

Summer's 'last hurrah'



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Oconee County Sheriff's Office Cpl. Jonathan Hodge talks with John Bellotti during a safety check near South Cove County Park on Lake Keowee on Friday afternoon. Hodge said boaters should keep safety in mind this holiday weekend, even though it's summer's "last hurrah."

Officials offer keys to a safe holiday adventure

BY RILEY MORNINGSTAR
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Labor Day weekend offers many opportunities to get out and enjoy the lakes and trails in Oconee County, but officials say safety preparations are also important.

"Plan ahead. If you know for

sure that you are going hiking, make sure you know the length of the trail," Oconee parks, recreation and tourism director Phil Shirley said. "Make sure you're planning to stay hydrated. If you're going out on the water, make sure you've got all your life vests and safety equipment on the boat. Other than that, it's

supposed to be nice weather, and we just want everybody to get out and have a nice time."

Oconee emergency management director Scott Krein said those enjoying the outdoors should stick to basic safety rules.

"One of the things is that it's a

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Government offices set to close for Labor Day

SENECA — Monday's Labor Day holiday will mean a day off for many, including government employees and some students.

All government offices in Oconee and Pickens

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SAFE: Police will be patrolling area lakes

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busy time on the lake," he said. "It's the last hurrah, and we want to make sure that just because it's the end of the season, we still follow all of our safety rules. Make sure you have all of your safety equipment and make sure — because it's August — weather on the lake can change. Be prepared watching the weather and get off the lake if the storms come in, because it gets so rough."

He also encouraged boaters to stay aware of surroundings and try to be courteous to others on the lake to prevent boating accidents.

"Try not to get too close to other boats," said Cpl. Jonathan Hodge of the Oconee County Sheriff's Office marine unit said. "They're supposed to be 50-100 feet away from a dock or a stocked vessel in the middle of the lake. You need to give them that common courtesy and bubble, because there may be kids or people swimming outside the boats, and you don't want to be close and risk accidentally hitting someone."

Hodge and other sheriff's



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Oconee County Sheriff's Office Cpl. Jonathan Hodge and deputy Jake Spence talk with Steve and Patty Hovis during a safety check on Lake Keowee on Friday.

deputies will be patrolling the lakes this weekend. Hodge said the most common violation he expects to see this weekend is a lack of lifejackets onboard.

"We're looking to make sure people have their lifejackets on," he said. "If you're on a Sea-Doo or a tube, you need to have that lifejacket on — it's crucial. I've run across a few boats this year that are pulling people behind the boat on a tube and don't have a lifejacket on at all. For a pontoon, let's say you have 10 people on it, but you only have eight lifejackets. You need to make sure you have enough lifejackets on that

vessel to give to each and every person on the boat."

Outside of preparing for potential changes in weather, planning ahead of time before going out for a hike is equally as important, Krein said.

"We encourage people to go out and enjoy our wilderness, but know where you're going," he said. "Go ahead and look at the map and look at the strenuous terrain it might be. If you see a sign for a waterfall, maybe look at the actual type of trail it's listed at. Don't assume it's easy to get to. Sometimes our waterfalls are beautiful, but are not always easy to hike to or walk to.

As always, there's usually an observation point to look at the falls from, and there's no reason to climb or go above the falls. The best viewing points are usually the ones established to view the falls."

Both locals and those visiting from out of town will want to research falls and trails prior to heading out, Shirley said.

"If you're driving down the road with your family and you see a sign that says, 'There's a waterfall over here,' or there's something fun to do and they're not from this area, they may not realize it might be a 2-mile walk to get to that waterfall," Shirley said. "Now hopefully there's a kiosk that tells them when they get to the trailhead, but we certainly don't want a family to take off in the woods on a 2-mile hike and getting into it and not being ready for that."

The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) Law Enforcement Division will be conducting "quick but thorough" courtesy boat inspections at South Cove Landing from 10 a.m. to noon on Sunday.