



2008 USDA-CSREES National Water Conference  
Sparks, NV

### **4-H2O Pontoon Classroom**

Rick Willey, John Hayes, Darren Atkins and Jason Caudill

#### **Abstract Text:**

Over the past several years, Clemson Cooperative Extension has partnered with community associations and state agencies to produce week-long, youth water quality education programs on lakes and streams as summer day-camps throughout South Carolina. These programs/camps, entitled 4-H2O Pontoon Classroom garner favorable attention from the wider watershed communities. The partnerships establish support for Cooperative Extension among a new clientele. Each 4-H2O - Pontoon Classroom is produced as an independent community partnership. Most commonly, a local lake association is the community partner. The many partners involved with this program include, but not limited to: state parks, K-12 schools, universities, community associations, state agencies, power companies and water companies. A uniform curriculum is provided for the independent (county based) 4H2O - Pontoon Classroom programs. The local program team adapts and adds to the curriculum to suit local needs and expertise. Common learning experiences include: exploring the local watershed; water chemistry testing; collection and microscopic identification of invertebrates and algae (biological stream and lake assessment); making and using Secchi disks; dissolved oxygen and temperature monitoring (including drawing a DO/Temperature profile of a stratified lake); and fish identification. Individual programs add canoeing, swimming; fishing instruction and/or local field trips. All programs emphasize teaching science information and skills, in the guise of an enjoyable week on the lake.

In 2005, the 4-H2O program was awarded a \$7500 conservation award by NRCS and National 4-H Council. These monies were used to purchase an education kit to be used by county programs. This kit includes all the equipment and supplies needed to conduct a 4-H2O camp. In addition, monies were used to conduct a training for county agents and volunteers interested in starting a 4-H2O camp. As a result, we had tremendous growth in the program in 2007, with an increase from 10 camps in 2006 to 21 camps in 2007 and an increase in number of kids participating from 200 in 2006 to 450 in 2007. South Carolina's statewide structure for the 4H2O - Pontoon Classroom program can serve as a model for public-private partnerships for science-intensive, youth water quality education in other states.

#### **Impact Statement:**

Through the 4-H2O – Pontoon Classroom program, we are able to address to the growing community the importance of water quality and conservational practices. These concepts are taught to the youth participating, who will one day be the leaders of tomorrow. However, it is also our hope that these youth will return home and teach these concepts to their parents, friends and neighbors. Through their hands-on-learning experiences at 4-H2O camp, the youth learn the importance of watershed management and how their and the community's everyday practices (washing cars, construction, farming, fertilizing, spraying herbicides and insecticides, etc.) can either positively or negatively affect this watershed. It is our hope and belief that their experience and education through the 4-H2O program will have both short-term and long-term positive impact on water resource management.