

SOUTH CAROLINA WATER QUALITY & WATER RECREATION PERCEPTION REPORT JULY 2025



University of South Carolina

Institute for Clean Water

Richardson Family SmartState Center for Economic Excellence in Tourism and Economic Development

1. Perceived Water Quality

Scores range from 1 (worst possible) to 10 (best possible); **higher is better**.

Daily use

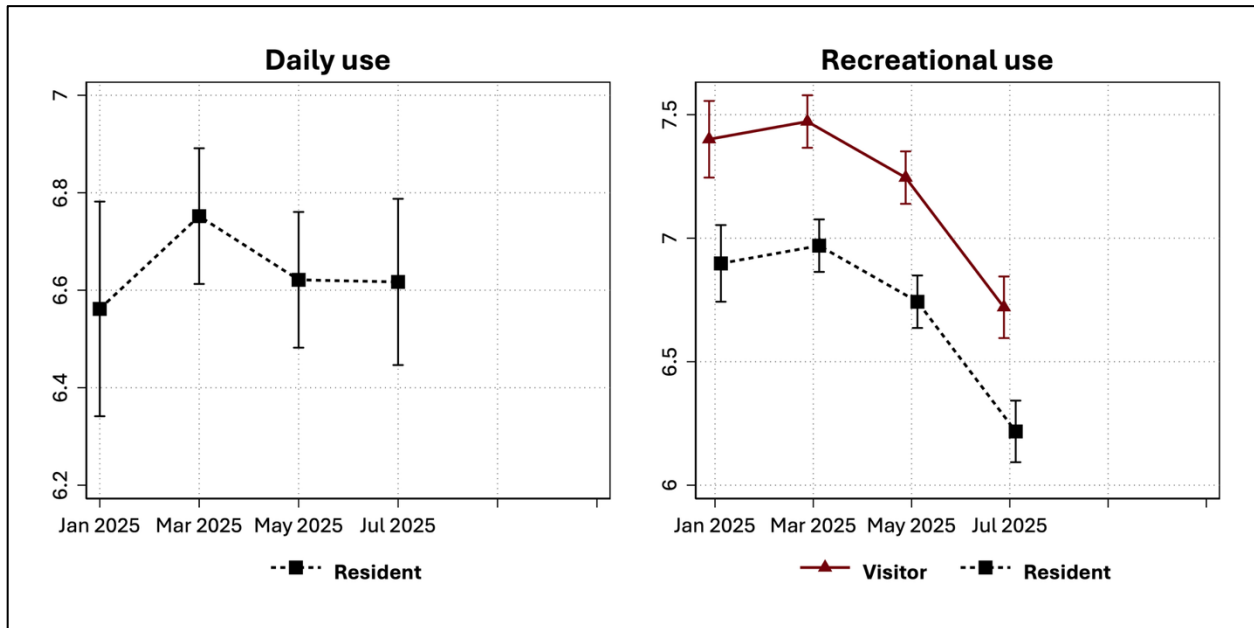
Perceptions about drinking water supply and water in streams and creeks in the neighborhood.

- Residents: **6.62** / 10 (-0.1%)

Recreational use

Perceptions about water in rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds for recreation activities.

- Residents : **6.52** / 10 (-2.5%)
- Visitors : **6.42** / 10 (-12.1%)
- Combined : **6.47** / 10 (-7.5%)



2. Perceived Risk of Water-based Recreation in South Carolina

Scores range from 1 (low perceived risk) to 7 (high perceived risk); lower is better.

