Duke deal will keep Keowee levels higher

Company gets approval to operate plants for 30 more years

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Duke Energy has received approval from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to operate its 868-megawatt Keowee-Toxaway Hydroelectric Project, including the Jocassee Pumped Storage Hydro Station, Keowee Hydro Station and lakes Jocassee and Keowee, for another 30 years.

The project provides added electricity during peak usage times for thousands of South Carolina residents while the lakes are a drinking water supply for Upstate residents and a recreation resource.

Under the new license, Duke will maintain a higher lake level in Lake Keowee during normal conditions beginning in December 2019. The

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A jet skier is seen on Lake Keowee from a lot at The Landing at Keowee Springs. Duke will maintain a higher level beginning in December 2019.

Duke

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lake will be maintained between 790 and 800 feet above sea level. Its prior license allowed it to dip to 775 feet under normal conditions. Lake levels at Jocassee will remain the same.

It's the first relicensing of the project after it was initially licensed in 1966 to operate for 50 years. Its license was set to expire in August. The new license takes effect on Sept. 1.

Duke Energy had reached an agreement in November 2014 with stakeholders in North and South Carolina to gain support for the relicensing as the company sought to extend the life of its hydroelectric project. The company spent nearly a decade working with government and community stakeholders as it sought its relicensing.

"The project provides clean, renewable hydroelectric power generation, supports regional public drinking water needs and provides high-quality recreational opportunities for the region," Steve Jester, Duke Energy's vice president of water strategy, hydro licensing and lake services, said in a statement. "This license ensures the availability of these resources for future generations."

The project begins with Lake Jocassee on the border of North and South Carolina. It flows into Lake Keowee then downstream to Lake Hartwell, which is operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The Keowee-Toxaway project is made up of the Jocassee and Keowee reservoirs with two powerhouses. It runs along 25 river miles and encompasses approximately 480 miles of shoreline. In addition to its hydropower generation, it provides cooling water for Oconee Nuclear Station, which has the capacity to generate approximately 2,500 megawatts of energy.

"Receiving the license allows us to implement operational, environmental and recreational resource enhancements that will result in many benefits to the community and the environment for decades to come," Jester said.

Under the agreement, Duke will enhance recreation facilities at both lakes. Proposals in its recreation management plan include adding diver access, a new courtesy dock, a new boat and trailer parking area, access for non-motorized boating and bank fishing signs at Devils Fork State Park. Duke Energy will add about 25 acres to Double Springs Campground and build new restrooms and 12 new campsites, according to the FERC relicensing agreement.

At Keowee, Duke will build new parking areas at three recreation sites, build new trails, add bank fishing signs and add new campsites, fishing stations and 10 cabins at Mile Creek County Park. It will build a canoe/kayak launch, fishing pier, and portage at 15-Acre Lake, a project recreation site located at Keowee-Toxaway State Park.

Duke also will implement a Habitat Enhancement Program in the watershed and conserve approximately 2,900 acres of property adjoining the lakes to preserve and protect ecologically and culturally significant resources.