



# YOUR OCONEE

Planning for the Future

**April 2019: Natural Resources & Community Facilities**

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THE OCONEE COUNTY 2030 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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## THE OCONEE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ...

is a state-required document that provides guidance for the county — the administration, council and private citizens — for the coming decade.

To get input from the community for the goals and strategies in the 2030 Comprehensive Plan, the county is producing a series of special sections to break down the data and offer you a chance to provide feedback.

This is the second of five monthly sections that will cover the 10 elements of the plan.

### Natural Resources

Nestled at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains and featuring lakes Jocassee, Keowee and Hartwell, Oconee County has abundant natural resources. Even a quick trip to the grocery store can showcase the county's multiple lakes, parks and trails, rivers, streams, waterfalls and forests.

These natural resources provide land for development with scenic and environmental amenities, while offering an opportunity for sustainable development. The appeal of natural resources — for aesthetic and recreational use — can also increase land development pressures to accommodate both new residents and tourists.

The resulting challenge is to achieve a balance in natural resources planning that promotes productive use of land and resources, maintenance of critical ecological functions, and protection of residents and property from natural hazards.

The natural resources element includes information on local geographic and geologic conditions, climate, agricultural and forest lands, plant and animal habitats, scenic areas, water resources and other factors that significantly impact the natural environment and shape the future development of Oconee County. A thorough look at the county's natural resources inventory must be taken into account during planning efforts to avoid depletion or destruction of sensitive, and often irreplaceable, assets. Valuing and investing in efforts to protect and improve our natural resources supports the quality of life for all county residents.

Let our advance  
worrying  
become advance  
thinking and  
planning.

*Winston Churchill*

### Community Facilities

This element focuses on the activities and entities that are essential to maintaining Oconee County's health, safety, growth and quality lifestyle. These include government facilities and infrastructure, fire protection, health and emergency medical services, education, libraries and cultural facilities.

Continued growth has resulted in increased demands on community facilities throughout the county. Governmental facilities, like the Department on Health and Social Services, have been expanded to provide much-needed space to better serve citizens. Continued renovations and maintenance of existing facilities has continued to be a part of the ongoing work of the county.

Several changes have occurred in the area of Emergency Management and Fire Service throughout the county, which should continue to serve the county well in the years to come.

On the whole, Oconee County is served by modern, relatively efficient community facilities. In fact, compared to those living in other areas of similar size and population, Oconee's residents are fortunate in many ways.

The challenge facing the county, however, is not to simply maintain what exists now, but to provide for the expansions and upgrades that will be necessary in the coming years. Most sources indicate that the population of Oconee County will continue to grow rapidly in the foreseeable future. Therefore, for citizens to maintain control of how their community develops, it will require planning years in advance. If the county is not adequately prepared to manage future challenges, it will be run over by them. The area's community facilities, which play a major role in establishing and maintaining the county's lifestyle, are accordingly of vital interest.

Questions or comments?

You can reach Oconee County Planning Director Adam Chapman at [achapman@oconeesc.com](mailto:achapman@oconeesc.com) or (864) 364-5103.

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

### District Drop-ins

Wednesday, April 24

District 3: Seneca Library □ 4 p.m.

Thursday, May 2

District 1: Keowee Elementary □ 6 p.m.

Thursday, May 14

District 4: Long Creek Fire Dept. □ 4 p.m.

Wednesday, May 22

District 5: Ravenel Elementary □ 6 p.m.

### Tuesday, April 23

Budget, Finance and Administration Committee □ 4:30 p.m.

County Council □ 6 p.m.

### Thursday, May 2

Parks, Recreation and Tourism □ 12 p.m.

### Monday, May 6

Planning Commission □ 6 p.m.

### Tuesday, May 7

Budget, Finance and Administration Committee □ 4:30 p.m.

Transportation Committee □ 4:30 p.m.

County Council □ 6 p.m.

### Monday, May 13

Agricultural Advisory Board □ 6:30 p.m.

### Monday, May 20

Planning Commission □ 6 p.m.

### Tuesday, May 21

Budget, Finance and Administration Committee □ 4:30 p.m.

County Council □ 6 p.m.

All meetings take place in council chambers at 415 S. Pine Street, Walhalla.

