LOCAL NEWS

Water policy praised for aiding lake

Managing levels during drought helped Hartwell recover, homeowners say

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ANDERSON — Lake Hartwell was a foot and a half below full pond Thursday when the Lake Hartwell Association held its annual meeting, compared to 18 feet low at the time of last year's gathering.

Association President Herb Burnham noted the difference when he addressed the gathering of more than 200 people at the Anderson Civic Center, saying that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' use of adaptive management worked.

Adaptive management — altering downstream flow from the corps' Upstate lakes depending on current conditions rather than rigid numbers — is a policy change the association has urged the corps to adopt.

Brig. Gen. Todd Semonite, new commander of the corps' South Atlantic Division, which includes eight states, said he's a believer — within limits.

"I understand clearly the facts of what happened in the lake," Semonite told *The Greenville News* in an interview before speaking to the association. "We clearly are concerned about lake levels and monitor them daily."

There's "no silver bullet" to solve lake level problems in severe drought, Semonite said. Adaptive management is a way to "optimize all the variables" that the corps is charged by Congress to keep in balance on the lake.

"I like to work to the maximum flexibility within the rules," Semonite said.

Water planning was the focus of the meeting. Two bills supported by the association will be debated in the Statehouse in the next session.

One is a water permitting bill to regulate how much water can be drawn from lakes and rivers in the state. The other would create a statewide comprehensive water plan.

Georgia, facing a water shortage, now has a plan, completed in 2008, and the association was involved in its development, said Mike Massey, chair of the association's South Carolina Legislative Committee. South Carolina has a plan containing many recommendations but no process to bind them together, Massey said. South Carolina needs a plan "or we're going to be in trouble somewhere down the road," Massey said.