The cost of low water

Study to focus on economic impact

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WALHALLA — Oconee and Pickens counties are together contributing more than $31,000 to participate in a study that will look at how lake levels at Hartwell impact local economies bordering the man-made lake with about 962 miles of shoreline.

Officials with the two counties say the study, scheduled to be completed in March 2010 will help them shape future policy.

The study represents a collaborative effort by the Strom Thurmond Institute at Clemson University and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Oconee County Administrator Dale Surrett said the study would cover the total economic impact of Lake Hartwell and the effect of various lake levels.

"This impact will involve tourism but will also involve other areas such as real estate transactions, boat sales, marina activity, advertising, taxes and potable water costs," Surrett said.

Pickens County Administrator J. Chappell Hurst Jr. said that to his knowledge, there is no data that has been collected in the past as is proposed by the joint study.

"We'd like to see exactly what the economic impact is so you don't have to guess," Hurst said. "Then you can develop an economy that won't be affected by the weather."

For instance, Hurst said it's hard to measure the impact a boater or fisherman makes on an economy when they stop for fuel, go eat at a restaurant or make a purchase at a bait store.

"We're anxious to see all this," Hurst added.

For his part, Surrett said the information from the study would be used to benchmark economic factors affected by the lake.

"It will allow us to verify the effectiveness of efforts to stabilize or improve lake-affected economic factors as well as weigh the economic impact of the lake against other uses such as flood control and power production," Surrett said.

Oconee, Pickens and Anderson counties, along with Hart, Franklin and Stephens counties in Georgia are sharing about half the cost of the study that carries a $211,000 price tag.

Their share of the cost in the study is based upon the percentage of shoreline. As a result, Oconee's share is $26,203, while Pickens' is $5,000.