



Volunteers Curbing Litter in Our Community

BY MELISSA HIGGS, *Communications Manager, FOLKS*

PalmettoPride, a nonprofit established in 2001, is a true public/private partnership comprised of state agencies, concerned citizens, corporate sponsors, and community and civic organizations with the stated goal of encouraging “behavioral change” in our citizens about litter. It oversees South Carolina’s Adopt-a-Highway program. The organization partners with local Department of Transportation offices to provide vests and signs, and to maintain roads. FOLKS has successfully partnered with PalmettoPride for years. We have received grants from them to obtain yearly litter cleanup supplies. They provide all of the green bags FOLKS uses for litter cleanups as well as the gloves and trash grabbers. (Duke Energy funded the T-shirts and banners for boats to display during Lake Sweeps.) This has saved the organization a tremendous amount of money.

We all know the benefits of clean communities. Tourists want to visit clean spaces, and everyone wants safe spaces without debris that can cause accidents and breed pests.

As I have travelled around the county, I have noticed vigilant homeowners cleaning roadways in front of their homes. I have also participated in Adopt-a-Highway collections. The time working together with a group of volunteers can be very rewarding. Keep Oconee Beautiful works to prevent litter as well. Unfortunately, we can’t stop it all before it happens, but we know that cleaner roads often discourage more littering.

Lakes benefit from these litter pickups. Stormwater runoff

sweeps debris into waterways. Here in the Upstate, we serve as the headwaters for the watersheds that flow toward the Atlantic Ocean on the coast.

The Oconee office of South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) maintains the Adopt-A-Highway program. I spoke with Coordinator John Gibson. He reported:

Currently, 27 groups have signed the two-year agreement contract. (Only four groups had not reported a litter pickup for 2024 at the time of this article.) By the end of November, roughly 11,400 pounds of litter and approximately 500 pounds of other materials, such as tires, mattresses, wood, and metal had been collected on state roadways. The top three groups were: Tri Lake Parrothead Club with 1,150 pounds collected; Clemson University Chi Phi Delta Theta Chapter with 1,050 pounds; and Submarine Veterans with 800 pounds collected.

Wells Highway from Friendship Road to SC-59 needs more attention since it is so close to the landfill. If you are interested in assisting with Wells Highway or know of another state road you would like to adopt, the Oconee office of the SCDOT can be reached at 864-613-1024.

If you are interested in helping with litter pickup, visit the Palmetto Pride website (www.palmettopride.org), or call them (803.758.6034). Your local office of the SCDOT should have safety training materials. Litter enforcement is also active in both Oconee and Pickens Counties. Their contact information is available on the county websites. ❁

FOLKS LITTER COLLECTION

According to Paul Gibbons, Island Keepers Coordinator, "Throughout 2024, 44 teams worked to check on our islands and cleared debris. Traffic was lighter this year than during the pandemic. Teams reported 47 volunteer hours collecting 62 bags of trash."

BOB LODI OF THE CLIFFS AT KEOWEE FALLS LAKE SWEEP GROUP REPORTED:

On October 13, I went to Fall Creek Landing N and S. The public roads were cleared as well as the parking lots and paths from the parking lots...We'll do a "land sweep" of the peninsula...Spring 2025.

SCOTT CALDERWOOD, LAKE SWEEP CHAIRPERSON, REPORTED:

Good news; the trend is in the direction of less trash. Bob Lodi noted that Fall Creek was much better than last year, which he credits to the Sheriff's Department presence at the landing. Another factor is as the lakefront continues to be developed there are fewer places for boaters to beach up. We also saw less trash at the Hwy 130/183 bridge just past Duke World of Energy. There were more large items, in particular dock floats noted, which I believe can be attributed to the hurricane. I estimate we had 30 boats working on the lake plus volunteers sweeping the landings. Boat crews are usually three to four volunteers so we had 100+ volunteers who put in 40+ hours.

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Island 10 and Island 20 are now open and need volunteers for Island Keepers.

FOLKS is looking for a Lake Sweep Chairperson. Scott will be stepping down after many years of service. Please consider volunteering for this essential position. If you are willing to help, please email FOLKS at folks@keoweefolks.org.