▶ **Can't make the meeting but still want to keep up?**

Oconee County meetings are recorded live and available to watch at [YouTube.com/YourOconee](https://www.youtube.com/YourOconee)



# OCONEE COUNTY NATURAL RESOURCES

**Natural Resources Element** takes a look at the opportunities and assets Oconee County has by simply existing. This chapter showcases the things we don't have much control over — from the air we breathe to the water we drink — and the ways we spend our time outdoors and utilize the land.

## AIR QUALITY

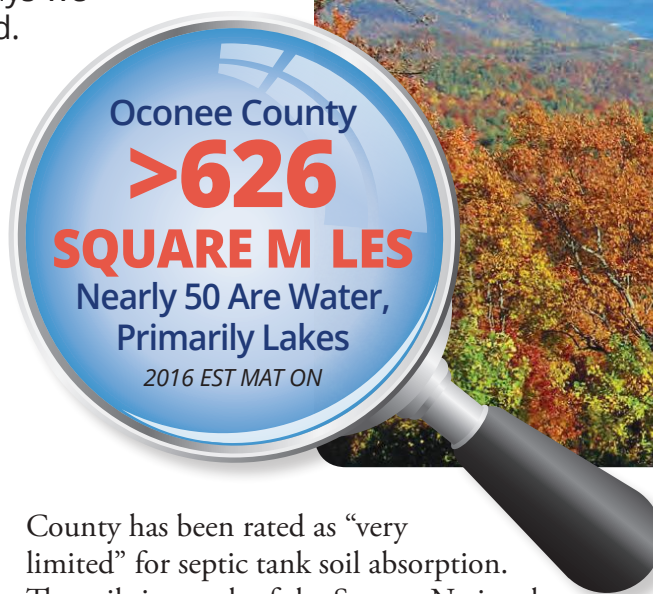
- ▶ As of February, all 46 South Carolina counties are within the threshold for ambient air quality. However, increased urbanization in the nearby Greenville-Anderson-Mauldin area may impact the air quality in Oconee County.
- ▶ Local leaders should monitor the factors that contribute to higher ozone levels to maintain acceptable levels and ensure the health of the county.

## LAND RESOURCES

- ▶ With more than 626 square miles, Oconee is the 26th largest county in the state. Nearly 50 of those are water — primarily lakes Jocassee, Keowee and Hartwell.
- ▶ Soil erosion is a concern for more than 60 percent of the county. Less than half of the county's land is considered to be at moderate risk of erosion, and 15.4 percent of the county has a "severe" or "very severe" rating.
- ▶ The soils at the most severe risk are in the Sumter National Forest. Loss of soil productivity and off-site damage is more likely on these lands where erosion control measures are typically costly and impractical to employ.
- ▶ Elevation in Oconee County ranges from 638-3,180 feet above sea level.

## DEVELOPMENT LIMITATIONS

- ▶ According to the USDA, more than two-thirds of land in Oconee



Lake Jocassee

County has been rated as "very limited" for septic tank soil absorption. The soils in much of the Sumter National Forest are included in this soil rating, in large part due to the steeper sloping topography.

- ▶ An additional 30.2 percent of county soils are rated as "somewhat limited," indicating that the soils have features that are moderately favorable for use as a septic system absorption field.

## OUTDOOR RECREATION

- ▶ There are 32 county and municipal outdoor park and recreation facilities encompassing nearly 553 acres in Oconee County. Eleven of the



South Cove Park

parks and facilities are owned and maintained by Oconee County, eight by the city of Seneca, seven by the city of Walhalla, five by the city of Westminster and one by the town of West Union.

## SURFACE WATER

- ▶ Oconee County has an abundance of surface water generally sustained by rainfall, including several major water bodies as well as numerous rivers, creeks, ponds and streams. Surface water accounts for more than 99 percent of the public water supply in Oconee County.

## THE LAKES

- ▶ At 56,000 acres, Lake Hartwell is the largest water body that extends into Oconee County. Full pool elevation for Lake Hartwell is 660 feet above mean sea level, with a maximum depth of 185 feet and an average depth of 45 feet.
- ▶ Lake Keowee was formed in 1970 and has two distinct halves. Much of the 18,372-acre lake is 800 feet above mean sea level, with a maximum depth of 297 feet and average depth of 53 feet.
- ▶ Lake Jocassee was created in 1973 with the construction of the Jocassee Dam. The 7,565-acre has a full pool elevation of 1,110 feet above mean



sea level. It has an average depth of 157 feet, though its deepest point is 351 feet.

