



Jocassee Journal

Information and News about the Jocassee Gorges



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Deborah “Debbie” Richardson Fletcher authored two important books about the history of Jocassee and was lovingly remembered by people all over South Carolina as “Jocassee Girl.” Debbie passed away Aug. 20, 2021. (Photo by Dave Fletcher)

'Voice of Jocassee' remembered

'Jocassee Girl' Debbie Fletcher wrote passionately about area that she loved
By Kay Wade

Sadness runs deep and wide as the lake itself as we bid farewell to one of Jocassee's greatest champions. This past summer saw the passing of Debbie Fletcher, author, mother, grandmother extraordinaire, and friend.

Debbie's book "Lake Jocassee" gave us an intimate insider's look at the building of lakes Keowee and Jocassee as part of the Keowee-Toxaway Project. But it was "Whippoorwill Farewell: Jocassee Remembered" that showed us Jocassee Valley—before the lake—through the eyes of a little girl.

This was a little girl who wistfully watched the “camp girls” from Jocassee Camp for Girls ride horses down the dirt road in front of her grandfather's house, and who took summer baths in a swimming hole in the Whitewater River, and who slept on a screened porch with the sound of the river—and the whippoorwills—lulling her to sleep. In Debbie's words, the word “remember” means “to put back together, to re-member.”

Debbie, you will be remembered.

(Kay Wade is founder, along with her husband, Brooks, of Jocassee Lake Tours, an eco-tourism outfitter operating on Lake Jocassee near Devils Fork State Park.) 



“Management” activities at Jocassee Gorges may include work like this tractor removing dead trees on the Long Ridge of Pinnacle Mountain, many of which were scorched during the 2016 Pinnacle Mountain Fire. (SCDNR photo by Greg Lucas)

What does 'management' of Jocassee Gorges mean?

Jocassee land manager discusses activities aimed at making area ‘a little better each year’

By Tom Swaynham

We are blessed at SCDNR to maintain some of the most beautiful properties in South Carolina. I have a special attachment to our Jocassee Gorges area as I am from the area and spent a lot of time up here during my youth. It is truly a blessing to work up here, and we appreciate it every day.

Jocassee Gorges is a Wildlife Management Area (WMA). These WMAs are managed by SCDNR for wildlife habitat with a historical emphasis on public hunting. Hunters have largely paid our salaries and have contributed funds for the purchase and management of these tracts.

Many of our users are hunters, but we have many others that enjoy the beauty of the area while hiking or riding through the property. We try to provide a wide variety of users a unique experience in a beautiful place. Balancing this use is difficult sometimes, but we do our best to accommodate appropriate use.

In future issues, we will talk a lot about SCDNR’s management activities. Our primary mission is to maintain the essential

character of the property. The reason we acquired Jocassee is that it is a large, intact tract of forested habitat that is connected to other protected areas, and contains significant fish and wildlife habitat and unique natural communities. We work hard to protect the property while allowing the public to enjoy the area.

Jocassee is not a wilderness area. It is a managed forest. It has been impacted by human activities for a long time. The forest has changed significantly in the previous two centuries. One of our primary objectives is to restore the forest to the species that originally occurred here. This will require management, including tree harvest, tree planting, intentional fire, and protection from invasive species.

In future issues of the Jocassee Journal, we will talk in detail about prescribed fire, dominant tree species, road management and many other topics. Yet no matter what the management regimen is, our primary objective is to make Jocassee a little better each year it is entrusted to SCDNR.

(Tom Swaynham is a wildlife biologist with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources and is the land manager for the Jim Timmerman Natural Resources Area at Jocassee Gorges.) 

Seventh year is the charm at Sassafras Hawk Watch

Bird counters at Sassafras see record number of raptors atop highest point

By Ed Moorer

I wanted to summarize what the past season at Sassafras Mountain has reported, and now everybody can quit getting those daily e-mails from us ever since Labor Day!

