Daily Journal • Daily Messenger Friday, September 18, 2009

Oconee extends control of 2 county parks

Duke Energy to operate South Cove, High Falls parks through 2038

By CARLOS GALARZA
carlos@dailyjm.com

WALHALLA — The Oconee County Council approved a request this week from the local Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism (PRT) to go along with a long-term lease extension with Duke Energy to operate South Cove and High Falls county parks.

PRT Director Phil Shirley said a long-term lease would help his department to continually qualify for available grants.

Shirley said the new lease with Duke Energy would extend to 2038.

Prior to approving Shirley's request, council heard from a resident who asked that the lease be made public.

Local government watchdog Susie Cornelius said she thought the county is acting illegally by collecting a $2 parking fee. Cornelius said the parking fee changed Duke Energy's policy of free access to public areas along the shores of Lake Keowee.

Shirley said Duke does mandate free access to reservoirs, but that it also allows user fees for parking. He said Duke signed off on the county's parking fee that went into effect last year.

Council Chairman Reg Dexter already has signed the lease extension that was drawn up by Duke Energy.

Shirley said that to qualify for certain grants, PRT must have long-term control of the parks. The existing lease was due to expire in 2016.

Oconee County has leased land along Lake Keowee from Duke Energy at no cost since the early 1970s.

Duke Energy formed Lake Keowee in the 1960s as cooling water for its nuclear reactors in Oconee.

South Cove Park, off State Road 188, and High Falls Park off Highway 130 on State Road 183, offer boat ramps and are popular destination spots for local residents and visitors.