Affective risk perception

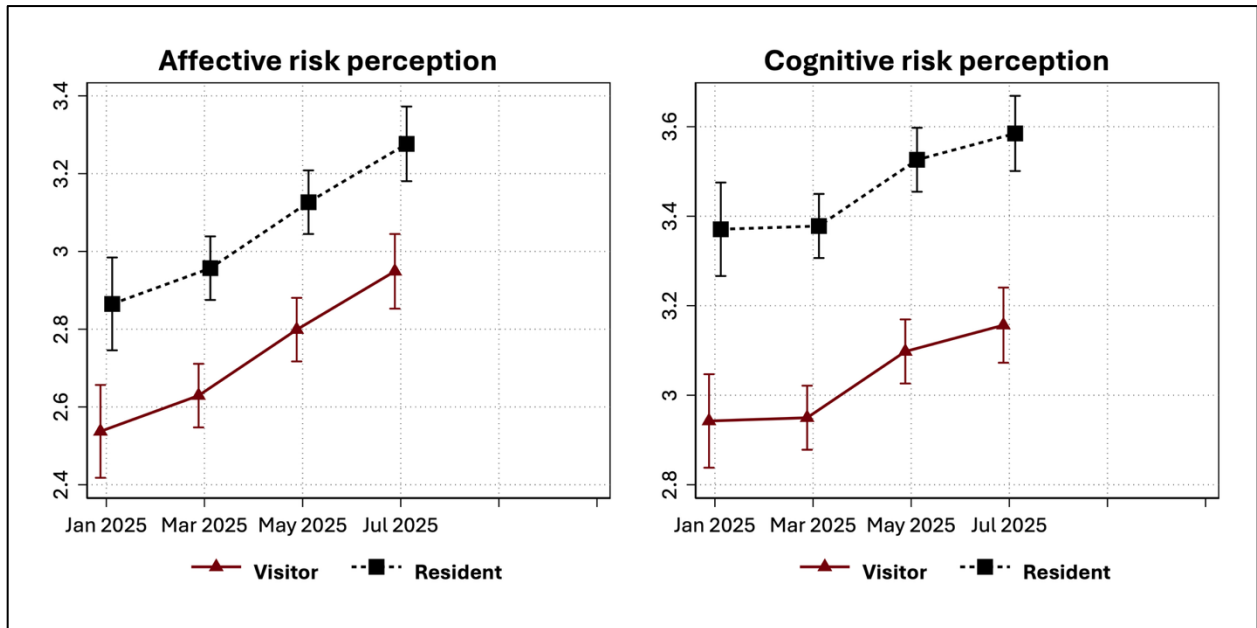
Feelings about participating in water-based recreation activities at lakes and rivers in South Carolina (afraid, anxious, worried).

- Residents : **3.25** / 7 (+4.3%)
- Visitors : **2.98** / 7 (+5.9%)
- Combined : **3.11** / 7 (+5.1%)

Cognitive risk perception

Perceived likelihood of encountering contaminated water and experiencing health issues when participating water-based recreation activities at lakes and rivers in South Carolina.

- Residents : **3.62** / 7 (+2.7%)
- Visitors : **3.12** / 7 (+0.8%)
- Combined : **3.37** / 7 (+1.8%)



3. Specific Factors of Perceived Water Quality

Multiple choices; **Bold** indicates the most frequently mentioned factor

Daily use

Factors that affected perceptions about drinking water supply and water in streams and creeks in the neighborhood.

	Residents	
	Yes	(%)
Bad smell	82	(16.4)
Murky water	176	(35.2)
Health concerns (e.g., bacterial or viral infection)	187	(37.4)
Visible pollution (e.g., algae, debris)	150	(30.0)
Water level issues	111	(22.2)
Agricultural runoff	122	(24.4)
Industrial contamination	100	(20.0)
Insufficient monitoring and reporting	150	(30.0)
Bad taste	124	(24.8)
Boil advisories	90	(18.0)
Water supply concerns (e.g., well contamination, old pipe)	117	(23.4)
Water treatment concerns	140	(28.0)

Recreational use

Factors that affected perceptions about water in rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds for recreation activities.