All those days when we carried our backpacks up the hill, chairs to ease our aching backs, and count signs to stick in the hard ground, it was worth it. The education of the thousands of visitors as to what we were doing, giving water to Foothill Trail hikers, informing guests that it was not a golf course they were looking at below, and smothering our bodies with sunscreen, was a daily occurrence. I personally drove more than 3,200 miles going back and forth around the curves to the mountain and back home again. I hope to do it all again next season.

We set a record raptor count this seventh year at Sassafras Mountain, sending hawkcount.org 12,326 raptors! All this data is important to the numbers of birds we count, but also to assess signs of our ever-changing world environment.

Broad-winged hawks led the count as usual with 6,656 (4,267 flew by on Sept. 25). Turkey vultures are also counted at our site on the Appalachian Flyway, and for those of us who stayed past September, it was a lot of fun to see a total 5,469 kettle up at times and keep on drifting to the south mostly from the Blue Ridge Parkway area.

Sharp-shinned hawks totaled 67, red-tailed hawks totaled 40, osprey totaled 17, and bald eagles made the Top Six species with

18 that we were sure were migrating and not local birds. I look forward to seeing the spring journal of HMANA to give final results from all sites along our flyway and compare what species are doing well. If you have not checked out Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch in Virginia, look on hawkcount.org. They also set a record with more than 37,000 birds and they do not even count vultures!

Our observation hours included a record with counters putting in 273.75 hours. Clickers tallied monarch butterflies, the weather station gave us current weather conditions, Subaru and WYFF gave us some local media sponsor coverage, and Rusty and Kaylen with SCDNR cheered us on. This would not have been

possible without regular counters Bill Brady and Betsy Lewis. Others came when they could, but these two could be relied on to be there for the three-month season. Thanks to all who helped. Our motto is: "The more eyes, the better." Hopefully, next season will bring more interested birders to assist on the



Hawk counters look to the sky as visitors climb to the top of the Sassafras Mountain Overlook. Sassafras Mountain Hawk Watch this year had a record raptor count, tabulating 12,326 birds for the season. (Photo by Ed Moorer)

platform.

In my 20 years of hawk counting at both Caesars Head and Sassafras, this has been my most rewarding. I have met more outdoor visitors from all over the United States and made more new friends than any other year. Covid has been a challenge, but social distancing helps on the platform. I hope this site will continue to get better and the people of South Carolina realize what a prize and opportunity Sassafras Mountain means to all who visit here.

(Ed Moorer is the coordinator of the Sassafras Mountain Hawk Watch.) 🍃

Copperhead



Corn Snake



All copperheads are snakes, but not all snakes are copperheads

SCDNR herpetologist offers advice on identifying native snakes

By Andrew Grosse

South Carolina is home to 38 species of snakes that are variable in size and color and can be found in a variety of habitats throughout the state. Of the 38 species of snakes in South Carolina only six are venomous. It is much more common for people to see a harmless nonvenomous species than a venomous one. Some are cryptic and rarely seen despite their vivid colors and unique pattern, like the highly aquatic mud and rainbow snakes, while others can be quite common like rat snakes and black racers.

Snakes are an important part of a healthy ecosystem and play a significant role as both predators and prey. As predators, they regulate rodent populations, which, in many cases, act as the primary vectors for ticks and tick-borne diseases, such as Lyme

disease. As prey, snakes provide food for a variety of birds, mammals and even insects and other snakes, like the Eastern kingsnake.

In the Upstate you can find several species of snakes including some of the more common species such as Eastern garter snakes, ringneck snakes, brown snakes, red-bellied snakes, black racers, rat snakes, and corn snakes. Unfortunately, many of these species are often mistaken for venomous species and unnecessarily killed.

While there can be a lot of variation in how individual snakes behave and appear, observing the head and pupil shape may help differentiate venomous from nonvenomous species. In general, the pupils of nonvenomous snakes are round while those of venomous pit viper species are elliptical or cat-like. Additionally, the

head shape of nonvenomous snakes tends to be oval or box-shaped, while venomous pit viper species tend to have a more triangular shaped head. Another way to think about it is that venomous pit viper species have a clear distinction

“While there can be a lot of variation in how individual snakes behave and appear, observing the head and pupil shape may help differentiate venomous from nonvenomous species.”

