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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## Virtual Field Trips to the Savannah River Site Become Reality

AIKEN, S.C., November 10, 2020 – With popular environmental field trips to the Savannah River Site (SRS) on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) is bringing the site visit experience to the students virtually.

SRNS has hosted local students as part of its Science and Technology Enrichment Program (STEP) for many years. Now, SRNS is conducting virtual field trips to benefit students from elementary school to high school, and the first lesson is called “Wet Wonders.” It allows students to study biotic factors that determine the health of a pond by capturing and examining macro invertebrates.

“This lesson provides a great demonstration of the groundbreaking work of environmental research pioneer Dr. Ruth Patrick who was hired by SRS in the 1950s to do a baseline study of the environmental health of the site prior to construction,” said Kim Mitchell, with the SRNS education outreach division.

Mitchell noted that educators can play a series of videos for their students or request representatives from the University of South Carolina Aiken Ruth Patrick Science Education Center (RPSEC) to visit their classrooms. Teachers or the RPSEC representatives can also provide materials such as water samples containing



*Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) is creating a series of videos and learning resources to bring Savannah River Site (SRS) ecology to classrooms in place of traditional field trips to SRS. Beth Eberhard, left, and Kimberly Fickling, both with the University of South Carolina Aiken Ruth Patrick Science Education Center, are shown working on the lesson “Wet Wonders.” SRNS employee Brad Bohr is recording the presentation.*

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aquatic creatures. Combined with the videos, this classroom “virtual field trip” creates an experience comparable to a real-time visit to a pond at SRS.

Since the in-person field trips were paused earlier this year, Mitchell and her team have been reorganizing nearly all of their outreach programs in an effort to remain relevant to the education community.

“We’re definitely going virtual within our competitive programs such as Future City, Science Bowl and Science Fair,” said Mitchell. “We may use a combination of options related to our science and literacy outreach programs involving teach-ins at area middle schools and the Innovative Teaching Mini-Grants Program for educators.”

The virtual approach to field trips allows organizers to reach a larger number of students, said Francine Burroughs, manager of the SRNS talent management and education outreach divisions.

“Even our employee volunteers have been stepping it up, eager to assist in finding new ways to reach students in this new virtual world, particularly regarding our STEM-based (science, technology, engineering and math) programs and events,” Burroughs said.

STEP provides hands-on STEM opportunities through real-world, issues-oriented investigations that focus on responsible environmental stewardship. Supported by the Department of Energy-Savannah River, SRNS, RPSEC, the National Audubon Society and the U.S. Forest Service, the program is offered to educators and students in the region around SRS.

*Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, a Fluor-led company with Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell, is 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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