

# Opinion

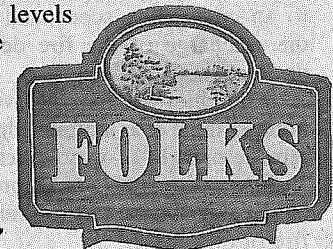
## Who's doing what for the lakes?

By Bill Graham, President & Ben Turetzky, Executive Director,  
Friends of the Lake Keowee Society

At recent Oconee County Planning Commission and Oconee County Council meetings there have been statements raised from the audience along the lines of: "If the people around the lake are so concerned about protecting the lake and needing to have Lake Overlays to protect the lake, where have they been when it comes to protecting the lake from polluters?" While we cannot speak for all of the residents around the lake, FOLKS (Friends of Lake Keowee Society) can speak for about 3000 of them — those that have belonged for up to 14 years to our organization.

FOLKS is 501(c)3 non-profit organization with a mission of protecting and preserving Lake Keowee and its watershed through science, educational outreach and promotion of good governance. To that end, over the past 10 years we have been granted and spent approximately \$600,000 of federal funds distributed by SC DHEC to "find and fix" sources of pollution into Lake Keowee. This \$600,000 was matched with \$400,000 of in-kind contribution by FOLKS and other agencies. This matching represents thousands of volunteer hours. One may ask: "What has FOLKS accomplished through this effort?" In our first grant we surveyed all of the major feeder streams and confirmed that sections of both Cane and Little Cane Creeks do not meet state standards for recreational use. We

also determined that there were low levels of fecal coliform in virtually all of the streams. In our second grant, which we have just completed, our mission was to bring Cane and Little Cane creeks into conformance with state standards. We believe that we have accomplished that mission but await DHEC validation of those measurements over the next months.



There were two very important findings from the Cane Creek grant: The major source of contamination of Cane Creek was human fecal coliform from the Walhalla Sanitary Sewer System. Work is ongoing by the Walhalla Utilities Department to continue to replace pipe and upgrade that system. On the Little Cane Creek side we have found that the contamination is primarily livestock fecal coliform and have worked through the Clemson Extension Service and NRCS with livestock operators to greatly reduce that contamination and, we believe, have brought Little Cane into compliance.

Another aspect of the grant was to find and assist in the repair of failed septic systems. In that phase, we shared in the cost of repair of 20 household septic systems. Another very important aspect of this work was to enlist the assistance of Troop 45 where Seth Mangan, an Eagle Scout candidate, led a group of Scouts and parents in the identification of over 200 sanitary sewer drains within the city of Walhalla and stenciled them: "Do Not Throw Anything in — Flows to Cane Creek and Lake Keowee." By the way, the south side of Walhalla drains into Lake Hartwell. We will fund the locating and stenciling of those drains with the fact that they flow into Lake Hartwell.

Perhaps the most important part of this grant was cooperative work we arranged with Clemson University and the EPA Laboratory in Athens, Ga., where water samples from Cane and Little Cane creeks were tested, using three different techniques, to identify the source of the fecal coliform, which, as noted above, identified very different sources for Cane and Little Cane creeks. This is why the EPA is recommending that the states go from total fecal coliform measurements to measuring specific pathogens that can be harmful to humans.

Two hundred volunteers go out twice a year to "sweep" the shores and islands of Lake Keowee and pick up the debris that careless people leave after spending a day on the water or on the shore.

Our concern about Zoning and Land Use Regulations is also a core part of our mission. To this end, we have asked both Oconee and Pickens counties to impose buffer zones around the lake to protect the waters from insecticides, pesticides and fertilizers used on lawns and ornamental plants. Pickens County imposed a 50-foot buffer some years ago to protect the lake, and Oconee County just a few years ago imposed a 25-foot buffer. Both of these are minimal efforts to reduce siltation and pollution. Our main thrust when it comes to the lake overlays and other lake-protective measures is we believe that both Oconee and Pickens counties should not be "developed by gotcha or default" — and the absence of regulations leads to just that. The county governments should decide what types of development should be allowed and where they should be allowed rather than astute developers who utilize loopholes to make a killing.

The bottom line to those who wonder what the people who live in lakeside communities are doing to protect the lake and its watershed, this is what 3000 are doing. We feel very good about our accomplishments to protect Lake Keowee and its watershed. So we ask "what are the rest of the almost 70,000 Oconee County residents and over 100,000 Pickens County residents doing, because the Lake and its well being are critical to all of us and to the future of the Upstate?"

If you are interested in helping to preserve and protect Lake Keowee and its watershed, stop bad mouthing the lakeside resident; come join us and be part of the solution, not the problem. If you live on Lake Hartwell, join the Lake Hartwell Association — they are just as concerned about the well being of Lake Hartwell as we are about Lake Keowee. <http://www.lakehartwellassociation.org/> In addition to joining FOLKS, if you are more interested in the Lakeside zoning initiative than the FOLKS technical efforts, join the Mountain Lakes Community Association or Advocates for Quality Development.