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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## Teachers, Students Return to Boundless Forests of Savannah River Site

**AIKEN, S.C.**, December 16, 2022 – Unique field trips for teachers and students alike that focus on environmental science in the vast forests of [Savannah River Site](#) (SRS) are up and running again after COVID-19 [shut them down](#) in 2020.

From left, South Aiken High School students Alexa Duran-Figueroa, Ashleigh Fair and Damaris Guillen examine aquatic organisms captured in a nearby streambed at Savannah River Site.

The tours are part of the [Science and Technology Enrichment Program](#) (STEP), one of the most popular education outreach initiatives at SRS. Visitors take part in real-time and virtual field trips in what became the first national environmental research park in 1972. That area at the 300-square-mile SRS is home to rare endangered species including wood storks, bald eagles and re-cockaded woodpeckers, as well as wild turkeys, white-tailed deer and otters.

Managed by contractor Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS), STEP is a cooperative effort between SRNS and the Ruth Patrick Science Education Center with special assistance from the University of Georgia's [Savannah River Ecology Laboratory](#).

"The STEP Field Trip Program provides opportunities for local educators to bring students to the Savannah River Site," said Taylor Rice with SRNS Education Outreach. "These outdoor settings at SRS enhance STEM-based education by providing a practical application to enhance environmental science."

STEP lessons correlate to academic science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) standards for grades three through 12. Lessons use real-world investigations that focus on responsible environmental stewardship.



*From left, South Aiken High School students Alexa Duran-Figueroa, Ashleigh Fair and Damaris Guillen examine aquatic organisms captured in a nearby streambed at Savannah River Site.*



*South Aiken High School students view aquatic organisms under a microscope as they learn about nature through the Savannah River Nuclear Solutions Science and Technology Enrichment Program at Savannah River Site*

The lessons have focused on preserving the nesting habitat of the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker and identifying freshwater macroinvertebrates in ponds and streams, among other topics.

During a recent in-person STEP visit, South Aiken High School students searched a small stream for aquatic invertebrates, which are critical to a healthy forest's food chain. They temporarily caught and studied creatures such as the damselfly, water scorpion and leech.

"The value of this program is immeasurable," said Jamie Hatchett, South Aiken High School science teacher. "For our students to be able to come out here and get hands-on, real-world experience with what we're talking about in the classroom is an incredible resource."