

Push made for water rights

County fears losing its allotment from Lake Keowee

By Ron Barnett

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Hoping to avoid losing the rights to millions of gallons of Lake Keowee water for Greenville County and other parts of the Upstate, County Council has adopted a resolution urging the state Department of Health and

Environmental Control to approve a new permit before the current one expires in 2016.

The action underscores the tension between the Upstate and communities on the other side of the Savannah River in Georgia, including Atlanta, over the right to an increasingly precious natural resource.

The resolution says the council

supports litigation that the Greenville Water System has initiated against DHEC seeking to force the state agency to process the permit application immediately.

The Greenville Water System supplies drinking water to more than 450,000 people in Greenville, Laurens, Pickens and Anderson Counties, including 13 neighboring water utilities.

"The Greenville County Council believes it is in the best interests of the environment and the residents and businesses of Greenville County and its neighboring counties to immediately process Greenville Water's permit application," the resolution reads.

The council **"unequivocally supports the immediate processing of the application of Green-**

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ville Water for a surface water withdrawal permit, as well as Greenville Water's current legal action to require DHEC to issue a surface water withdrawal permit to Greenville Water," it says.

Greenville Water draws from two mountain reservoirs that it owns in the Saluda River basin as well as from Lake Keowee, which was built by Duke Energy and is part of the Savannah River basin.

It's trying to get its first permit under a new law that requires permits of anyone withdrawing from South Carolina's lakes and rivers with few exceptions.

Greenville Water wants to get the 30-year permit right away, clearing the way to withdraw up to 90 million gallons a day from Lake Keowee starting in 2020.

But the state Department of Environmental

Health and Control says the water system must wait until its 26-year-old inter-basin transfer registration expires in 2016.

By that time, officials with the water system fear, thirsty communities and

industrial users on both sides of the border with Georgia may have locked up supplies from the Savannah River basin by getting their own permits, leaving Greenville without enough water to grow.