FOLKS to host planning forum on Thursday

Staff Reports

SALEM — Friends of the Lake Keowee Society (FOLKS) will host a forum at 7 p.m. Thursday, on the topic of Oconee County's Comprehensive Plan.

The event will be held at Duke World of Energy.

Oconee is currently updating its 2004 Comprehensive Plan, which, according to FOLKS President Bill Graham, will be a critical document as the county moves forward with zoning initiatives.

"Forums on subjects like Warpath Landing and MonteLago always attract a large audience, but these next two forums concern subjects of fundamental importance to Lake Keowee," Graham said in a prepared statement.

"This is not just an opportune time but a critical time for the citizens of both counties to get involved in the process that will be the guide map for the development of these counties for the next five-10 years" Graham said. "The primary concern of FOLKS is the protection of the lakes and their watersheds through good governance, and this is where it starts.

"We will exit the current economic downturn, and it is critical that citizens have a strong input, particularly on how growth will continue around Lake Keowee in a manner that preserves the technical as well as aesthetic quality of the water in our watersheds."

Thursday's forum will be conducted by Chris Starker, a rural waters project associate in Upstate Forever's Clean Air and Water Program. The presentation will identify ways for citizens to participate in the process and will provide information from recent studies on natural resource issues relevant to the comprehensive plan. These studies include why buffers and watersheds are important and offer strategies for protecting them. It also includes some low-impact development strategies and growth projections for the Upstate counties.

"It is a particularly important time for this presentation as the Oconee County Planning Department is presenting a first draft of the Natural Resources Section of the Comprehensive Plan," Graham said, noting that the plan is available online at: http://www.oconeesc.com/planning/ordinances/Comprehensive%20Plan%20July%202004.pdf.

The second forums will be June 18, also at the World of Energy, and will offer attendees an opportunity to speak with numerous Duke-Energy subject matter experts about the process and timetable for the relicensing of the Keowee Toxaway Project. That event will be from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission operating license for lakes Keowee and Jocassee was granted in 1996, and Duke Energy will be filing for a renewal in 2014. The process is long, complicated and very important to the Upstate, so much so that planning is already in process.

FOLKS expects to be a stakeholder in this five-year process.