

# Advocates willing to make waves for Lake Murray

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View of Lake Murray near Lake Murray Dam in Irmo. Staff/Leah Hincks.

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LEXINGTON — On a scorching July day, Lake Murray is a rush of activity. Speed boats whir, and children on tubes scream with laughter. Pontoon boats bob past contented fishermen and shoreline

swimmers who seek relief from the heat. Homeowners sip sweet tea on their docks while they watch bald eagles in the air and fish in the water.

Working to protect it all is the Lake Murray Association.

“(Lake Murray Association) has an open dialog with all of the other entities around the lake and just try to educate and make people aware of the lake itself,” said Lake Murray Association Co-President Debi Lafayette.

New to the leadership role, Lafayette is working with the rest of the board to modernize the organization’s website, strengthen its social media presence and grow and diversify its membership. Facing a dip after COVID-19, Lake Murray Association wants to not only build up its membership, but include representatives from a variety of groups that have stake in the lake, including homeowners, boaters, fishermen, business owners and wildlife, Lafayette said.

This way, the Lake Murray Association, which is a stakeholder in the license agreement between Dominion Energy and the Federal Energy Regulation Commission, can listen to all sides, and look out for the health of the lake and the safety of those on the lake, Vice President Lee Ayers said.

The Lake Murray Association was founded in 1993, out of concern that South Carolina Electric & Gas, which controlled the Lake Murray Dam before Dominion Energy bought the company in 2019, held too much control over lake levels, and could affect lake users without warning.

After an agreement was formed with SCE&G, members of the group realized the lake held a host of issues to tackle. In the following decades, Lake Murray Association built osprey nest perches, studied phosphorus levels in the water alongside DHEC, and worked with SCDNR to eliminate Hydrilla, a noxious and invasive weed.

In 2022, Lafayette took the helm alongside Co-President Nancy Nelson Embler. In addition to modernizing some of the association's processes, Lake Murray Association is focused on two major issues: lake users' safety and wildlife in and around the water.

Lake Murray is not currently facing any wildlife crises, so Lake Murray Association is keeping it at the top of the priority list, but not focusing its efforts on the issue right now.

Lake safety is more pressing. The association has been involved in pushing for state legislation regulating boater education and increasing no-wake zones around swimming areas and docks, Ayers said.

Also, the Lake Murray Association started a "Ladies on the Lake" program, after realizing that a shockingly large number of women rely on men to operate their boats. The program gives women the skills and confidence to take control of the boat in an emergency, Lafayette said.

"It's a big lake," Ayers said. "There's a place and a time for everybody to get enjoyment and recreation out of the lake, and that's what we support overall is that mutual universal interest."

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## **Leah Hincks**

Leah Hincks covers Lexington County for the Post and Courier in Columbia. She is a Massachusetts native who studied journalism at the University of Richmond, and spends her free time running and reading.