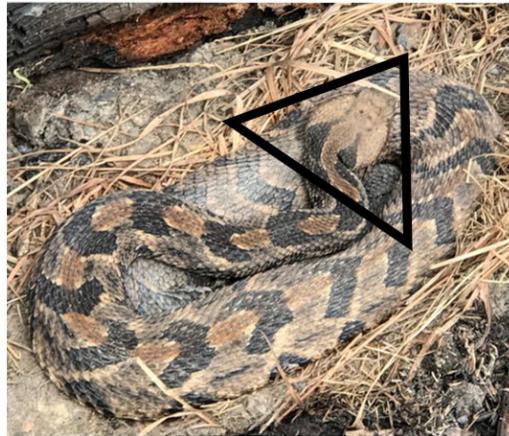
~Andrew Grosse, SCDNR herpetologist

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Nonvenomous



Venomous



Non-venomous snakes often killed for no reason

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where the head stops and the body/neck begins while nonvenomous species tend to have a smaller head that is roughly the same size as the body.

One important exception is the coral snake, arguably the most cryptic of our venomous snake species, which is adapted to digging and lives primarily underground and is found in deep sandy habitats in our coastal plain. While their brightly colored red, yellow and black pattern helps distinguish them from most species, their head and pupil shape look more like a nonvenomous species than one of our five venomous pit vipers. Another notable exception to consider is, when threatened, many nonvenomous species will flatten their heads to appear more intimidating, so using only head shape as a distinguishing characteristic may not be reliable.

Two species that are often mistaken for one another are corn snakes and copperheads. While it can be quite variable, the overall pattern can help differentiate the two species. In

general, copperheads have a pattern that is thicker on the side and thinner on top. Some say it looks like an hourglass from above and a Hershey Kiss from the side. In contrast, corn snakes, as well as juvenile rat snakes and black racers, will have the thicker portion of their pattern on top and appear to have saddles if viewed from above.

Regardless of the species in question, all snakes have an important role in the ecosystem. If you are fortunate enough to see a snake, give it some space and enjoy it from a distance.

Additional information can be found at <https://www.dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/herps/snakes.html>.

“South Carolina is home to 38 species of snakes that are variable in size and color and can be found in a variety of habitats throughout the state. Of the 38 species of snakes in South Carolina only six are venomous.”

~Andrew Grosse, SCDNR herpetologist

(Andrew Grosse is the statewide herpetologist with the South Carolina Department of Natural

Resources. This article first appeared in “The Sentinel,” the Friends of Lake Keowee Society newsletter.) 🌿

Nonprofit CEO hike on Foothills Trail was ‘good for the soul,’ leaders say

By Dana McConnell

Sitting at the top of an organization chart is lonely. We work our entire careers to get there, then realize there are few people we can truly talk with and relate to. When you add in the events from the past year of a global pandemic, stark political divisions, and rising economic uncertainty, the stress of managing and sustaining a nonprofit can cause significant burnout. Charlie Hall, president of Upstate Warrior Solutions, decided to do something about that.

Charlie and his team organized the first of what could become an annual outing. For five long, hot days at the end of May, our group of nonprofit CEOs hiked the entire Foothills Trail from Oconee State Park to Table Rock State Park. We had five through-hikers and 13 section-hikers who left our workstations, staff, and families to unplug from reality.

Our veteran hikers breezed right through the 77-mile trip. But for the rest of us, the commitment required months of pre-hike training, several trips to REI, and significant on-line research. There was also an assurance that the hike would be assisted. (Many thanks, by the way, to our support teams who carried our nightly gear to each camp site.)

Setting fears and doubts aside, we hugged our loved ones goodbye and stuffed our over-packed bags into the transport vans to embark on this momentous journey. Our word of the week was “buttercup,” a code for when someone needed to step off the trail for a bit of privacy.

Once on the trail, the terrain quickly became physically demanding. Our mental exertion from the past year was



This group of nonprofit CEOs hiked the entire 77 miles of the Foothills Trail from Oconee State Park to Table Rock State Park in May 2021.