### WATER USE

▶ Water suppliers withdraw more than 10.8 million gallons of water daily in Oconee County for domestic, commercial, industrial and public use. Of the water withdrawn, 0.24 million gallons are drawn from surface water sources such as lakes, rivers, and streams and 10.58 million gallons from groundwater sources beneath the earth's surface.

▶ There are nine watersheds — five in the Seneca River sub-basin and four in the Tugaloo River sub-basin — that impact Oconee County. The Chauga, Coneross and Little River-Lake Keowee watersheds cover the largest areas.

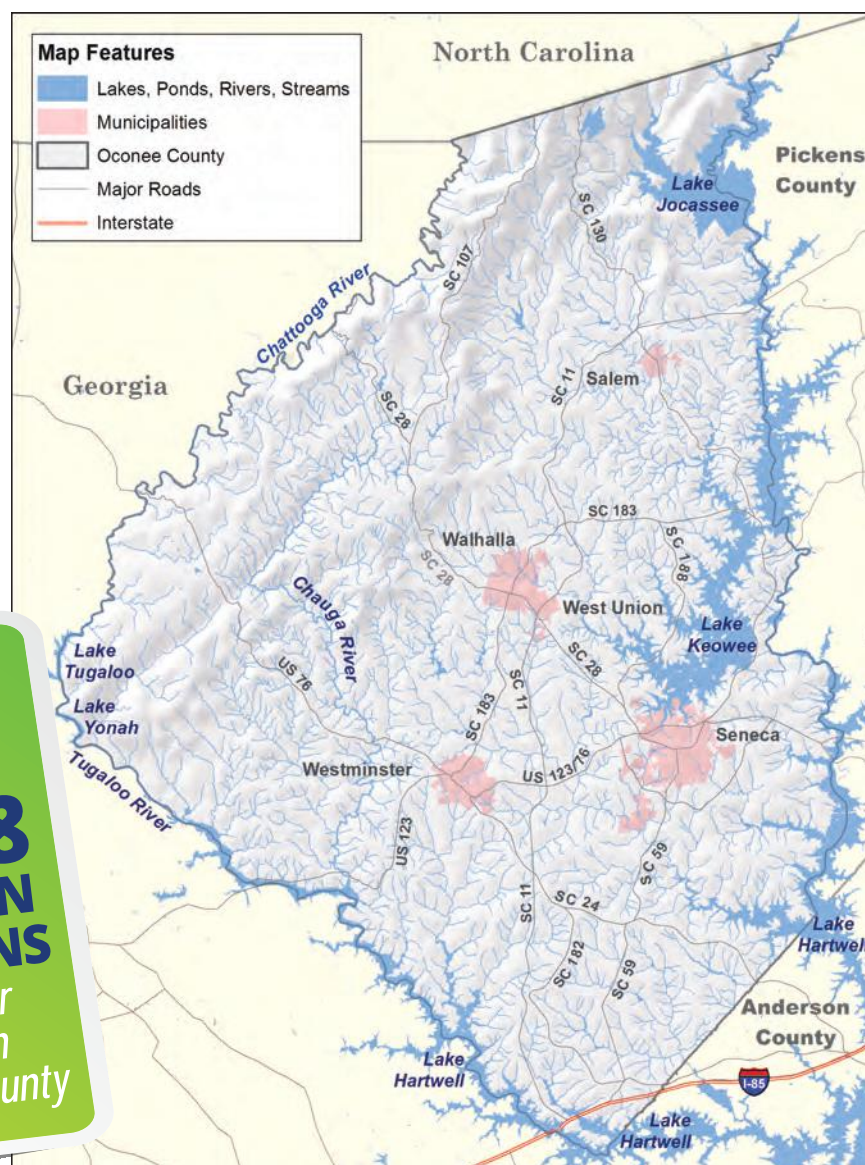
▶ An additional 45.9 million gallons of the



**Brasstown Falls**

county's groundwater were withdrawn for irrigation use and 30.49 million gallons for golf course use.

