

Jocassee levels sink

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SENECA — The eyes of passers-by near Lake Jocassee aren't betraying their owners — waters are down on the lake in a big way. The recent lack of rainfall has required Duke Energy to pull water from Jocassee to maintain needed levels at Lake Keowee. Keowee's waters are used in the cooling process at the Oconee Nuclear Plant.

"The biggest impact has been the drought," Duke spokeswoman Linda Conley said. "We have to keep Keowee at a certain level because we use that water in the operation of the nuclear station, so we have to pull from our upper reservoir."

The lower levels have made boating access to the lake slightly more difficult, but access points are still open to Jocassee, Conley said. Duke will also have to periodically provide water to Lake Hartwell during the current dry

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— Linda Conley
Duke Energy spokeswoman

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streak.

"We have to make some partial releases to Lake Hartwell," Conley said. "That is part of our licensing agreement with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. Since we're part of the Savannah River Basin, in order to balance that whole basin, when Hartwell reaches a certain level, we in turn have to make releases from our reservoirs downstream. That is another piece of the puzzle as far as what

is impacting our lake levels." Jocassee currently stands at 74 feet, compared to 100 feet considered "full pond."

Lake levels in relation to full pond are relative, and do not illustrate the depth of the lake. The system used by Duke Energy is meant to show the difference between the current level of the lake and a full lake. Full pond is the point at which the water begins to spill over the floodgate or spillway. A full pond is considered 100 feet.

South Carolina's drought, considered "extreme" by the South Carolina Office of Climatology, has hit the lakes hard, according to Conley.

"Until we get some significant and continuous rainfall, these levels are going to stay the same," Conley said. "In 2007, we received about half of what we normally receive, and we've only received about 75 percent of what we typically get so far in 2008."