The view from Bald Knob on the flanks of Pinnacle Mountain seems to be the destination of Table Rock State Park.

transformed into group therapy by encouraging each other through each step and up the next incline. It was a scenario that played out daily, especially on Heartbreak Hill.

We encountered hornet nests, snakes, lots of lizards, and even an armadillo, thanks to the keen eyes of those in our group. Our collective emergency kit contained a “magic cream” that seemed to cure anything from bug bites to scrapes to poison ivy. And speaking of cures, there was one occasion where a medical procedure was needed on a toe. Since we didn’t have a physician in our midst, we decided that someone in our group who had played a doctor on stage before was close enough. The procedure was performed using tools at hand. We think it worked.

We were surprised to find so many water sources

from reality'



ms to go on forever. By this time, the CEOs were getting close to their

along the trail. This provided wonderful refreshment to our overheated faces and sore muscles. The first two hikers in our group who arrived at Upper Whitewater Falls found the area void of visitors. Taking advantage of the moment, they stripped down to their skivvies and enjoyed a quick dip just as a group of high school students walked up the trail. Their scramble to dry off was a bit comical!

Our trail experience also included a bit of mystery. One evening during dinner, we each had our selection of freeze-dried mountain meals. As the meals were individually chosen and prepared, another member of our group was excited to find her selected meal already prepared for her. As she was enjoying her dinner, the original preparer kept looking around for the meal as if he set it somewhere he

didn't remember. The truth came out later that evening as another beef stroganoff was patiently prepared. Karma had the last word on that, though.

A few other scenarios rounded out the fun week, like coyotes howling one evening near our campsite, "Dueling Banjos" (song from the movie "Deliverance") playing too close for comfort, and discovering a way to buttercup after a thunderstorm rolled in. A few lessons were learned as well, like how mileage on a 1940s State Parks trail map may not be current anymore. By the end of the week, our mileage to the next check point ended in "ish," as in 5-ish miles left. The "ish" was ALWAYS arbitrary.

We are so grateful to the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, the various Boy Scouts and Girl Scout troops, and the many volunteers from the Foothills Trail Conservancy, who help maintain the Foothills Trail. It was absolutely beautiful and is a treasure for South Carolina.

Our time away was incredibly good for the soul. It was never about the destination of getting to Table Rock State Park. Rather, it was about the journey. The trail gave us an opportunity to reconnect with our peers. It gave us space to feel supported. And, it allowed us to renew our passion for our nonprofit work in our communities.

(Dana McConnell is executive director of the Center for Developmental Services in Greenville, a network of care providers for children and adults with special needs.)



Taking a well-deserved break was always a joy for the hikers. They were surprised to find so many water sources along the Foothills Trail, providing refreshment to the tired and overheated walkers.



With strong winds on the way, on Nov. 17, 2016, the U.S. Forest Service helped firefighters keep the fire under control by igniting a previously unburned area in Table Rock State Park. This view is from a pull-off inside the park near White Oak Shelter. (SCDNR photo by Greg Lucas)

Five-year anniversary marked for Pinnacle Mountain Fire

Started as an escaped campfire, blaze became Upstate’s largest wildfire

In early November 2016, five years ago, S.C. Forestry Commission dispatchers received the first call of a fire about a half-mile southwest of the summit of Pinnacle Mountain in Pickens County. Embers from an escaped campfire spilled over the side of a trail and down to the forest below.

Strong, gusting winds, combined with dry fuels on the ground, created high potential for outdoor fires escaping easily and spreading rapidly, as evidenced by the scene playing out on the mountain. What began as a small two-acre spot fire quickly turned to 25 acres overnight.

By the time the fire was declared contained 26 days later, the fire had burned 10,623 acres and would be forever known as the Pinnacle Mountain Fire—the longest, largest and costliest fire in Upstate history.

In the wake of the devastation caused by the Pinnacle Mountain Fire, S.C. Forestry Commission officials sought to strengthen the State Forester’s Burning Ban, which before had not included campfires. The following legislative session

saw the passage of House Bill 3719, which added campfires and other recreational fires to the list of activities that can be prohibited under such a ban. The legislation also raised the fines levied on those convicted of violating the ban up to \$200 for first offenses and at least \$500 for second and subsequent offenses.

