Duke plan makes changes in Lake Keowee

BY NORMAN CANNADA
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CLEMSON — Addressing concerns about water levels at Lake Keowee is one of the significant points Duke Energy is proposing as part of its Keowee-Toxaway Hydroelectric Project Agreement in Principle.

Details of the agreement in principle were presented at the Madren Center in Clemson on Wednesday. That agreement is the result of work since 2009 by Duke and 32 stakeholders in the process for Duke's application for relicensing with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERG).

The current 50-year license expires in August 2016.

Jen Huff, project director for Keowee-Toxaway relicensing, said one of the biggest changes in the proposed new agreement is that Duke agrees not to draw down Lake Keowee lower than 10 feet below full stage. Currently Duke can draw down up to 25 feet below full-lake levels. At Lake Jocassee, Duke would not draw down lower than 30 feet of a full lake, which is what is in the current agreement.

"We were able to go down 25 feet, and now we're only asking to go down 10 feet," said Huff. "I think people hear that during a severe drought we can pull the lake down 10 feet and they think, 'Duke's going to pull the lake down 10 feet.' We have no interest in having Lake Keowee down 10 feet. We would much prefer Lake Keowee to be high and full.

"Unfortunately if it quits raining we have a limited ability to keep Lake Keowee full."

Huff said in a drought Duke would not release water downstream to Lake Hartwell once Lake Keowee hit 791.5 feet, something it has not done during the current agreement.

"The only thing that would cause Keowee to decline at that point is evaporation (or) ground water infiltration, because in a severe drought you start to get water from reservoirs going into the groundwater and withdrawals from Greenville and Seneca (water systems)," she said. "At that point (Greenville and Seneca) would have been asked to reduce their water withdrawals below what they would do typically. That's all we can do at that point. We can't stop evaporation. We can't make it rain. We can't stop water going into groundwater and we can't cut off municipalities' drinking water supplies."

Jeff Lineberger, Duke's director of water strategy and hydro licensing, said the goal is to draw water down gradually to give the lakes more time to recover.

"The longer we can keep (water) in the lake in a drought, the more time we have to get the rain to bring it back up," he said.

Lineberger said the plan also includes a regional drought management plan where conservation would be encouraged among water customers, those living near the lakes and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the event of a drought.

"All of this would be for the purpose of trying to keep more water in the lakes longer to give us more time to get rain like we had last month to fill the lakes back up," he said.

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