

Waterford development earns 'Firewise' rating

THE JOURNAL STAFF

SALEM — Oconee County's Waterford development is the latest South Carolina community to be designated as a Firewise community by the South Carolina Forestry Commission. Firewise status is given only to those communities whose residents demonstrate a significant and ongoing commitment to protecting lives and property against the threat of wildfire. Waterford marks the state's 10th Firewise community. The Commission's Firewise coordinator Mike Bozzo says Waterford residents represent the level of commitment that any neighborhood needs if it wants to protect homes and lives. "With the addition of Waterford we now have five communities in the Keowee Key Fire District to earn their Firewise designation," said Bob Bowles, Keowee Firewise Coordinator. The communities include Keowee Key in 2006, Wynward Pointe in 2007, Keowee Harbors in 2009 and Waterford Pointe in 2010. "This is about 90 percent of

the district in population. It also makes up five of the 13 (communities) in the entire state. With Chickasaw Point we have six (communities) here in the Upstate," said Bowles. "We are proud of our accomplishments and hope to serve as a role model to other parts of South Carolina."

The Keowee Fire Department continues to promote the Firewise Program as it has partnered with the SC Forestry Commission and the several communities within its service area.

The communities have taken on several projects to decrease their vulnerability to wildfires, including community chipping days, installation of an emergency evacuation route, renovating community buildings' landscapes to make them more Firewise and the purchase of equipment (a chipper) and tools to assist in the community chipping days.

"Having the Firewise program in our District has been a wonderful opportunity for me and my department to work side-by-side with the communi-

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ties to help promote the dangers we face with wildfire and to educate the homeowners on how to better protect their communities if and when that danger ever arises through the Firewise practices," said Richie Caudill, Chief of the Keowee Key Fire Department.

In Waterford's case, their Firewise committee met a year ago to discuss the fire safety needs of the community.

That committee started implementing recommendations in accordance with their Community

Wildfire Protection Plan, which was drawn up by the Forestry Commission with input from the community and Keowee Fire Department personnel.

After considering the risk for wildfire, residents decided first and foremost the Keowee Key Club & Activity Center should set the example and incorporate Firewise recommendations.

This included removing the flammable pine straw from around the building's foundation and replacing it with decorative river stone.

Then plants were thinned and pruned to prevent them from touching the building or overhanging the roof. Lattice with screening was installed below many of the decks, stairways and ramps.

The clubhouse project stands as a role model for what individual homeowners can do on their property to reduce fire risk," Bozzo said. "Homeowners can simply come and observe just how good it can look after removing flammable pine straw, pruning limbs and installing screens behind lattice to prevent fuel build-up under decks."