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- Shoreline preservation. Some people hope that Duke will leave large sections of waterside land undeveloped. This does not mean more boat ramps, but land left largely in its natural state for people to enjoy.
- Help for migratory fish to get around dams. These include "ladders" and "lifts" for fish such as eel and shortnose sturgeon. Help could include hatcheries that spawn these fish and stock them into sections of river. Some say populations of migratory fish have decreased since Duke built the dams.

Duke is holding meetings with people who represent sections of the basin. Two state teams are overseeing studies on public concerns and will try to reach settlement agreements.

Anyone can attend the advisory team meetings and speak about concerns.

The Catawba begins in the N.C. mountains, running through lakes and flowing lengths for more than 200 miles before intersecting with Big Wateree Creek in South Carolina, where it is called the Wateree River. In the Catawba Valley, the basin's highlights include lakes Rhodhiss, Hickory and Norman.

Water's ceaseless appeal to people draws them to the river, but the ways Duke controls the stream frustrate some.

"We think this next license should have conditions in it that much better compensate the public than the license of 1958 did," Jobsis of America's Rivers said. "We didn't have the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act -- they've never been applied to Duke's dams. This is the first chance we have to get Duke to comply with what we accept as being modern environmental standards."

The unnatural ebbs and flows caused by dam releases can make river paddling an exercise in frustration, say some canoeists and kayakers.

"I have paddled on the Catawba below Lake Hickory. That actually presented a problem because of inadequate takeouts," said Maurice Blackburn, who represents paddlers on the foothills relicensing advisory team. "It was one long paddle, but I didn't want to paddle that long. You need a place where you can park your car and get your boat out of the water. There wasn't a place on public property."

Some local officials complain that Duke is unfair to the communities along the river whose land Duke covered with its lakes. Darrell Robertson, an Alexander County commissioner, said Duke has been unresponsive about concerns over too much sediment in the lakes, which he said reduces water capacity. He also worries Duke will start charging local governments for the drinking water they take from the lakes.

"The good Lord didn't make that water just to benefit Duke Power," he said. "I don't have a lot of confidence that the welfare of the people who live along the lakes will be looked at. Unless we really stay on top of it, our interests won't be looked after."

Duke spokesman Mary Kathryn Green said that relicensing study teams are researching public concerns. "We are aware of all of these issues," she said. "They are probably included in a study or we are aware of them and are working toward helping with that concern."

Speak Your Mind

The next meeting of the foothills relicensing advisory group is 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday at the Morganton Community House, 120 N. King St. Details: Duke Power at (828) 382-5778 or <http://www.catawbahydrolicensing.com/>

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