

# Advocating for Water Quality Awareness in Lake Keowee Community

**BY LILI GALLOWAY**, *Girl Scout Gold Award Recipient and Walhalla High School Student*

The rivers, streams, and creeks in Upstate South Carolina are captivating. It's a natural phenomenon that eighteen waterfalls exist in Oconee County alone. Recreation, power, and lifestyles in the Upstate rely heavily on the environment's water. Unfortunately, many residents of the Upstate are unaware the importance of water quality. Educating the public about water quality testing and linking them to citizen science organizations puts a focus on our area's water, and brings attention to the national issues of clean drinking water.

The Girl Scout Gold Award is similar to the Boy Scout's Eagle Scout; it's the highest honor awarded based on the number of hours of service to the community. The Gold Award requires eighty hours dedicated to a sustainable and community-serving service project of the scout's choice. Two smaller ranked projects are the Silver Award (50 hours) and the Bronze Award (25 hours). I've been a Girl Scout since I was in kindergarten, and I've learned to love serving my community. I completed my Bronze Award in elementary school (donation boxes for school supplies). I found more of a passion in my Silver Award project, where I built a "bee hotel" and garden for Camp Wistagmon. Though this was an important topic, I wanted to reach out further into the environmental sciences for my Gold Award project.

The easiest way to reach the public in an environmental space is through hands-on activities in the local parks. For my project, I used attractive signs with water quality information that included QR codes, which link to videos about the basics of water testing. With those videos and physical instructions, the public can check out an Adopt-A-Stream-like kit from a park office and try testing themselves. It is intended to be fun rather than serious, so the quality control of the data from public uncertified testers is not recorded.

SC Adopt-A-Stream is an organization now run by the SC Department of Environmental Services (formerly SCDHEC), but when I completed my volunteer training, it was run by Clemson University. SC Adopt-A-Stream invites the public to become citizen scientists through water quality testing. This organization recognizes the importance of water throughout South Carolina. Their training workshop inspired me to focus on water quality for the Gold Award. I began my project with a presentation in front of my Girl Scout service unit's Gold Award council, where they approved the concept: giving information to the public about water quality. Much of my life I've been aware of water quality, especially because of growing up playing in the rivers and fly fishing with my family. However, many families don't have access to education on water quality. This is important in our area because agricultural, rural areas should always be under watch.

I began this project at the beginning of my junior year of high school, but it took a long time to get things rolling. I reached out



to parks who might be interested, and contacted Camp WaBak, a Girl Scout camp in Marietta, SC. WaBak is a wonderful camp that I went to as a kid, and I wanted not only to install a sign and kit at that location but also to film the water testing videos there. The most accessible point to Gap Creek in camp was my ideal spot to film. I



went in late February with my best friend Sarah and my mom. Sarah and I spent our Saturday wading in the cold water, trying to bring my vision to life. I will admit at the beginning of the project, I had no clear vision as to how things could be accomplished. I was unsure of my decisions, and I didn't have a great hold on how reality would play out. The turning point was a call to a representative from SCDHEC who was covering Adopt-A-Stream matters. We discussed Adopt-A-Stream's involvement, and the possibility of their donating kit materials. I wanted to cut costs as much as possible, so Adopt-A-Stream's donation of materials (pH testing kit, a conductivity meter, and a transparency tube) was my idea. However, due to their uncertain future (at the time SC Adopt-A-Stream was moving under SCDHEC management), they were unable to donate any kit materials. With my plan changed, I scrambled to find a solution.

FOLKS was my saving grace. My family had already put in the money for the printing of my signs at D-Sign in Seneca. I didn't want them to donate any more, so I reached out to FOLKS. I met with Stephen Schutt at South Cove County Park, explained the project,



and he advocated for my project at a monthly meeting. They donated enough money to cover the water quality kit materials, construction materials, and the printing of the small sponsor signs to go on the posts. Due to their donation, I was able to purchase everything needed, and in August I installed signs and kits at High Falls County Park, Chau Ram County Park, and Camp WaBak. Now, any park or camp visitor can check out a kit, and use the videos to learn about water quality and its importance.

Overall, this Gold Award project was successful although daunting at times for me. Still, the result of encouraging more people to participate in water quality science outweighs any cons. Water is a necessity to all life, and without clean water, our environment struggles to stay alive. I believe that humanity can find a solution to help our planet and ourselves achieve a balance between lifestyle choices and the Earth's health. Spreading more accurate information and encouraging the public to get outside for more field work is a great first step to a better environment. I feel proud of how this project turned out, and I hope you enjoy it as well. Thank you, Upstate South Carolina and FOLKS. ❁

An advertisement for Clemson Downs Retirement Community. The top half features a group of five people (three women and two men) smiling in front of a waterfall. Large orange text reads "Fall in Love with Us!". Below the image is the Clemson Downs logo, a stylized orange and purple flower, and the text "CLEMSON DOWNS RETIRE WELL.". At the bottom, an orange banner contains the text: "Clemson Downs, A Continuing Care Retirement Community. (864) 654-1155 • @RetireWellClemson • ClemsonDowns.com".