

EXPIRES IN 2008

# Duke studies aimed at renewing hydro license

*Firm, public will have year to agree on terms before filing application*

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Duke Power has pared down more than 500 requests for studies that will serve as the basis for relicensing its hydro operations on the Catawba River.

The 31 studies Duke will undertake don't include some of the most controversial requests, such as sweeping analyses of shoreline development. Those issues may re-emerge, however, before Duke submits its application for a 30- to 50-year license renewal in 2006.

Studies will focus on six broad categories: hydro operations; wildlife and botanical; aquatics; water quality; cultural; and shoreline management and recreation. Committees composed of Duke officials and members of the public will oversee each study.

Among its studies, Duke will:

- Evaluate the potential of restoring migratory fish such as

shad, which swim upstream to spawn, as far up the river as the Lake Wylie dam.

- Assess future water demands on the Catawba and develop procedures for coping with drought.

- Evaluate recreation needs, including land-based activity such as hiking, and dam releases of water for fishing and boating.

- Update its shoreline classification maps, which guide permits for piers and boathouses. The update will assess the effects of continuing development on recreation.

- Inventory wildlife and vegetation at the Catawba's Great Falls, a two-mile reach of S.C. river from which Duke diverts water. Wildlife and paddling advocates would like water to flow there again.

Most studies will be finished by June 2005, leaving about a year for Duke and the public to seek agreement on terms before the license application is filed. The current license expires in 2008.

Duke won't study so-called mitigation measures that could become part of the new license, such as agreements to create waterfront buffer zones or to pre-

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serve land. It won't address development outside its hydro project boundary, which generally extends only to the area covered by water. No studies will be conducted of removing dams.

But the more than 100 members of the public who sit on two state relicensing teams and four regional advisory committees can still raise those or other issues. If they have enough support, resulting agreements between Duke and public groups could be incorporated into the new license.

"The process is allowing those folks the opportunity to bring those issues up," said Mark Oakley, Duke's Catawba relicensing manager.

Groups unhappy that studies were omitted may appeal to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for informal mediation, or request more information after

the initial application is filed, said Vicki Taylor, executive coordinator of the Catawba-Wateree Relicensing Coalition.

The coalition, in which 42 government agencies, environmental, homeowner and other interest groups participate, takes a wider view than Duke of the issues open for debate in relicensing. It might conduct its own studies of some issues, Taylor said, such as on the feasibility of buffer zones and the water-quality impacts of sediment.

Before the license is issued, FERC will prepare an environmental analysis of hydro impacts, providing a chance for public input.

Federal law also gives some state and federal agencies authority to impose conditions on the license. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, for example, can insist on fish passages around dams. State agencies have to certify that the license won't hurt water quality and can press for more consistent releases of water from dams.

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