Heat wave on Lake Keowee

Hydro station upgrade may drop levels even more

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SALEM — Duke Energy says high demand is behind the falling water table on Lake Keowee.

An ideal water level for Keowee is 99, according to Duke spokesperson Sandra Magee. In the last week, levels have dropped to 96.4.

Magee said nothing abnormal is causing the lower levels other than a heat wave that is driving up demand and causing super evaporation of lake waters. She said that when peak demand is reached, Duke pumps water up from Keowee to Lake Jocassee so the firm's hydro station can produce more electricity.

"Our target of 99 (on Keowee) is, indeed, a target," Magee said. "Jocassee runs more when demand is high and, with the prolonged hot weather we have had, demand is peaking."

Additionally, she said, water is always lost to evaporation but the recent heat wave has increased that process as well. Typical evaporation during the month of July is just over five inches.

Magee said Lake Keowee residents should not expect to see lake levels go back up any time soon unless rainfall increases.

That will, however, change this fall as Duke will receive two new turbines for units 1 and 2 at its Jocassee hydroelectric station. The upgrade will increase generating capacity by 50 megawatts but will require lowering Jocassee water levels.

"[illegible] Jocassee will be operated at least four feet below full pond during the upgrades, which are planned for September 2010 through May 2011," Magee said.

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LAKE: Turbines to make slow journey

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Following a seven-day trek, the first turbine will arrive near Salem on Monday. The second turbine is expected to arrive at this location in early September.

Each turbine — about 23 feet in diameter and weighing nearly 150 tons — will be transported via interstate highways on 20-axle, dual-lane trailers about 250 feet long.

Once near Salem on S.C. Highway 11, the first turbine will be parked temporarily until the second arrives. Then both will make the slow and winding seven-mile journey to the facility on a hydraulic platform trailer while escort personnel walk alongside. Duke Energy will notify residents and emergency personnel they may need an alternate route during daylight hours of the two days the turbines travel to the station.

These will be the first upgrades to Jocassee units 1 and 2 since they began commercial operation in 1973. Units 3 and 4 were upgraded in 2006 and 2007.

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