

Preventing tragedy



Agencies talk Fall Creek Landing safety

Above: Emergency responders try to revive a drowning victim at Fall Creek Landing in 2015. Twenty people have drowned near the landing since 1993, and local, state and national agencies held a conference call Friday to try to come up with safety measures to prevent future deaths.

FILE

BY CAITLIN HERRINGTON
THE JOURNAL

SALEM — Local, state and national agencies were on the line Friday to discuss additional preventative measures to be placed at Fall Creek Landing in Salem to deter people from walking to “The Rock.”

The site of three drownings in less than four months this year — and 20 since 1993 — the Duke Energy-owned property provides quick access to Lake Keowee for those entering the northern side of Oconee County. With a busy lake weekend coming up, representatives from Duke Energy, the South Carolina Department of Nat-

2019 drownings at Fall Creek

April 29: Angelo D. Hall, 19,
Greenville County

July 2: Thomas Landon Gallman,
27, Greenville County

Aug. 18: Jose Adrian Ramirez,
20, Greenville County

ural Resources, the Oconee County Sheriff’s Office and historical and conservation agencies chatted about possible ways to deter visitors from

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entering the lake at unsafe points.

"They're looking at getting permission to put a fence on Fall Creek Landing Two," Oconee County Sheriff Mike Crenshaw said. "It's all still a work in progress, but I just think it's good people are at the table willing to discuss it."

A major draw of Fall Creek Landing is The Rock, an island a short distance from the peninsula where people jump into Lake Keowee. A sand bar between the peninsula of the landing and the island gives visitors the "false security" of walking between the two points and is often the site of drownings, officials said.

"The issue at Fall Creek isn't the danger of jumping off The Rock into the water, it's the waist-deep

and shallow sandbar that goes out from a point over to the island," Oconee County Fire Chief Charlie King said after an April drowning. "It's very narrow, and if you step off, it's a very steep drop-off into deep water. It can happen for a split second for people who go down and won't resurface."

The preventative measures were first discussed in May, when Duke Energy committed to putting rip-rap around the island and investigating other measures to keep foot traffic away from the popular spot.

"The plan we spoke of this morning was to put a large-scale, more industrial type of fence on the landing in an attempt to deter visitors from crossing to The Rock by foot," Oconee County administrator Amanda Brock said. "There was also talk of putting large boulders

on the perceived sand bar between the landing and the island."

Any work in the water has to wait until fish-spawning season is over, Duke Energy officials said in an initial commitment letter. Other wildlife, regulatory and environmental hurdles have to be overcome before changes are made on Keowee's shores.

"They do have to get clearance from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to make sure proposed changes are not in conflict with agreements already in place," Brock said. "Today was just a first step and open dialogue with local and statewide stakeholders and the government agencies involved in this process."

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FILE

Signs warning of the dangers at Fall Creek Landing have not been enough to prevent drownings at the popular swimming spot.