Hydro relicensing talk

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GREENVILLE — Conservation efforts and water levels were front-and-center in discussions as Keowee-Toxaway relicensing stakeholders and Duke Energy officials met at Duke's Wenwood Operations Center this week.

Stakeholder team members listened intently as Duke officials discussed their collaborative efforts with the Greenville Water System and Seneca Light & Water to create an Interim Low Inflow Protocol for lakes Keowee and Jocassee.

The prospective protocol would be utilized to conserve water during drought periods. Similar programs have been implemented by Duke throughout nine counties in North Carolina and five counties in South Carolina as part of the Catawba-Wateree Hydro Project.

As proposed, the protocol would establish the percent of water to be retained in the Duke lakes based on the various drought stages. The percent ranges from 90 percent of usable storage at the "watch" stage, to 45 percent at Stage 4. At Stage 1, Duke lake levels could be retained at 80 percent, 70 percent at Stage 2 and 55 percent at Stage 3.

Water levels, stream flow and rainfall averages would all be used in conjunction with U.S. Drought Monitor reports to determine the Keowee-Toxaway stage rankings. Duke spokesperson Erin Culbert said that while water levels in lakes Hartwell and Thurman would also be part of the formula, those calculations would be made separately from the Jocassee and Keowee calculations.

"The end game is to retain as much water in storage as possible and to have a coordinated response," Culbert said.

There is no existing protocol for low inflows. A 1968 operating agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which allows Keowee to be reduced 22 feet, is still on the books.

turns to lake levels

However, Culbert said there has been an "informal understanding" that Lake Keowee's needs — cooling for Oconee Nuclear Station — restrict those kinds of reductions in water levels.

According to Duke, if the proposed protocols were approved ONS may be required to shut down if a Stage 4 drought develops.

Duke spokeswoman Sandra Magee described the prospective protocol as "proactive" and a "work in progress," noting that all potential stage scenarios — from good to bad — are being discussed during this planning phase.

Duke Energy officials will meet with Greenville and Seneca water representatives later this year to finalize a list of specific pre-planned actions that will be taken as water levels in lakes Keowee and Jocassee change. Magee said those actions vary from emphasizing water conservation through customer outreach programs to reducing or even eliminating Lake Keowee flow releases when needed.

The current Keowee-Toxaway Project license, issued to Duke by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in 1966 will expire in 2016. If granted, the renewal will allow Duke's continued oversight and operation of the hydro stations on lakes Keowee and Jocassee, as well as ongoing support of the ONC.