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**For Immediate Release**

## Students STEP into the Forests of the Savannah River Site

*Educating Future Generations with Environmental Enrichment Activities*

**AIKEN, S.C.** – (November 20, 2023) – On Nov. 8, 12<sup>th</sup> grade students from Richmond County Technical Career Magnet ([RCTCM](#)) School in Augusta, Georgia, experienced a unique hands-on field trip through the Savannah River Site (SRS) forests, to practice environmental stewardship and learn about a variety of career opportunities.

The Science and Technology Enrichment Program ([STEP](#)) at SRS is a long-standing, cooperative effort between Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) Education Outreach and Ruth Patrick Science Education Center ([RPSEC](#)). Lessons correlate to academic curriculum for grades three through 12 and use real-world investigations to spark interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

“The Savannah River Site has so much to offer with miles of trails, ponds and a variety of protected wildlife,” said Taylor Rice, SRNS Education Outreach Specialist. “It is so important for local students to experience this opportunity to spark their interest in STEM.”

The Advanced Placement Environmental Science class from RCTCM completed a watershed activity to address human impact on healthy ecosystems and studied the biotic factors of healthy ponds and macroinvertebrates.



*Richmond County Technical Career Magnet School students use microscopes, pipettes and a dichotomous key to identify aquatic specimens caught in a nearby pond.*



*A senior from Richmond County Technical Career Magnet School wades through a nearby pond, capturing macroinvertebrates with a net.*

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“In a world where electronics and virtual instruction rule, it is important for our future generation to get outside and experience hands-on learning activities from industry leaders,” said RCTCM Science Department Chair Nathalie Pace. “Many of my students are still deciding what they want to be or what career path to follow, and this experience is very impactful on their decision.”

Pace finds the program to be like no other, with many students expressing thanks for the exposure to new opportunities.

“Field trips are incredibly beneficial and special to students that do not always have the means or transportation to connect with their communities outside of school,” Pace continued. “As a science educator, I will continue to work with SRNS and RPSEC to make this happen for my students.”



*During the Savannah River Site STEP field trip, two RCTCM students build a watershed model to see how humans impact the water supply and how to mitigate harmful actions.*

STEP continues to create remarkable experiences for students visiting the Site, which is home to many rare and endangered species. Students delve into topics such as preserving the nesting habitat of the endangered [red-cockaded woodpecker](#), constructing watersheds, analyzing manmade pollution, and identifying freshwater macroinvertebrates in ponds and streams.

“We always aim to build excitement and curiosity around the environment and STEM careers through these activities,” said Beth Eberhard, the center’s student program specialist. “After working for this program for eight years, I truly enjoy seeing the excitement on students’ faces as they get outside, explore and make unique observations.

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RCTCM senior Monica Burns would recommend this program to other students who are interested in the Site.

“The watershed activity impacted the way I viewed my daily actions and helped me understand the importance of being conscious and conservative to protect the environments that surround me every day,” said Burns.

SRS will continue to grow its [40-year partnership with RPSEC](#) by bringing STEP field trips to local students. For more information about STEP field trips, contact Taylor Rice at [taylor.rice@srs.gov](mailto:taylor.rice@srs.gov).

*Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, a Fluor and HII partnership company, is responsible for the management and operations of the Department of Energy’s Savannah River Site, located near Aiken, South Carolina.*

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