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Rodeo hooks kids on fishing

By Jim Hilley

July 17, 2016

Saturday wasn't a good day to be a hungry catfish.

Around 40 kids from several group homes in Columbia, Turbeville and Sumter got a chance to wet a hook at the Wateree River Correctional Institution pond Saturday morning.

The pond was recently deepened and a carpenter at the correctional facility led a team of inmates who constructed an ADA accessible wooden fishing pier to allow the facility to host public events at the lake.

South Carolina Department of Corrections Director Bryan Stirling said Saturday's fishing rodeo came out of a partnership the Department of Corrections has been developing with the Department of Natural Resources.

"We did a Wounded Warriors hunt a couple of months ago that we partnered with DNR," Stirling said. "We decided we should do a fishing rodeo."

Stirling thought it would be a good idea to start with an event of limited size, so the idea of having children from area group homes come out and fish seemed like a good place to start.

"Some of these kids don't have a chance to get out much," he said. "This event gives the kids a chance to get out and our correctional officers have a little fun, too," he said.



Capt. Billy Downer of the Department of Natural Resources helps a group of boys from local Group homes land a catfish during a fishing rodeo at Wateree River Correctional Institution.

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It was a perfect day to have the event, as a cloud cover left over from storms the night before kept the heat at bay, at least for a while. The DNR stocked the lake Thursday with 640 pounds of catfish, Stirling said.

DNR Capt. Billy Downer said promoting the sports of fishing and hunting is an important mission to DNR.

“We spend a lot of our grant money on fishing rodeos,” he said. “We have fishing clinics and fishing rodeos to get kids interested in fishing.”

Downer and three or four of the children seemed to have found a good fishing hole, as the kids were getting bites ever couple of minutes.

“It’s also part of our law enforcement education and outreach,” he said between helping youngsters land their fish.

The kids were having a blast of course, with several of them saying they caught their first fish.

Lt. Kim Leverich, a member of DNR’s law enforcement education team, was also at the lake side helping kids with their fishing technique. She said one of the girls she was helping had never been fishing before.

“She’s caught three already,” she said.

As one boy let Downer reel in his latest catch, he told anyone listening what a difficult fish it was to catch.

“That one took seven pieces of bait, one line and one hook,” he said.

Stirling said they eventually plan to have bigger fishing rodeos at the pond.

They will probably need to restock the pond first, however.





Director Stirling shows a special fishing rag donated to each participant by DNR for use at the WRCI Fishing Rodeo