SCDNR land managers said the fire would cause some trees to die and more snags will be present in the future. In addition, the fire eliminated much of the mountain laurel and rhododendron that had encroached into dry habitats where those species do not belong ecologically. A flush of wildflowers and herbaceous vegetation will flourish on the forest floor in the coming years. In the future, more sunlight will penetrate the woodland canopy and reach the forest floor as a result of the fire. The relatively “stagnant” forest will support vibrant plant communities that have not been present for almost a hundred years. Many animals in the area will find small seed-bearing plants, fruit-producing shrubs, grasses, forbs and a diversity of vegetation that cumulatively equate to better wildlife habitat. 

2021 Upstate bear season harvest is all-time record

Hunters harvested 131 bears during two-week October season

Upstate hunters harvested a total of 131 bears during South Carolina's 2021 bear season, which is a new all-time record. The previous record was 127 bears taken in 2013.

"It was a very active season," said Tammy Waldrop, Upstate black bear biologist for the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR). "Mainly it was because of where the acorns fell. It concentrated the bears and made for a high harvest."

In Region 1, which is the northern portions of Greenville, Oconee and Pickens counties, hunters harvested 126 bears. Sixty were taken during the still hunt, the first week of the season. Greenville County hunters accounted for 22 bears during the still hunt season, Oconee County hunters harvested 16 and Pickens County hunters killed 22.

During the party dog hunt, the second week of the bear season, mountain hunters killed 66 bears. Oconee County led the way with a total of 46 bears. Pickens County hunters harvested 12 bears during the dog season, and Greenville County hunters killed eight bears.

In Region 2, which is the southern portions of the mountain counties, and all of Spartanburg County, the two-week still hunt accounted for five bears. Three bears were killed in Pickens County, one was harvested in Spartanburg County, and one bear was taken in Oconee County. This is the third year that Region 2 has been included in the fall Upstate bear hunt.

The largest bear of the season came from Oconee County and was taken during the dog hunt. The black bear weighed about 550 pounds. Another large bear, this one weighing 525 pounds, was harvested in Pickens County during the still hunt.

A large crop of acorns in Oconee County helped kept the bears close to their home ranges, according to Waldrop. The acorn production was especially heavy in the Tamassee-Salem area.

"The acorn load was unbelievable in the Tamassee-Salem area," Waldrop said. "There was a high production of acorns from white oaks and it pulled in a bunch of bears."

For the privilege of hunting bear, in addition to the required hunting license and big game permit, a hunter must obtain a bear tag issued in his/her name at a cost of \$25 for residents and \$100 for nonresidents. Youth under the age of 16 are required to obtain a youth bear tag from the department at no cost. Bear tags are available over the counter at SCDNR offices in Charleston,



Anaston Broom Porter of Pickens displays her 380-pound male bear that was taken in Jocassee this year during the dog party hunt. Anaston, 24, is the daughter of Shannon and Shannon Broom of Pickens and is a recent double graduate of Clemson University with a bachelor's degree in wildlife and fisheries biology and a master's degree in agricultural education.

Clemson, Columbia, Florence, and York. Tags can be ordered by telephone a 1-866-714-3611 or online at <https://www.dnr.sc.gov/purchase.html>.

Black bears are the largest land mammals in South Carolina.

Male black bears are generally larger than females. An average adult male black bear can weigh between 150 - 350 pounds while the female averages between 100 -250 pounds. However, when food is plentiful, older bears have been documented at weights above 400-500 pounds. The largest black bear recorded in

South Carolina was 609 pounds.

The average life expectancy of black bears is 18 years in the wild. They reach sexual maturity by three years and obtain most of their growth by five years.

Typically, black bears require large expanses of forest dominated by a diversity of mast-producing hardwoods and shrubs intermixed with early successional vegetation such as blackberries and pokeberries. Wetlands such as swamps and bays also provide good habitat. However, black bears are adaptable. As long as they can find adequate food sources and have suitable den sites, black bears can be found in a variety of habitats.