### SURFACE WATER



Water suppliers withdraw  
**>10.8 MILLION GALLONS**  
of water daily in Oconee County

SOURCE: USGS NATIONAL HYDROGRAPHY DATASET, DECEMBER 2018

### Foothills Trail



## FROM DREAM TO DREAMY

It was a miserable, rainy day the first time I laid eyes on Oconee County.

My sister, who lived in Marietta, Ga., when I was interviewing for my first real “big girl” job, told me I just had to apply to The Journal. She'd been camping with some friends who lived in Anderson and thought the area would be right up my alley.



### CAT'S MEOW

CAITLIN HERRINGTON

I did some research and found I agreed, applied and made the trip up for a January interview.

I hated it.

The weather was dismal, I couldn't find the waterfall I wanted to visit and — even though I clearly rocked my interview — I just didn't have a great feeling about Oconee County.

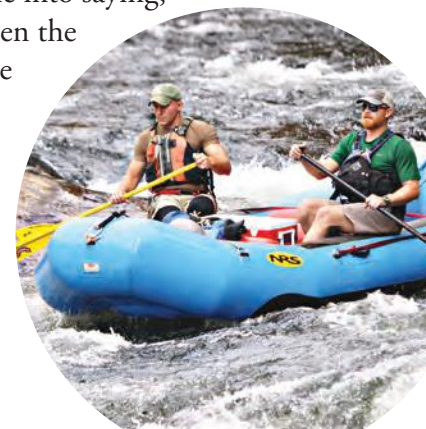
I'll say it was the free ice cream that tricked me into saying,

“Yes,” when the offer came

in, but

it's the mountains and rivers that are keeping me here. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't excited about The Journal's ice cream freezer being re-stocked for summer, though.

I have friends who have lived





here their whole lives and not taken advantage of the parks, trails, scenic views and waterfalls we have here. It boggles my mind.

Have you looked in our backyard lately?

Notice I say “look” — I understand not everyone can or is willing to hike up their socks for a camping trip on the Chattooga or a trek on the Foothills Trail. But goodness, just look up on a clear day coming down Wells Highway from Seneca High School and tell me this place isn’t special.

Take a slow, winding drive up to Issaqueena Falls and walk down to the observation deck. If you don’t have a vehicle that can handle the gravel roads and potholes of Horsepasture Road to access Jumping Off Rock, the roads are paved all the way to the Oscar Wigington overlook up in Salem. Either spot produces a dreamy view of Lake Jocassee without much physical effort.

**HAVE YOU  
LOOKED  
IN OUR  
BACKYARD  
LATELY?**

For those who can, take a hike. I highly recommend trips to waterfalls that eventually flow into the Chattooga River as the best — and sometimes only — way to cool off during the summer. It’s nearly impossible not to feel a chill the first time you dip your toes in the water.

As much as I clearly love ice cream, it doesn’t quite do the trick after a 3-mile hike in 85-degree weather.

Caitlin Herrington is the Lifestyle Editor at The Journal. You can find her chasing waterfalls or at [cherrington@upstatetoday.com](mailto:cherrington@upstatetoday.com).



HIKING TRAILS	LENGTH (MILES)
Miuka Falls	1.2
Moss Mill Creek	0.4
Mountain Rest Community	0.4
Oconee State Park	2.3
Oconee Bells Nature	1.5
Oconee Station	1.5
Old Waterwheel	1.4
Sandy Ford	0.3
Secret Falls	3.5
Stumphouse Passage of the Palmetto Trail	4.0
Tamassee Knob	2.2
Thrift’s Ferry	0.4
Westminster Elementary	0.6
Woodall Shoals	0.2
Big Bend Falls	3.4
Chattooga River Trail	15.5
Earls Ford	0.3
East Fork	2.5
Fall Creek Falls	2.0
Foothills Trail	76.0
Fork Mountain	6.4
King Creek Falls	0.5
Oconee Passage of the Palmetto Trail	3.2
Opossum Creek Falls	2.0
Riley Moore Falls	0.7
Rocky Gap/Willis Knob	12.4
Spoonauger Falls	0.5
Station Cove Falls	0.5
Winding Stairs	3.5
Yellow Branch Falls	1.3
Yellow Branch Nature	0.4
Chau Ram Park	3.0
Bee Cove Falls	2.1
Blue Hole Falls	1.0
Brasstown Falls	0.3
Bull Sluice	0.25
Chauga Narrows	0.6
Hidden Falls	2.1
Issaqueena	0.4
Lee Falls	1.5
Pig Pen and Lick Log Falls	0.9
Long Creek Falls	3.3
Riley Moore Falls	1.0
Ramsey Creek Falls	0*





# OCONEE COUNTY COMMUNITY FACILITIES

**Community Facilities** provide many tangible benefits for the county, ranging from health and public safety to education and preserving history. As the county continues to grow, so should these facilities in a responsible manner that matches the needs of the people they serve.

