Disaster scenario discussed

BY NORMAN CANNADA
THE JOURNAL

Flooding from a deluge of rain rather than the dangers of an earthquake would likely be the worst-case scenario that could cause the Lake Jocassee dam to fail, according to Scott Krein, director of emergency management for Oconee County.

But Krein and other officials said that while they plan for such a disaster, the possibility of such a scenario is remote.

Krein presented an emergency plan for such a scenario during a meeting sponsored by Friends of Lake Keowee Society (FOLKS) Thursday night at Duke's World of Energy. The emergency plan is part of an annual dam safety report Duke Energy officials present to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).

While there are fault lines in and near Oconee County lakes, officials said they do not present major earthquake threats. An earthquake centered in Lake Keowee earlier this month registered a 2.0 on the Ritcher scale and was not felt by most residents. Krein and Duke Energy officials at the meeting also said dams like the one at Lake Jocassee have shown the ability to withstand earthquakes.

It would take about 36 inches of rain over a 72-hour time period to cause water to overfill the dam's storage facility and overtop the dam causing it to fail, Krein said. He said the most rain in a three-day period in Oconee County has been less than 12 inches.

"You're more likely to die driving home tonight or your house being struck by lightning before we get close to the numbers here," Krein said.

Still, Krein said a plan is in place to prepare for such an emergency and its potential effects.

In the scenario, many residential areas in the county near the lakes would have as much as 2 feet of water in the first 25 to 35 minutes with the peak of flooding coming within the first three hours.

"We're not talking about a wave of water," Krein said. "It's a rise of water."

The failure of Jocassee Dam would lead to the failure of dams and dikes throughout the area. He said evacuation efforts would be an important part of the effort, getting people to safe ground before the waters reach their highest levels.

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PLAN: 'We can evacuate everybody ...'

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"We can evacuate everybody with traffic and everything in just under five hours," Krein said. "That's with no warning that anything was going to happen."

Duke officials at the meeting said ongoing inspections monitoring water seepage are done regularly at the dam and an inspection is required anytime there are 2 inches or more of rain. Those inspections would make it likely that residents would have more time to get to safety before a disaster occurred.

In addition, residents can be alerted to emergency situations quickly by signing up for free alerts by text, email and internet-based phone systems called Voice over IP. To sign up for the alerts go to www.alertoconee.com.

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