

Teen drowns at Fall Creek Landing

1st Fall Creek drowning of year

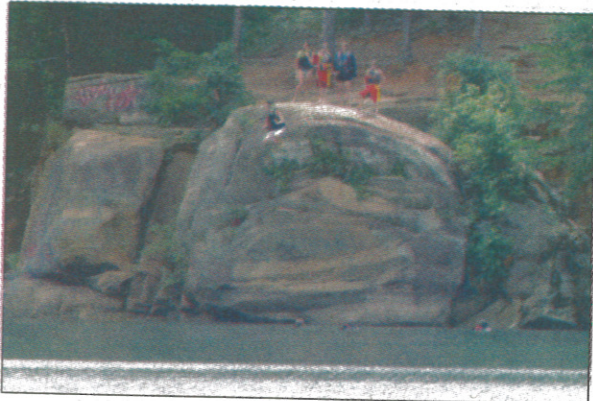
BY JUSTIN LEE CAMPBELL
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Oconee County Coroner Karl Addis ruled drowning as the cause of death for a Spartanburg County teenager whose

body was found in Lake Keowee near Salem on Sunday morning.

Addis said in a news release Dillon Ray Spears, 15, of Wellford, went under while swim-

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Swimmers jump off "the rock" at Fall Creek Landing in Salem on Monday. A Spartanburg County teenager drowned near Fall Creek on Sunday after he and a friend tried swimming to the rock to jump off it, according to Oconee County Fire Chief Charlie King.

ming back toward shore after he and a friend tried to swim to a cove at Fall Creek Landing.

According to Addis, a call reporting a drowning at Lake Keowee came in around 9:58 a.m. The dive team found Spears at approximately 10:30 a.m. about 19 feet below the surface and 30 to 40 yards off shore, Addis said.

Addis said officials pronounced Spears dead at 10:54 a.m. after he was unresponsive to CPR performed by EMS officials. No autopsy will be ordered.

Oconee County Fire Chief Charlie King told The Journal the two teenagers began swimming toward a cove with the intention of jumping off a rock. King said Spears went underwater when he

became tired and did not resurface. Spears' friend searched but was unable to find him.

King said the county fire department, Salem Fire and Rescue and the Oconee County Sheriff's Office responded to the scene.

The Journal reported in January an increased law enforcement presence helped prevent any drowning deaths from happening at the park last season for the first time in several years.

Oconee County Sheriff Mike Crenshaw said at the time a meeting between county and Duke Energy officials yielded new safety measures for the area, including placing boulders and safety signage at the park to stop unlawful parking

and increasing the number of patrolling officers.

Duke helped fund overtime for deputies to ensure officers were on site during summer months. Crenshaw said two deputies patrolling the area on the weekend from Memorial Day to Labor Day turned visitors away after the park reached capacity.

The meeting followed the 15th reported death near Fall Creek Landing in 21 years when a 20-year-old Six Mile man drowned in August 2015. Fall Creek Landing is popular in part because of access to "the rock," which swimmers jump off of into the lake.

Crenshaw said Spears' death was the first drowning at Fall Creek Landing this year. He said the new safety measures are in place year round.

"We had two officers

working Saturday and Sunday," Crenshaw said. "I think someone there at the boat ramp notified one of our deputies working traffic at Fall Creek. Our deputy was the one who actually placed the initial call."

Marine and patrol units responded to the call before the county fire department took over after officials determined the incident was unintentional and not a crime. According to Crenshaw, Spears was an experienced swimmer who might have succumbed to fatigue.

Crenshaw told The Journal two deputies direct traffic on the weekends at Fall Creek, while marine boats patrol the area seven days a week.

"One of our main emphases with deputies in the area is reducing illegal drugs and alcohol consump-

tion," he said. "Based on what I'm being told, there was no connection on Sunday to alcohol or drugs."

Crenshaw said the county was fortunate last year to have no drowning deaths in the area but added drownings at the lake are like traffic accidents. Both will continue to happen.

"The goal of increased law enforcement is to reduce the combination of drugs and alcohol and drownings, and we're still being effective at doing that," he said. "We can't guarantee we'll eliminate all drownings, but that's our hope."

Crenshaw said the sheriff's office will continue to keep personnel and marine units at Fall Creek Landing during the summer.

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