## GOVERNMENTAL FACILITIES

▶ Most of Oconee County's government offices are county owned. While the majority of the offices were scattered throughout Walhalla, most were relocated to the Pine Street Administrative Complex in 1999. As a result, the citizens of Oconee County are able to conduct most governmental business in one location.

▶ The county's road and bridges department, solid waste, and the vehicle maintenance facilities are now all located on Wells Highway in the Seneca area. The present county courthouse, completed in 2003, is located in downtown Walhalla.

## LIBRARIES

▶ Oconee County boasts a library system that has, since 1948, grown to include the main library in Walhalla and branches in Seneca, Westminster and Salem. A bookmobile services the rural areas of the county.

▶ Oconee's libraries utilize an internet-based catalog system, enabling users to take advantage of the latest information technology.

## FIRE PROTECTION

▶ There are currently 17 fire districts in Oconee County, with the county providing equipment for fire protection in the unincorporated areas of the districts.

▶ There are five full-time fire departments in Oconee County with the personnel paid by the municipalities or, in the case of Keowee Key, by fees collected from property owners.

▶ Oconee established countywide Emergency Service Response in June 2007. A relative

Most government offices are  
**COUNTY OWNED**  
and located on Pine Street in Walhalla



measure of the success of the fire protection system is shown in the ISO ratings — used to determine fire insurance costs — which vary from 4 to 10, with the lowest found in Seneca and the highest found in the rural areas.

▶ The county's ISO ratings will be reassessed in summer 2019.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT

▶ Unincorporated areas of the county are protected by the Oconee County Sheriff's Office. Although the majority of deputies are focused on patrol duties, a number of different specialties exist within the department.



▶ As urbanization increases, the county should look at optimal ratios of officers to population, additional funding to maintain and improve services, potential additional command centers and tools like intergovernmental agreements.

## EMERGENCY MEDICAL

▶ Emergency medical service in Oconee County is provided by Prisma Health's ambulance fleet with paramedics available 24 hours per day.

▶ Additionally, all fire departments within Oconee County have CPR/AED equipment and trained personnel to assist with medical response when needed. Two special forces — Oconee Special Rescue Team and Oconee County Dive Team — conduct unique rescue operations. These teams are equipped to handle calls such as wilderness searches and swift-water rescues.

## HEALTH SERVICES

▶ The cornerstone of Oconee County's healthcare system is Prisma Health Oconee Medical Campus, which includes a 169-bed hospital and a 120-bed nursing and rehabilitation center in Seneca.





**SPECIAL FORCES**  
conduct unique rescue operations for OC

► Numerous physician offices are located throughout the county. Mergers in recent years have given citizens access to a larger network of specialists located in and outside the county.

**WATER TREATMENT**

► There are five major public water providers located in Oconee County with an overall capacity exceeding 14 million gallons. Recent upgrades in some systems have greatly increased the volume.

► In addition, a number of private suppliers offer service to residents living in developments across Oconee County.



**SEWAGE TREATMENT**

► Public sewage treatment is provided by the Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority, which operates a treatment facility that primarily serves the municipal wastewater collection systems of Seneca, Walhalla and Westminster.

► Plans are also underway to establish sewer service to Oconee County's I-85 corridor, an effort



centers located across the county. Currently, all of the county's solid waste is hauled to landfill facilities in Homer, Ga. The county does, however, maintain a Construction and Demolition Landfill near Seneca.

**EDUCAT ON**

► Oconee County is home to 16 public educational facilities. The majority are owned and operated by the School District of Oconee County, though there are a few private and faith-based schools. SDOC also operates an adult education program, an alternative school program and the Hamilton Career Center.

► Though neighboring counties provide many post-secondary education options, the Oconee County campus of Tri-County Tech opened in the fall of 2018.

