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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## Local Students Measure Health of Savannah River by its Biodiversity

AIKEN, S.C., August 13, 2019 – Local students trade classrooms for the trees and waterways of the Savannah River Site (SRS) by participating in several science experiments focused on environmental stewardship.

Through the Science Technology Enrichment Program (STEP), they collect water samples and tiny aquatic creatures from the site's Fire Water Pond. Using biodiversity as a measure, they evaluate the health of the water and the insects and animals.

“Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) offers several educational programs to area students at no charge,” said Kim Mitchell, STEP program coordinator in the education outreach programs of SRNS, the site's managing and operating contractor. “However, this is the only program where the kids actually visit SRS. They get out into the woods and get their hands dirty enjoying environmental science projects.”

STEP partners with the University of South Carolina Aiken's Ruth Patrick Science Education Center, drawing from techniques pioneered by the late Dr. Ruth Patrick, the first scientist to diagnose the health of a river or stream by studying plant and animal life.

The Atomic Energy Commission, DOE's predecessor agency,



*Students from South Aiken High School participate in the Science Technology Enrichment Program at the Savannah River Site, netting small aquatic creatures and testing pond water to learn more about freshwater ecosystems.*

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assigned Patrick to collect data on the water quality and life found in the Savannah River prior to the opening of the Savannah River Plant in the early 1950s. Students follow in the footsteps of Patrick to collect vertebrate and invertebrate creatures, using biodiversity as a health indicator for freshwater ecosystems at SRS.

“For kids who are thinking about being a scientist, these experiments will help them truly understand what science is like out in the real world instead of just hearing about it in a classroom,” South Aiken High School (SAHS) senior Maggie Volk said. “I think it’s cool that the people providing all the materials and putting all the effort into these activities really care about us and want to make this a good learning experience.”

Field trips at SRS provide educational experiences focusing on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). By partnering with area teachers, the program emphasizes the role of science teachers as educational leaders in the schools and community.

Melanie Fischer, a SAHS senior, said she enjoyed taking part in the environmental science experiments at SRS.

“I’ve known for a while that I’ve wanted to be involved in marine biology and environmental science. And, this experience has really cemented that decision,” she said.

*Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, a Fluor-led company with Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell, is responsible for the management and operations of the Department of Energy’s Savannah River Site, including the Savannah River National Laboratory, located near Aiken, South Carolina.*

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