Drought studies paint different pictures

Economic impact less severe here than Lake Lanier

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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SENECA — Two lakes, two drought impact studies, but two very different results.

Observers are still scratching their heads trying to figure out how one study in November concluded that a six-county and two-state area around Lake Hartwell was minimally impacted economically from a severe and protracted drought stretching from April 2007 through December 2008.

Earlier this month, another study found that the same drought had a devastating impact on the economy of areas around Lake Lanier near Atlanta.

Strom Thurmond Institute at Clemson University concluded in its report that the six-county region surrounding Lake Hartwell suffered economic loss estimated at $18.7 million as a result of low lake levels from the 21-month drought. However, the study found that the loss accounted for less than 1 percent of the total value of goods and services produced in the region totaling $30.2 billion.

The STI study gauged the impact on Oconee, Anderson and Pickens counties on the South Carolina side of Lake Hartwell, and Franklin, Hart and Stephens counties on the Georgia side.

Just as puzzling was the conclusion that Oconee generated a plus $4.2 million and Stephens plus $1.7 million despite the low water levels at Hartwell.

The Lanier economic impact analysis prepared by Bleakly Advisory Group, Inc. concluded that the drought cost the surrounding area a loss of $87.6 million in

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Bill Banton shops in the pro shop at the Walker Golf Course on Lake Hartwell in Clemson. The Strom Thurmond Institute will be undertaking a second phase of a study to see how the 2007-08 drought impacted Hartwell business activity in a six-county region.

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recreational spending.

Additionally, 987 to 1,224 jobs supported by recreation at Lanier also were lost, according to the study.

Larry Torrence, head of the Lake Hartwell Marketing Association, said a second phase of the Strom Thurmond study on Hartwell to be undertaken soon would likely mirror the Lanier results.

"There's growing interest in the second phase," Torrence said. "The first left much to be desired."

Torrence said he doesn't doubt the statistical accuracy of the Strom Thurmond information but said it painted a broad picture rather than pinpointing the drought's effect on Hartwell businesses.

Howard Moore, a member of the Oconee County Planning Commission, followed the Strom Thurmond study from the onset.

"I looked at all the models and they were thorough," Moore said. "But I could not understand how the impact was minimal. I would think it would have had a major impact."

carlos@dailyjm.com | (864) 973-6685

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Oconee County planner