Keowee-Toxaway relicensing gets swell of support

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SENECA — Support on behalf of Duke Energy's application for federal relicensing of its Keowee-Toxaway hydroelectric project encompassing lakes Keowee and Jocassee has poured in from local, state and federal stakeholders.

Duke's 50-year license to operate the Keowee-Toxaway project expires next year, and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is reviewing the company's application to be relicensed for another 40 years.

Letters supporting relicensing have been submitted to FERC by Oconee County, the Friends of Lake Keowee Society, Upstate Forever, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, the S.C. Wildlife Federation and private citizens.

Oconee County administrator Scott Moulder wrote to FERC March 17.

"As a local government

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directly impacted by the operation of the Keowee-Toxaway Hydroelectric Project, (Oconee officials) possess a significant interest in the outcome of the Duke Energy Carolina LLC's effort to obtain a new license," Moulder wrote.

"Developed over many months by a wide range of stakeholders, the (relicensing agreement), which set out the proposed operational standards requested by the applicant under the new license, represents what we feel is as equitable an outcome as may be expected by all parties," Moulder added.

Upstate Forever executive director Brad Wyche joined in support of Duke's request that the license term be at least 40 years.

"Duke Energy's staff worked diligently with stakeholders in crafting the compromise proposal embodied in the application, which balances a wide range of competing interests," Wyche wrote in a letter dated March 18.

FOLKS executive director Ben Turetzky said the group — created to help preserve Lake Keowee for the enjoyment of future generations — was most concerned with policy during periods of drought.

"With most of our membership residing in or near lakeside communities, one of the most difficult, emotional and time-absorbing issues for FOLKS was the negotiation that would result in the maximum required drawdown of the lakes during severe droughts," Turetzky wrote in a letter dated March 28.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service invoked federal law to reserve the right to prescribe fishways within the project area aimed at restoring and preserving habitats and species.

"We look forward to working with the licensee to implement measures for fish passage at the project in the future," Cynthia Dohner, regional director for FWS, wrote to FERC on March 27.

Duke spokesperson Jennifer Jabon called the FWS request "standard practice during the relicensing process."

Jabon said the broad support for the relicensing application is the result of stakeholders' participation in the many meetings leading to the relicensing proposal.

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