**16** Public Educational Facilities in Oconee County

**TR -COUNTY TECH**  
Oconee County campus opened in 2018

anticipated to dramatically expand the area's ability to attract new businesses.

► As well as the public sewer system, several private providers offer service to some of the larger residential developments in the county.

**SOL ID WASTE**

► The Oconee County Solid Waste Department provides residents with 11 manned and two unmanned convenience





# Citizen Survey of Natural Resources & Community Facilities

This survey was developed as a means of providing the county with some understanding of the things you like about Oconee County, as well as the issues that concern you. The survey is also your chance to dream a little, to give us your vision of the county's future and how you think we might arrive at that destination.

Visit [upstatetoda.com/surve](http://upstatetoda.com/surve) to submit online or drop off completed survey at our local library, The Journal at 210 W. North 1st Street in Seneca, or the Oconee County Planning Department at 415 S. Pine Street in Walhalla.

## 1. How important are the following?

- |   | Very important           | Somewhat important       | Not important            | No opinion               |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| ▶ Expanding existing/developing new parks                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▶ Improving the quality of existing parks/recreation                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▶ Growing a network of greenways/bike trails                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▶ Promoting development that is sensitive to air and water quality concerns | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▶ Preserving or enhancing scenic views                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▶ Preserving or enhancing access to parks and natural environments          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## 2. How important is preservation of:

- |                              | Very important           | Somewhat important       | Not important            | No opinion               |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| ▶ Farmland                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▶ Soils                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▶ Lakes/waterways            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▶ Historic structures/places | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▶ Scenic views               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▶ Wildlife                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▶ Forests/wilderness areas   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## 3. How important is mitigating the impact of drought, flooding, landslides and other environmental hazards?

- |  | Very important           | Somewhat important       | Not important            | No opinion               |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## 4. Have you visited any of the following?

- South Cove County Park
- Chau Ram County Park
- High Falls County Park
- Lake Hartwell State Park
- Stumphouse Tunnel Park
- Sumter National Forest
- Devils Fork State Park
- Oconee State Park
- Twin Lakes
- Chattooga River
- Coneross Point

## 5. When did you last visit a county or state park?

- in the last week
- in the last month
- in the last 6 months
- in the last year
- More than a year
- Never

## 6. Do you have convenient access to recreation facilities, including access to natural places?

- Yes
- No

## 7. Where would you like to see more household garbage/recycling centers located? (Note: These are general areas, not specific locations.)

- Seneca
- Westminister
- Salem
- Long Creek
- Townville
- Oakway
- Walhalla
- West Union
- Mountain Rest
- Fair Play
- Around Lake Keowee
- Around Lake Hartwell

## 8. Would you support additional protections for the land around bodies of water to help mitigate pollution, flooding and erosion?

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

## 9. Do the county's natural resources play a part in why you live, work or play in the area?

- Yes
- No

YOU HAVE A CHANCE TO

# WIN \$100 just for voicing your opinion!

Submit your completed survey and be entered to win one of two \$100 Visa gift cards! Surveys must be submitted by May 8 to be eligible to win. Winners will be drawn and announced May 10.

\*Name: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Ph. #: \_\_\_\_\_

\*E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Indicates required field so prize winners may be contacted. Personal information for contest will not be kept or sold. Must be age 18 or over to be eligible to win prize. Employees of Oconee County or The Journal and their families are ineligible. Limit of one prize per household. Please note that survey prizes are not being funded by Oconee County but have been generously donated by The Journal.

## 10. What features would you like to see added to the libraries?

- Public meeting space
- Creative studio space
- Space for tutoring/small meetings
- Offices
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## 11. Addressing some of the issues identified in this survey may require additional revenue. Please rank your TOP 3 choices to find this funding:

- User fees
- Issue bonds
- License, permit and utility fees
- Establish a county sales tax
- Hospitality and accommodations tax
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Property tax increase
- Capital projects tax

## 12. What is your age range?

- 12 or under
- 25-34
- 55-64
- 13-17
- 35-44
- 65-84
- 18-24
- 45-54
- 85+

## 13. What is your zip code?

\_\_\_\_\_

## 14. What is your gender?

- M
- F

Additional comments/suggestions may be attached or emailed to [achapman@oconeesc.com](mailto:achapman@oconeesc.com)