Oconee approves Keowee-Toxaway relicensing agreement

Pickens could reconsider at next meeting

BY NORMAN CANNADA
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WALHALLA — Oconee County is on board with the Keowee-Toxaway Stakeholder Relicensing Agreement and will continue to support the Keowee-Toxaway project in its efforts to be relicensed for another 40 years.

The council approved the agreement and authorized Council Chairman Joel Thrift to sign all documents related to the relicensing agreement at its meeting Tuesday night.

The agreement is the result of work by Duke Energy and 32 stakeholders since 2009 in the process for Duke's application for relicensing for the Keowee-Toxaway project with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERG).

The current 50-year license expires in August 2016. Art Holbrooks, the county's representative working on the agreement, said Duke and stakeholders are seeking a 40-year license renewal. The license is only for the Keowee-Toxaway project and not the license for the Oconee Nuclear Station.

Jen Huff, project director for Keowee-Toxaway relicensing, said in May that one of the biggest changes in the proposed new agreement is that Duke agrees not to draw down Lake Keowee lower than 10 feet below full stage. Currently Duke can draw down up to 25 feet below full-lake levels. At Lake Jocassee, Duke would not draw down lower than 30 feet of a full lake, which is what is in the current agreement.

The agreement also includes a regional drought management plan where conservation would be encouraged among water customers, those living near the lakes and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the event of a drought.

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Pickens County Administrator

Pickens County Council voted not to support the relicensing agreement in September, but could reconsider at its next meeting Oct. 21.

Pickens County Administrator Chappell Hurst said he and council members were concerned about language in the document that appeared to require the county to go through Greenville to get access to water on the lake.

"The concern was we were going to have to go through Greenville," Hurst said. "Anyone who wanted access was going to have to go through a regional water company. We don't want to be dependent on another county. We wanted to make our own decisions. Duke has made some changes after we voted that have improved the document considerably and have addressed some of the concerns that we had."

Duke Energy spokeswoman Lisa Hoffmann said the stakeholder committee "removed the problematic language" to address the concern by Pickens officials that it could be "perceived as a barrier for new public water supply intakes on Lake Keowee."

Hurst said in order for the council to reconsider signing the agreement, one of the councilmen voting against the agreement would have to make the motion to reconsider. He said he did not know if the council would reconsider the motion at its next meeting Oct. 21.

Stakeholders have until Nov. 29 to sign the agreement.

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