

## Residents raise questions on Keowee-Toxaway relicensing

By Ray Chandler

Wednesday, June 15, 2011

SENECA — Conservationists, lake shore residents and others made clear Wednesday what they want the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to consider in deciding whether to renew Duke Energy's license for its Keowee-Toxaway Project, comprising Lakes Keowee and Jocassee.

Most had a list of things they thought commission officials should urge Duke to do better.

Some conservationists said Duke didn't fulfill the promises made when it was granted the first license for the project in 1966.

Dana Leavitt, land trust coordinator of Upstate Forever, said Duke had promised to maintain nearly 75,000 acres for public access such as hunting, camping, fishing and hiking, as well as preserve the land for game management and watershed protection.

"Duke has not lived up to its commitments," Leavitt said.

Leavitt was one of 11 speakers Wednesday at Seneca High School, where the commission held two scoping meetings to receive opinions on issues and questions that should be explored as part of the relicensing process of the Keowee-Toxaway Project.

The project was granted a 50-year license in 1966. The relicensing process has been under way since 2009 and Duke has to submit a final relicensing application by August 2014, according to Stephen Bowler, the regulatory commission's coordinator on the relicensing project.

The federal agency has jurisdiction, Bowler explained, because the lakes have a part in supporting the Oconee Nuclear Station. A new license will extend from 30 to 50 years. The Bad Creek power station, above Lake Jocassee, is licensed until 2027.

Interested parties have until July 15 to submit their requests for studies of specific questions and issues that they want the commission to consider.

The two lakes, Keowee and Jocassee, have a key part in Duke Energy's capacities and the surrounding communities, said Jennifer Huff, Duke's relicensing project manager.

The two hydroelectric stations have nearly 868 megawatts of generating capacity, Huff said, and the Jocassee plant, which has pump storage allowing reverse of the turbines to raise water back into Lake Jocassee, is Duke's only real way of storing electricity to meet peak demand times, such as hot summer days.

Altogether, she said, the total Keowee-Toxaway project generation capacity represents 22 percent of Duke's generation capacity in the Carolinas.

In addition, she said, Lake Jocassee draws about 325,000 visitors a year and Lake Keowee over 900,000, a boon to the local communities. The lakes also have a part in supplying local drinking water and in helping to balance the lake levels in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineer lakes on the Savannah River, stepping up release of water when those lakes fall too low.

"The lakes are important to everybody," Huff said.

Bill Marshall of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources said his agency would submit requests for studies on better protecting and enhancing fish and wildlife in and around the projects, one particular focus being stabilization of the lake levels during fish spawning seasons.

Another desire of the department, Marshall said, is better protection of environmentally sensitive areas.

These issues needed addressing, he said, "because the impact of Lake Keowee and Lake Jocassee has been greater than was anticipated in the first licensing."

Jim Codner, president of Advocates for Quality Development, a lakeside residents group, called for stiffer restrictions on commercial development and an increased emphasis on boating safety.

His group is not opposed to development, Codner said, but is opposed to commercial developments, such as the now-dead Palmetto Point commercial marina project, being plopped down in the midst of residential areas.

Ben Turetzky, executive director of the Friends of Lake Keowee Society, called for fine tuning of Duke's shoreline management plan, especially with an eye toward better erosion control.

The 71 islands in Lake Keowee, Turetzky said, are in special need of this attention.

Wayne Kelly of the Pickens County Historical Society urged Duke Energy to donate land and to fund a recreation area of Fort Prince George, which he said would become a major tourist draw, such as the recreated Ninety-Six site and Fort Loudon in Tennessee.

Fort Prince George was built in 1753 on the Keowee River across from the Cherokee town of Keowee. The fort was the major British army presence in the Carolina backcountry during the French and Indian War (1754-1763), standing sentinel

against the French in what is now Alabama.

The original site was covered by Lake Keowee, Kelly said, and recreating the fort would help restore the area's sense of place and mitigate the loss of the actual site.

Former Pickens Mayor Ted Sheehan said Duke had been a bad neighbor. He echoed the sentiments of those who said the company had reneged on promises to preserve nearly 75,000 acres for public access.

He said the company bought the land for \$83 per acre and sold it for thousands per acre.

The area gave up a lot for the project to be built, Sheehan said, and got comparatively little in return.

No Duke Energy official responded to the company's critics at the meeting, but Sandra Magee, Duke Energy spokeswoman, responded in a written statement to the same points raised elsewhere.

"The relicensing project balances customer needs and protection of natural resources," Magee said.

Regarding the charge that Duke has not lived up to 50-year-old promises on preserving and maintaining lands for public access, Magee said:

"To date, this pledge has been more than fulfilled. According to our records, these commitments have been met by protecting approximately 57,000 acres of land for public use in the Keowee-Toxaway area.

"Duke Energy did not pledge this land as a compromise or prerequisite to building our facilities, but to honor our corporate commitment to partner with state and federal agencies. Our continued partnership with these agencies keeps these lands protected and maintained."

Anyone wishing to submit comments as part of the scoping process can do so online either through the FERC website at [www.ferc.gov](http://www.ferc.gov) or through Duke Energy's site at <http://www.duke-energy.com/keowee-toxaway-relicensing/project-relicensing.asp>.

