Growth in south Oconee County

Number of households spiked by 54 percent

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WALHALLA — The growth rate in rural south Oconee County is outpacing growth around Lake Keowee, according to the first draft of the Housing Element to be incorporated in this year's updated Comprehensive Plan.

According to the number of households in each of the 11 Census tracts in Oconee, Census Tract 309, which represents the southern part of the county, grew by 54 percent during the past decade from 1990-2000.

Census Tract 309 includes the Village of Fair Play and encompasses the Interstate 85 corridor.

During the same period, Census Tract 302, which encompasses much of the fast-developing Lake Keowee area, increased its number of households by 43 percent.

The Housing Element Draft notes: "The 2000 Census data provides us with a glimpse of what may be a transition in growth."

In the 2004 Comprehensive Plan, which is being updated this year to comply with state law requiring a revision every five years, Census Tract 309 was projected to have 2,692 households. In actuality, the 2000 Census showed that south county increased to 3,450 households.

By the same token, the Lake Keowee area was projected to have 2,343 households in 2004, but the actual number was 2,487, or less growth than in Census Tract 309.

Except for Census Tracts 304 (9 percent) and 307 (8 percent) all areas in Oconee enjoyed double-digit growth in the number of households.

An analysis in the Housing Element draft suggests that the availability of more affordable housing is driving growth in south county. The median value of owner-occupied housing in Census Tract 309 according to the past Census was just under $100,000. By comparison, the median value of Lake Keowee homes was more than $210,000.

The report goes on to state that the average cost of a permitted housing unit in Oconee was significantly higher than the rest of the Upstate during the study period in 2001. The average cost per unit in Oconee was $183,609, or 11 percent higher than Pickens County ($165,519) and 55 percent higher than Anderson County ($118,839).

The Housing Element report recommends the establishment of a housing task force to examine options and methods for dealing with affordable housing issues.

The Housing Element draft, along with the drafts of the Land Use Element and Community Facilities Element, are posted on the Planning Department's Web page, www.oconeesc.com/planning, online.

overtakes Lake Keowee