New plan for Keowee-Toxaway

BY MIKE EADS
THE JOURNAL

KEOWEE KEY — Lake levels and the future of the Keowee-Toxaway Project are subjects of much conversation, as members of Advocates for Quality Development (AQD) learned Saturday.

The group, which has been a vocal advocate for the implementation and enforcement of Oconee County's zoning laws, hosted its annual meeting Saturday at the Keowee Key Activity Center.

Chuck Smith is the AQD's representative in "stakeholder" discussions about a new license for Duke Energy to operate the Keowee-Toxaway hydroelectric facility. The talks began in 2009, well ahead of the 2016 expiration of Duke's first, 50-year license from the Federal Energy Regulation Commission (FERC).

One of the possibilities under discussion, according to Smith, would be for Duke to reconfigure its Oconee Nuclear Station to drop Lake Keowee's minimum level down to 790 feet, from its current minimum of 794 feet. Keowee's level is now at 796 feet, but it is normally around 800 feet. Smith said Duke would agree to maintain the lake at 795 feet 98 percent of the time, except in cases of drought. No decision has been reached, however.

The various state, local, business and community groups – including Duke, FERC, AQD and more than 20 others – in the process are expected to have an Agreement in Principle (AIP) worked out by May 2013, according to Ken Kearns, the Washington, D.C.-based consultant hired to facilitate compilation of the new management plan for Keowee-Toxaway.

"The stakeholder group has noted that its discussions should be concluded in May 2013 to give them time to review the results with their constituencies and gain approvals prior to the July signing," said Kearns.

under discussion

"Once the (AIP) is signed, then it will be converted to a formal contract (the Relicensing Agreement, or RA) by November 2013," said Kearns, who went on to state that Duke and all other parties cannot change the terms of the relicensing plan once they sign it.

Assuming the relicensing agreement is hammered out by next May, Duke is expected to file that agreement along with its license application in August 2014. Duke's first license to operate Keowee-Toxaway was for 50 years and the new one would be good for anywhere from 30 to 50 more years.

Anyone wanting to follow the relicensing process may do so by emailing ktrelicensing@dukeenergy.com, sending a letter to Jen Huff, Duke Energy, EC12Y, PO Box 1006, Charlotte, NC 28201-1006 or by visiting www.duke-energy.com/lakes/keowee-toxaway-relicensing.asp.

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