Water: It's feast or famine

Legislation would promote water allocation across South Carolina

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SENECA — When it comes to persistent droughts and water resources, at least one expert thinks it's about time South Carolina got its act together.

Gerrit Jobsis told Friends of Lakes Keowee Society (FOLKS) members Thursday that, "South Carolina really needs to step up."

The former Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) employee, who now represents the interests of American Rivers, a national conservation organization, said that without a water allocation plan the state is doomed to a cycle of aquatic feasts or famines.

Jobsis also used the FOLKS forum at Duke's World of Energy as a pulpit for preaching water efficiency, citing nine ways massive amounts of water can be saved (See inset).

"The increased demand being brought about by tremendous growth in the Southeast, along with persistent droughts, means we must find some other method, other than just praying, to ensure an adequate water supply," Jobsis said.

The Southeast regional director of American Rivers said building dams and creating reservoirs are expensive, short-term solutions. The real way to solve the problem of more demand and less water is to reduce demand through conservation efforts ranging from new residential showerheads to fixing leaks in municipal water lines.

"Water efficiency is the 21st century solution to the drought-stricken Southeast's water problems and must be the backbone of the region's water supply plan," he said.

However, he said individual attempts to be more water efficient have to be supported by governmental efforts. In South Carolina, he said, that means working for the passage of legislation that would allocate the state's water

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By the numbers

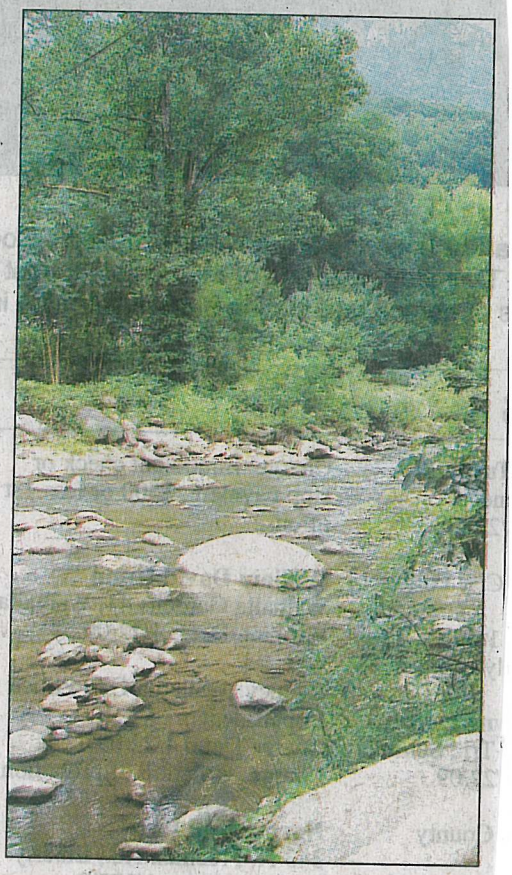
200 — The number of millions of gallons of water that Atlanta could save each day by enacting water efficiency measures

$700 — The millions Atlanta could save with the same measures

6 — The billions of gallons of water lost each day to municipal water leaks

612,000 — The number of fishermen who used South Carolina rivers last year

$532 — The millions pumped into the state's economy by those fishermen



File photo

If South Carolina is going to meet its water needs, it needs water allocation legislation, according to a spokesman for the American River organization.

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resources.

All state lakes, he noted, are actually impounded rivers that provide two-thirds of the state's drinking water. He referred to South Carolina's approach to allocating these resources as "hydro-illogical," in that we pay attention when there is a drought and ignore our rivers when there is not.

"We need to take proactive steps," he urged, adding that currently South Carolina has no means by which to control how much water is allocated to users.

However, two bills, Jobsis said, are now pending in the state Senate, both of which would protect water, regulate water withdrawal, encourage water management and improve interstate communication on matters related to water.

"Right now, S462 has more legs," he said, "Although there are some outstanding issues that need to be addressed."

He encouraged FOLKS members and others concerned with water allocation to support passage of the bill without permanent water rights and with shared control between the DNR and the Dept. of Health and Environmental Control. Jobsis said grandfathering existing water users for a period of 20-30 years would be acceptable, adding, "we don't want to grandfather forever."

Jobsis said the current legislation being considered is far better that bills that were debated but failed to gain passage during the last two legislative sessions. He also said passage could aid South Carolina's federal court case against North Carolina over use of water in the Catawba River Basin.

"It would show that we are doing the responsible thing by adopting an allocation law," he said.