LOCAL NEWS

Hartwell forum to look at water planning

Homeowners say they'd like to see proactive measures on drought

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ANDERSON — Watershed planning to avoid crises in future droughts will be discussed at The Lake Hartwell Association's annual fall information forum Oct. 29 at the Anderson Civic Center.

Brig. Gen. Todd Semonite, commander and division engineer of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, South Atlantic Division, will be the keynote speaker at the 7 p.m. forum that is free to the public.

Semonite and others will focus on the need for revised water planning and management in the Savannah River Basin, said Mike Massey, a board member and past president of the association.

"As you are aware, the lake was down 22 feet last fall, which is causing the Corps to re-evaluate its drought management process," Massey said.

The Lake Hartwell Association has made several recommendations for the Corps to consider.

One is a recommendation for adaptive management to regulate downstream releases depending on current rainfall, lake levels and other conditions along the Savannah River Basin. The Corps moved in that direction during the recent drought, but the association wants this to be a regular process rather than reaction to crisis, Massey said.

The association also has asked the Corps to establish earlier drought plan water management triggers and decreased releases of water during winter months. Both would conserve the amount of water in the lakes.

The association has asked that all three recommendations be part of a revised drought plan.

The Corps plans to work on a revised drought plan based on lessons learned in the recent drought, said Billy Birdwell, a Corps spokesman.

Adaptive management "certainly is something we are looking at and will consider," Birdwell said. The Corps will study what worked and what didn't concerning drought triggers and decreased winter releases and will work closely with South Carolina and Georgia water officials on any revisions.

The Corps also has an environmental assessment open for public comment through Oct. 30. The assessment would allow the Corps to decrease flow from the Thurmond dam from 3,600 cubic feet per second to 3,100 cubic feet per second this winter if conditions warrant decreased flow.