

LOCAL NEWS

Permits sought to manage water use

Bill seeks to balance conservation, growth in wake of drought

By Rudolph Bell

STAFF WRITER
dbell@greenvilleonline.com

Drought brought the level of Lake Jocassee so low that Duke Energy had to cut the output at its hydroelectric station on the lake during the past two years.

Conservationists are hoping state lawmakers pass legislation this year

that will put South Carolina in a better position to manage water resources the next time drought strikes.

The bill would require anyone withdrawing water from rivers and lakes to get a permit from the state Department of Health and Environmental Control with certain exceptions.

In issuing permits, regulators would have to take

water levels into account as well as existing uses and future needs. Industries and other water users would have to draw up contingency plans in case of drought.

As it stands now, South Carolina's only requirement regarding surface water withdrawals is for notice of withdrawals exceeding three million gallons a month.

"We don't know how much is being used or what it's being used for," said John Tynan, co-director of

the clean air and water program at Upstate Forever, a local environmental group, and a newly elected board member of the Greenville Water System.

Tynan said South Carolina, North Carolina and Alabama are the only states east of the Mississippi that don't require such permits.

He and other advocates of the permits say it would give industry more certainty about water availability and improve South Carolina's legal position in dis-

putes over water rights such as the lawsuit that Attorney General Henry McMaster has filed against North Carolina over use of the Catawba River.

State Sen. Paul Campbell, a Berkeley County Republican who is sponsoring the legislation, said groups representing conservationists, industry, power companies and municipal water systems are close to a compromise after years of debating a permit requirement.

Campbell, a former executive with aluminum maker Alcoa Inc., said he hopes to have the bill out of committee by the end of the month and onto the Senate floor in February. Chances of passage are good, he said, but they will dim if special interests insist on too much tweaking.

"Quite frankly, if it dies this time, I'm not sure there's going to be a senator up there who's going to bring it back up," Campbell said.