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Friends of Lake Keowee outlines strategy for opposing Palmetto Point marina

By Ray Chandler

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SENECA — By next week a date and place for a hearing on a proposed commercial marina on Lake Keowee should be known, but members of the Friends of Lake Keowee Society are already planning their strategy for opposing the permit for the development.

Increased boat traffic and a resulting decreased boating safety might be an argument the group can make, said Ben Turetzky, executive director of the group, said Thursday night at a meeting held at Duke Energy's World of Energy.

The group has requested data on boating accidents on Lake Keowee from the state Department of Natural Resources to add weight to that argument, he said.

"We have a lot of anecdotes of near accidents," he said. "But we need numbers of actual incidents."

Developers have applied to the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control for permits allowing a 50-slip marina complete with a restaurant, a marina store, a 20-room lodge and a 250-boat dry storage area on about 13.5 acres of Palmetto Point, off S.C. 130 near the Keowee Key gated community.

The state health department initially granted the permit but rescinded it last week after the agency was bombarded with complaints that members of the public had not been given an opportunity to have their say, according to spokesman Adam Myrick.

A hearing will be scheduled to hear those concerns before the permit application is reconsidered.

Turetzky said his group has some of the same concerns with the Palmetto Point project as it had with a similar proposed project at Warpath Landing on the Pickens County side of the lake. Those concerns focused on sanitary waste management, rainwater runoff contamination and the addition of more boats to a lake that is already crowded at times.

Concerns about increased traffic on S.C. 130 are important, Turetzky said, but won't be part of the Friends of Lake Keowee argument.

"DHEC is really interested in only what affects the lake itself," he said.

Part of the problem, he said, is in how the shoreline management plan of Duke Energy, which owns the lake area, lays out restrictions on commercial marinas.

Under the guidelines, the area for one-half mile around a proposed commercial marina site can't be more than 50 percent residential, it can't be within one-half mile of another commercial marina and the approach to the marina site from the lake can't have a choke point less than 300 feet across.

One problem, Turetzky said, is that under the guidelines residential occupation is judged using only shoreline mediation buffers or the presence of docks on the shore. Zoning classifications or the presence of developments without docks or shoreline buffers were not considered.

These are factors the Friends group will try to have changed in the shoreline management plan, he said, together with working for county building standards that will further clarify development guidelines around the lake.

The profile of the lake bottom also offered another point of argument, Turetzky said, since some lake channels were narrow and a choke point that was 300 feet wide or wider when measured on the surface actually saw boat traffic in a much narrower width.

With the possibility of another drought period looming, he said, the lake bottom profile is something Duke Energy and the Federal Energy Regulation Commission, which must approve Duke's shoreline management plan, should consider.



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