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Keowee lake level proposal criticized

Homeowners worry property values will drop; Duke Energy says plan would have little effect

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Pickens County News

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Newton Brightwell and his wife have lived on The Reserve at Lake Keowee for about two years now. The couple moved from California to South Carolina to be closer to family. They found The Reserve to be a beautiful and inviting community with the lake as the main attraction.

But it looks as if that attraction is being compromised at the expense of residents, Brightwell said. He and other residents are opposed to a proposal by Duke Energy that would allow the lake water level to drop an additional 5 feet below full pond level during extreme droughts.

"Our primary concern is that the residents in and around Lake Keowee bought the property with the belief that the lake would be relatively stable," Brightwell said. "They invested a lot of money in their property based on that belief and perception and now that perception is changing.

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Email Doug Barker at barker256@bellsouth.net and visit duke-energy.com/lakes/keowee-toxaway-relicensing.asp

"Duke, by their own numbers, has said 46 percent of the docks on Lake Keowee are going to be on dry land if they lower the lake. That's almost half the docks. ... We believe people could lose 40, 50 percent of their property value."

Brightwell drafted a petition about two weeks ago. He and fellow resident, Doug Barker, have gathered more than 700 signatures. Copies have been sent to U.S. Sens. Jim DeMint and Lindsey Graham and local elected officials, Barker said.

"We expect to get additional responses from them and we are preparing a follow up letter," Barker said. "There's going to be a large impact we believe on property values and thus, on the Pickens and Oconee County budgets."

The lake was developed several years ago as part of Duke Energy's hydroelectric stations back in the 1960s, said Duke spokeswoman Erin Culbert. Since the mid-90s, the reservoir has



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not fallen more than 5.4-feet below full pond level, for the most part, she said.

"Prior to that point, in the 70s and 80s, Duke Energy operated Lake Keowee with much more fluctuation," Culbert said. "In our current license today from 1966 that's still in effect, we have the ability to operate Lake Keowee down 25 feet ... but since the mid-90s, we have been operating it about 5.4 down or higher."

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