Duke updates FOLKS on re-licensing progress

BY MIKE EADS
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SALEM — The only thing certain about Duke Energy's re-licensing plan for its Keowee-Toxaway hydroelectric facility is that the plan is far from certain.

Jen Huff, Duke's project manager for the re-licensing, briefed members of Friends of Lake Keowee Society (FOLKS) Thursday night on negotiations with various stakeholders to come up with a plan to submit to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. More than 300 local residents packed into the Tamassee-Salem High School gym for an update on re-licensing.

The company is three years into this process with various local, state and federal agencies, as well as FOLKS and other citizens' groups. It has a very preliminary proposal it's calling a "trial balloon."

Duke is considering the reconfiguration of the Oconee Nuclear Station to draw down lakes Jocassie and Keowee, but it is also obligated to obtain the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers approval because Duke has to provide water for points south.

Huff said one proposal would raise Lake Keowee's minimum level up from 775 feet to 790 feet and probably realize levels of 795 or better 96 percent of the time. However, Lake Jocassee's level could drop as much as 30 feet.

"Most of the time, under the trial balloon Lake Keowee would be higher than under the current agreement," Huff said.

All bets would be off during times of severe drought, however, as "water is a common resource," and Duke is obligated to provide water farther down the Savannah River Basin.

"I know we all think there's plenty of water, but there's not," Huff said bluntly.

Many of the people in attendance voiced concerns about lake levels, with one going so far as to ask if Duke would compensate lakefront owners for drops in property values. All Huff could say was that Keowee would likely be at or above 795 feet for all but 4 percent of the time.

Duke and the stakeholders have until May 2013 to finalize an Agreement in Principle (AIP), to be followed by a two-month cooling off period before all of the parties sign off on it.

Duke is expected to file the AIP along with its license application in August 2014.

For more information, email ktrelicensing@dukeenergy.com, send a letter to Jen Huff, Duke Energy, EC12Y, PO Box 1006, Charlotte, NC 28201-1006 or visit www.duke-energy.com/lakes/keowee-toxaway-relicensing.asp.

meads@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6685