Update on Keowee-Toxaway licensing tonight

BY MIKE EADS
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SALEM — Duke Energy and the Friends of Lake Keowee Society (FOLKS) will update residents on licensing plans for the Keowee-Toxaway Project tonight at 6:30 at Tamassee-Salem High School.

Discussions about a new license for the hydroelectric project began in 2009. Several state, local, business and community groups – including Duke, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and Advocates for Quality Development (AQD) and more than 20 others – have participated in the process and are expected to craft a formal Agreement in Principle (AIP) by next spring. Duke's current license expires in 2016.

Tonight's meeting will be a progress report on the licensing discussions.

"This is an important meeting as we will hear more about the 'trial balloon' (first draft of an Agreement in Principle), including various operating scenarios during drought conditions," said Ben Turetsky, one of the FOLKS members participating in the process.

Duke spokeswoman Erin Culbert recently told The Journal that the Oconee Nuclear Station could be reconfigured in order to allow for more flexibility in water levels downstream.

"... (M)odifying Oconee Nuclear Station allows it to continue operating through a larger range of reservoir elevations, particularly during droughts," Culbert said. "This modification also would allow Duke Energy to provide downstream flow releases to support downstream water user needs deeper into droughts. It's an approach we recommend to help the Keowee-Toxaway basin better withstand future droughts."

One of the possibilities along those lines, according to Chuck Smith of the Keowee Key-based Advocates for Quality Development, would be to drop Lake Keowee's minimum level to 790 feet, from its current minimum of 794 feet. Keowee's level is now at 796 feet, but 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.

The question of lake levels is all but certain to draw comments from Keowee Key residents. The meeting was originally slated for Duke's World of Energy facility, but later moved to Tamassee-Salem to better accommodate what is expected to be a heavy turnout, according to Turetsky.

There are several months left before the AIP is finalized.

"Once the (AIP) is signed, then it will be converted to a formal contract (the Relicensing Agreement, or RA) by November 2013," according to Ken Kearns, a Washington, D.C., based consultant who is facilitating the application process for FERC, Duke and the other stakeholders.

Duke is expected to file the AIP along with its license application in August 2014. The first license to operate Keowee-Toxaway was 50 years long and the new one could be good for 30 to 50 more years.

For more information, email ktrelicensing@dukeenergy.com, or send a letter to Jen Huff, Duke Energy, EC12Y, PO Box 1006, Charlotte, NC 28201-1006 or visit www.duke-energy.com/lakes/keowee-toxaway-relicensing.asp.

Refreshments begin at 6 p.m. and the forum will start at 6:30 p.m.

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