"The acorn load was unbelievable in the Tamassee-Salem area. There was a high production of acorns from white oaks and it pulled in a bunch of bears."

--Tammy Waldrop, SCDNR bear biologist

Pioneering forestry professor celebrates 90th birthday

Dr. Cook taught students as much about life as he did about forestry

By Johnny Stowe

(Editor's note: Dr. Walter Cook designed and laid out many trails within the Jocassee Gorges during the past two decades, and he has been a contributor to "Jocassee Journal." Mark Hall, recently retired Jocassee land manager, was a student of Dr. Cook's at the University of Georgia.)

Dr. Walter Cook, retired University of Georgia (UGA) forestry professor and Athens-Clarke County, Ga., recreation icon, was honored by more than a hundred folks, including his students, who gathered to celebrate his 90th birthday in late June at Sandy Creek Park. The Mayor of Athens-CC read a proclamation declaring June 26 this year and in all future years Walter Cook Day, and gave him a symbolic gold key to the city and county!

Dr. Cook regaled the crowd with tales, some hilarious and some profound—some of them were both. The upwelling of profound respect and affection, and the proclamation and the city key, in large part centered on his work as a volunteer who designed and built (and helped maintain) many score public trails across the Southeastern U.S., including those at Sandy Creek Nature Center/Park, and on his decades of volunteer service on related boards and advisory committees. His students are scattered across the world.

Denise Froehle, my SCDNR colleague and a student and friend of Dr. Cook, and I rode over to the celebration. I was privileged to offer a tribute to my revered mentor, telling how he profoundly impacted my life—both professionally as well as personally—in my work as a forester and land manager, in the way I manage my own land and public lands in my job, the way I hunt and write and speak, the way I teach yoga and meditation, and in ways I think about land and our place in it that approach the numinous.

My first quarter at UGA I took Dr. Cook's Forest Recreation course, where he introduced me to Aldo Leopold and his land ethic through "A Sand County Almanac," on which I later centered my master's work under Dr. Larry Marchinton. Then I took Forest Engineering, and then Wilderness Management from Dr. Cook, and served as his teaching assistant for five quarters. Taking these courses, working for Dr. Cook, and our friendship have been among the most important relationships in my life. Dr. Cook volunteered for me when I came to SCDNR in January 1996, building trails on several SCDNR heritage preserves.



Retired forestry professor Walt Cook, wearing his trademark Jocassee Gorges Volunteer T-shirt, was responsible for the design of many of the trails within the Jim Timmerman Natural Resources Area at Jocassee Gorges.

Dr. Cook taught at the UGA forestry school for decades and was a pioneer whose interests and accomplishments ranged from the practical to the philosophically profound; his prescient doctorate focused on Forest Aesthetics; he was the first or one of the first professors to teach Wilderness Management in Eastern North America, and in 1979 he was first author on a paragon paper, on broad-based dips, which are widely-used erosion control structures on forest roads that have saved untold tons of soil from eroding into waterways around the world.

Dr. Cook worked with one of his students, Doris Wehlau, to translate from German the 1902 book of Heinrich Von Salisch, "Forest Aesthetics," a work that cogently laid out how forest beauty need not be lost in the process of yielding
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Professor: ‘Success in your job is loving what you do’

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timber products. This work presaged Leopold’s poignant prose on Type A vs Type B foresters. Dr. Cook taught a great many students who have impacted the forestry and wildlife profession and society as a whole and the land that supports us all, as well as students from other schools who took his courses as electives. He regularly taught students of landscape architecture.

Dr. Cook told me things like “Johnny, you have to make enough money to make a living, but beyond that success in your job is in large part a matter of loving what you do.”

And he told me that “There are many ways to get paid.” I think of these things when I restore land, especially when I do it on-the-ground, drip torch-in-hand. Dr. Cook also penned some beautiful essays.

He gave me many of his papers when he retired, and I refer to them still, and frequently; his copy of the “Forestry Handbook,” the bible-leaved tome of traditional forestry in the U.S., is one of my most prized possessions. Dr.

Cook and a colleague wrote the chapter on surveying.

