



July 27, 2009

The 4-H2O Pontoon Classroom on Lake Murray is unique weeklong annual summer educational program offered to 20 youth ages 10 to 12 years of age from the Midlands of South Carolina. This event is now in its second decade of educating youth on the importance of the Lake Murray body of water and the watersheds that feed the system its 50,000+ acres with more than 500 miles of shoreline, or approximately 7.2 billion gallons of water. The agenda offers both on land and water educational programming to spike the youth's interest in the protection of this valuable resource from many different angles. For example, they learn about the many stormwater pollutants that can run off during heavy rains out of a watershed and make its way to the lake and therefore damaging the quality of the water for fish, recreation, irrigation and as a drinking water source. They studied and identified macroinvertebrates "critter count" as a water quality monitoring tool. They did water testing and learned about ph, temperature, dissolved oxygen, turbidity and made measurements with their made secchi disc and ran E.coli bacteria test with cultured ColiScans. One of the more exciting, fun and educational things that we do on the water is to have the South Carolina Electric and Gas (SCE&G), who are the owners of the lake, come over with their shock boat and drop electrical current into an area of water and stun fish so that we can capture and identify species and populations. It is always neat to see the expressions on the youths faces when they see the fish come bubbling up. By the way, the fish are not harmed only stunned for just long enough for us to net them.

All of this educational programming was wrapped around fun events in and around the water like wildlife knowledge games, casting rods and reels and leaning about the art of bass fishing from a local tournament angler.

At the end of the week all the knowledge gained was culminated into activities such as the quiz bowl that is much like a Jeopardy game to test their level of learning. Teams of youth or individuals produced and put on skits to show the teaching team and their attending parents what they had learned during the week.

This type of in-depth program would not be possible with just Extension personnel and is only achievable thanks to our educational partners. They have been supporting and making this event feasible since its inception into the Midlands. The Lake Murray Association provides the pontoons and boat captains to move the youth around the lake so that we can hold our educational activities. Other educators and partners include; DHEC, Lake Murray Coast Guard Auxiliary Squadron, Family Community Leaders (FCL), Lexington Water Treatment Plant, Lexington Sheriffs Marine Dept., Lexington Conservation District, South Lake Marine and Boats, The State Newspaper, Local FLW Tournament Bass fisherman, along with local Striper Delight Lure manufacturer to name a few.

“4-H2O is a great program that gives young people the chance to learn about water quality and how clean water preserves aquatic life, safeguards our health, and allows for great recreational activities,” Lynn LaSalle of DHEC said. “My hope is that, after they take part in this fun learning experience, they do their part to protect this precious resource.”

Each year we open the pontoon classroom to only 20 participants so that we can maintain the highest quality of our outdoor classroom. Annually we are sold out usually by word of mouth advertisement, which I feel, is a true testament to the worth of this Water Quality educational endeavor here in the Midlands of South Carolina.

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