Lake Hartwell levels remain

Recent rains unlikely to prevent second drought trigger next month

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ANDERSON — Despite rain Monday and showers expected through Thursday, Lake Hartwell likely will reach a second drought trigger next month, and downstream flow already has been cut to keep more water here.

Outflow from the three Upstate U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' lakes already has been cut below the maximum allowed, and Col. Jeff Hall, the Corps' new district commander, said his water management approach will be "aggressive" — within the confines of current federal law.

The Lake Hartwell Association would like to see quicker preventative action.

"I would call it an economic gap when Hartwell is down four to five feet," Pat Goran, who serves on the Savannah River Basin Advisory Council, told members of the lake association Monday. "We need to work with our friends in Augusta and on the coast in sharing the pain in drought conditions."

"It's all about balancing needs" — from protecting drinking water supply and environmental habitats to supporting industry that creates jobs, Hall said.

Federal money was recently approved for a comprehensive study of the basin that could lead to a change in the law, and an agreement has been worked out to allow the cash-strapped states to provide in-kind services for their share and allow the long-awaited study to move forward, Hall said.

A Clemson University study of the economic impact of lake levels should be released next week, Hall said.

It will show an impact but also will show the area's economy is resilient, Hall said.

Along with lake levels, the amount of water that can be taken from lakes and streams in the state will be regulated under a new state law, adding protection as the area continues to grow, said David Baize, assistant water bureau chief with the state Department of Health and Environmental Control.

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