One thing that stands out to me about Dr. Cook’s courses is that they ranged from the ecophilosophical to the utilitarian—he got us to think about the “why” of what we do as foresters and citizens, and also the “how” (such as practical engineering skills of forest road-building, surveying, mapping and such to get timber out of the woods). He was one of the last professors, before GIS/GPS became the norm, and we did all our work the old way, with compasses and steel forester’s chains, with clinometers, stereoscopes and hand-drawn maps. We used engineer’s

rules and dot grids to create polygons and figure distances and acreage. We all got pretty good at pacing distances while following a bearing, and orienteering accurately on slopes as well as flat ground.

I recollect well how he said that we would be using GPS/GIS and other new-at-the-time technologies in our careers, but that we would benefit from learning things the old ways because we would have a working understanding of the principles behind the technology. This has been the case with me, making it easier to explain these fundamentals to young

folks, and enabling me to orient myself in wilderness in Alaska and the Rockies in such places where lack of coverage or dead batteries render much standard electronic technology less than, if not totally, useless. And perhaps most importantly, when I use the fundamental tools and techniques Dr. Cook taught me, I think of him, and that gives meaning to these things, meaning that touches me in a way no electronic gadget ever could.



One of Walt Cook’s popular slide shows is entitled, “Things You Can Only See on a Trail,” and he is always encouraging people to get outside and see the natural world.

Dr. Cook’s legacy, which he is still energetically building, will resonate far into this Third Millennium, through the people and special places he inspired, taught and protected.

The world needs more folks like Dr. Walter Cook. May we all aspire to make such an impact on nature and society.

(Johnny Stowe, a Heritage Preserve Manager with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, is a Certified Wildlife Biologist and a S.C. Registered Forester. He is a member of the International Association of Wildland Fire’s Board of Directors.) 🌿



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New Jocassee Gorges land manager named

Pickens County native tending to SCDNR lands in Pickens, Oconee counties

Tom Swaynham has been named as the land manager for the Jim Timmerman Natural Resources Area at Jocassee Gorges.

Swaynham, a Pickens native and a 34-year veteran with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), was for the past seven years the assistant chief of wildlife for the Upstate and Midlands region.

"Tom has done a little of everything with SCDNR," said Billy Dukes, SCDNR chief of wildlife. "Some folks don't know that he started his career with the agency as the state's first alligator biologist. Now he is fulfilling his childhood dream of managing Jocassee Gorges. His wealth of experience in land management, his local knowledge of the Upstate region, and his love of the land make him the ideal person for the job. Jocassee Gorges and the surrounding properties couldn't be in better hands.

"I still say he moved to Jocassee to get as far away as he could from alligators!"

Swaynham replaced Mark Hall, who retired from the Jocassee position in May after two decades of service in the mountain region. Swaynham holds two degrees from Clemson University: a bachelor's degree in Economic Zoology and a master's degree in Wildlife Biology.



Tom Swaynham

The Jim Timmerman Natural Resources Area at Jocassee Gorges, which is often referred to as "Jocassee" and has been called "The Horsepasture" for generations in Pickens County, is South Carolina's premier mountain property. It is located in northern Pickens County and eastern Oconee County and surrounds Lake Jocassee.

The Jocassee lands are heavily wooded with hardwood forests and white pine woodlands and are blessed with many waterways, including numerous creeks and the four rivers that empty into Lake Jocassee: Whitewater, Thompson,

Horsepasture and Toxaway. The lands were acquired by the state in 1998 because of the unique biology present there, the special recreational opportunities it provides, and the simple fact that it is a large, rugged and remote property.

Fishing, hunting, bird-watching and hiking are traditional uses on Jocassee. Hikers enjoy the wildflower displays that can be seen along the Foothills Trail and Palmetto Trail. Cold, free-flowing headwater streams support wild trout populations. Hunting for black bear, wild turkey, white-tailed deer, squirrel and raccoon has been popular in Jocassee for many decades. Jocassee is especially popular in the spring when wildflowers are blooming and again in the fall when colors are often spectacular. The area has more than 200 miles of old logging roads for wandering and exploring.