

News from the Savannah River Site

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SRNS “STEPs” Up to Help Local Students Enhance Science Education

AIKEN, S.C. (December 2, 2013) – Students from Williston-Elko (S.C.) High School recently traded their traditional classroom for the forests and ponds of the Department of Energy’s Savannah River Site (SRS), as they participated in a hands-on environmental science lesson through Savannah River Nuclear Solution’s “Science Technology Enrichment Program” (STEP).

With transportation funding provided by SRNS, the Williston-Elko students collected vertebrates and invertebrates, using biodiversity as an indicator of water health in an SRS pond at the Department of Energy Site.

“We recognize that every school system in the Central Savannah River Area is working within an extremely tight budget,” said Candice Dermody, manager, Talent Management and Education Outreach. “Providing a bus for a science education visit to SRS is highly appreciated by participating schools’ staff and students. We’re pleased that we can contribute to their knowledge in the area of environmental science.” Williston-Elko High School is one of four Barnwell County schools to recently visit SRS, each of which also participated in the SRNS STEP initiative.

STEP is an SRS education outreach program which partners with the Ruth Patrick Science Education Center. In this program, students



Christian Sapp (left) and Kim Mitchell of Education Outreach Programs use a dip net to collect macro vertebrates and invertebrates at the pond's edge.

use some of the techniques pioneered by the late Dr. Ruth Patrick, the first scientist to diagnose the health of a river or stream by using plant and animal life.

Dr. Ruth Patrick was assigned by the Atomic Energy Commission to collect baseline data on the water quality and biota of the Savannah River prior to the opening of the Savannah River Plant in the early 1950s. How appropriate that students from local schools would follow in the footsteps of Dr. Patrick to collect vertebrate and invertebrate creatures, using biodiversity as an indicator of water health on the Savannah River Site.

Offered at SRS and at the Silver Bluff National Audubon Society, STEP provides teachers and students with hands-on opportunities through real-world, issues-oriented investigations that focus on responsible environmental stewardship.

“The kids were thrilled,” said Cathy Smith, Career Specialist, Williston-Elko High School. “All the way back many of them were talking about this experience. “I believe some of the students with us today may have new career plans.”

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

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions is a Fluor-led company whose members are Fluor Federal Services, Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell, 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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