Lake levels head south

Dry weather pattern could bring drought conditions

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Doug Young enjoys doing volunteer work for the South Carolina Drought Response Committee.

The panel, created by state law more than 20 years ago, monitors and assesses how the state is dealing with dry weather.

"I send them all the newspaper articles dealing with climate and water issues," Young said Wednesday.

Young's interest in keeping abreast of the latest news on the topic makes him the water expert at the Mountain Lakes Community Association (MLCA).

Earlier this week, Young gave a PowerPoint presentation that brought MLCA members up to speed on water issues.

A resident and board member at Chickasaw Point, Young showed a photo of the gated community's nearly dry dock at the height of a severe drought in November 2008.

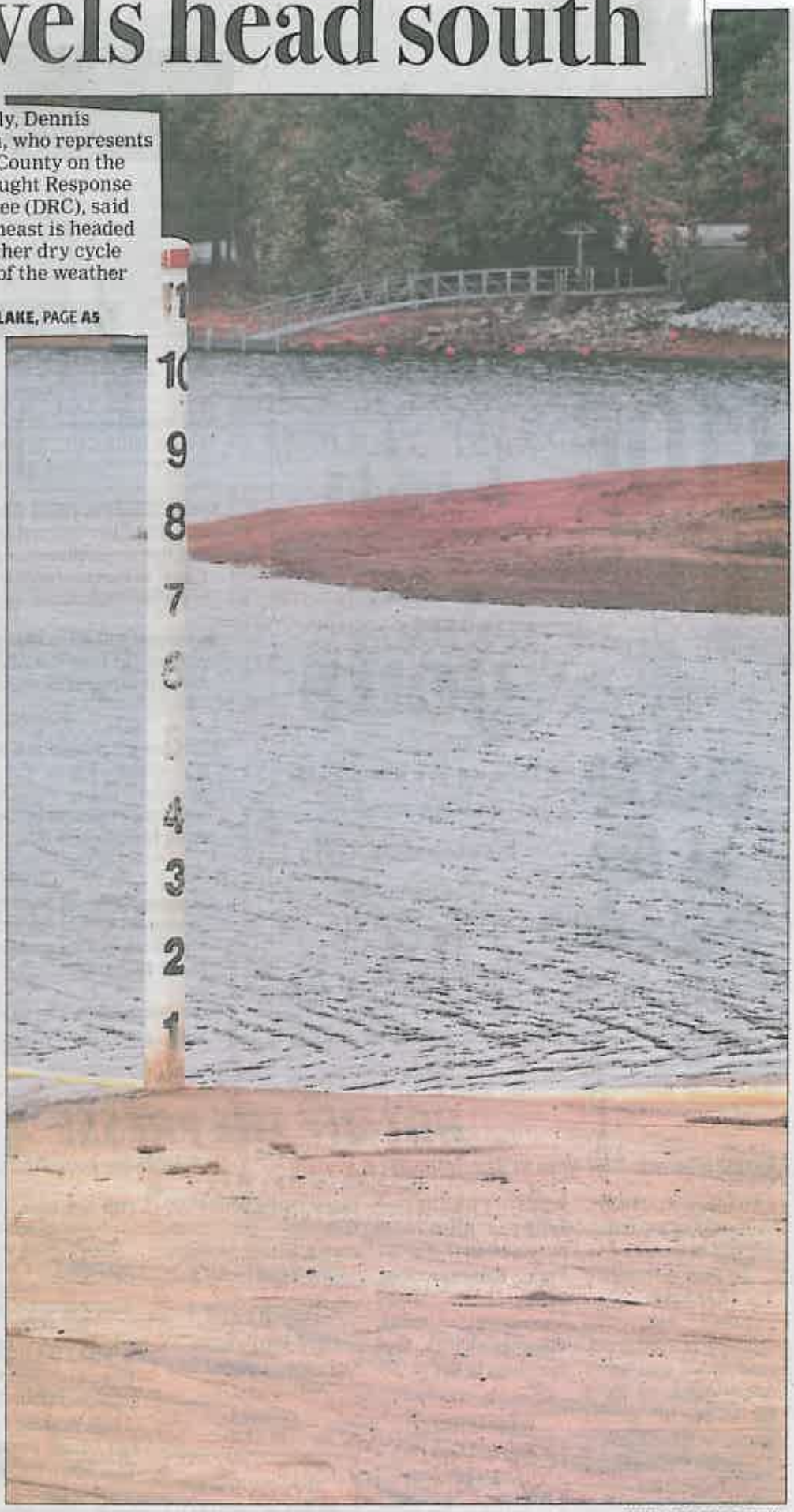
"People around Lake Keowee who complain about low lake levels don't get any sympathy from me," Young said as he displayed photos of the almost barren dock at Chickasaw Point on Lake Hartwell.

Two years removed from the 2008 drought that delivered a heavy blow to the local economy, lake levels are again heading south, Young told the group.

He is not alone.

Recently, Dennis Chastain, who represents Pickens County on the S.C. Drought Response Committee (DRC), said the Southeast is headed into another dry cycle because of the weather

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The Twelve Mile Recreation Area on Lake Hartwell shows lower lake levels Wednesday. Dryer weather patterns could be ushering in drought conditions.

LAKE: Rain likely won't help

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pattern known as La Nina that will dominate well into next year.

The rain from the past few days, while a welcome sight, is unlikely to make much of a difference in lake levels.

Young said that in 2008 Lake Hartwell dropped 20 feet below the target lake level.

On Wednesday, Hartwell's level was at 654.84 feet, or 5.15 feet below what it should be.

The level at Lake Jocassee stood at 85.9 feet or nearly 13 feet below its targeted level of 99 feet. Lake Keowee's level was off only three feet from its targeted mark of 98.5 feet.

Young projected a graph that showed how over the years periods of drought have become more frequent than periods of rain.

If the propensity toward dry weather continues, Young predicts more territorial battles among states over the control of sources of water.

Young said ongoing litigation between North Carolina and South Carolina could become the rule rather than the exception.

He said South Carolina went to court against its neighbor because North Carolina takes water from the Catawba Basin before it goes to South Carolina.

A similar battle is brewing between Georgia, Alabama and Florida. Young said Georgia takes water from the Chattahoochee River before it reaches Alabama and Florida.

Young sees a potential conflict between Georgia and South Carolina over the Savannah Water Basin that includes Lake Hartwell. He said that's one battle both sides should avoid.

In the meantime, despite the ongoing efforts to create a shared vision for the Upstate, Young said little attention is being paid to the region's future water supply.

Young recommends creating an Upstate Regional Water Authority that would determine how much water is available in a drought year, calculate the volume of water being used and determine what is the best use for the remaining water.

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