.

"Because most people do not know the rules — what do the lights mean, what do the buoys mean, who's required to wear a life vest, what size fire extinguisher do you have to have on your boat ... all those kind of things," Osburn said.

According to a proclamation passed by county council this week, the vast majority of accidents are caused by human error or poor judgment and not by boat, equipment or environmental factors, and a "significant number" of boating fatalities could be prevented each year if more boaters wore life jackets.

The proclamation states "today's life jackets are more comfortable, more attractive and more wearable than styles of years past and deserve a fresh look by today's boating public."

Osburn said it is important to make sure life jackets fit, as well as having the proper class of life jacket — from Class I, which are very bulky but designed to turn the wearer's head up in the event of unconsciousness to a Class V, which is basically a ski jacket.

"There's kayaking jackets with the big arm holes so you can move your arms," he said. "In South Carolina, anybody under 12 years old, you have to wear a life jacket. There's all kinds of rules that govern life jackets, and the DNR and Corps of Engineers have loaner programs so you can actually borrow life jackets."

Osburn said it is also important to make sure life jackets are Coast Guard-approved before purchasing them.

Another major safety violation Osburn sees on the lake is people riding on the front or back of a boat outside the gate.

"If the boat's moving, you're not supposed to be out there, because if you fall over, the propeller is going to hit you in the head and kill you," he said.

Osburn said boating safety courses also teach students about topics such as right of way and the proper use of sound signals.

"If you're going to pass somebody on their port side, you blow the horn twice," he said. "Well, guess what would happen if you came up behind somebody and tooted your horn twice? They'd probably flip you a bird. And you're supposed to answer them back that it's OK to pass. So there's all this information out there that people just don't know."

Osburn said there is a schedule of classes available at the Golden Corner Lakes and Sail Power Squadron website, gclsaps.com, as well as from the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, the Coast Guard Auxiliary or the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"There are a multitude of places where you can go get training," he said.