	Residents		Visitors	
	Yes	(%)	Yes	(%)
Bad smell	73	(14.6)	100	(20.0)
Murky water	215	(43.0)	175	(35.0)
Health concerns (e.g., bacterial or viral infection)	209	(41.8)	141	(28.2)
Visible pollution (e.g., algae, debris)	175	(35.0)	154	(30.8)
Water level issues	112	(22.4)	129	(25.8)
Agricultural runoff	121	(24.2)	98	(19.6)
Industrial contamination	105	(21.0)	98	(19.6)
Insufficient monitoring and reporting	162	(32.4)	115	(23.0)
Swimming advisories	134	(26.8)	156	(31.2)
Boating/fishing restrictions	84	(16.8)	154	(30.8)
Poor facility maintenance (e.g., boat access, picnic areas)	102	(20.4)	128	(25.6)
Wildlife concerns (e.g., alligators, snakes, animal feces)	197	(39.4)	176	(35.2)

4. Overall Satisfaction of South Carolina Recreationists and Visitors

Scores range from 0 (unsatisfactory) to 100 (satisfactory); higher is better.

Water-based recreations in South Carolina

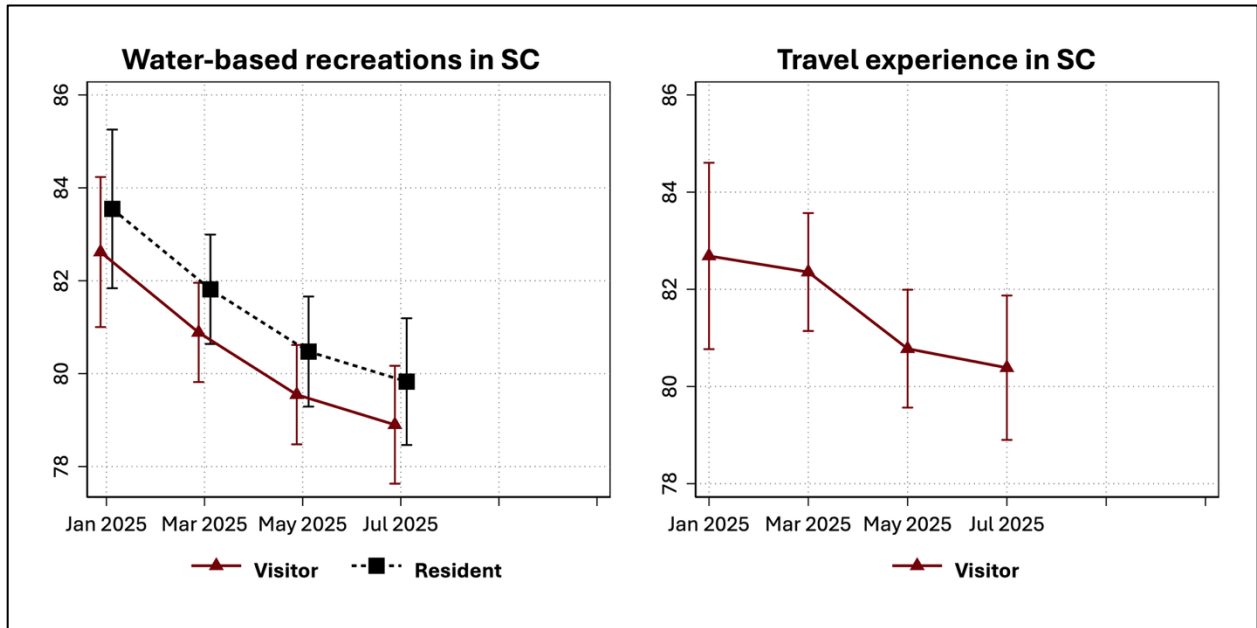
Overall, how satisfied were you with your recreation activity experiences at lakes and rivers in South Carolina?

- Residents : **79.84** / 100 (-0.6%)
- Visitors : **78.89** / 100 (-0.9%)
- Combined : **79.27** / 100 (-0.8%)

Travel experience in South Carolina

Overall, how satisfied were you with South Carolina as a travel or vacation destination?

- Visitors : **80.39** / 100 (-0.5%)



Notes. Based on survey of 500 respondents in South Carolina (Residents) and 500 respondents in the rest of the United States (Visitors). Data were collected between July 31 – August 9, 2025.