

Official: Federal action draining the lake would devastate quality of life

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Index-Journal regional editor

Consider the worst case scenario: Greenwood County decides not to comply with federal requirements that it make Lake Greenwood safer. It costs too much and nobody wants to pay for it.

The federal agency requiring the safety enhancements — the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission — does everything in its power to change the county government's mind.

Still, the government won't budge. Finally, there is no alternative. The feds have just one option left: FERC suspends Greenwood County's license to own a lake.

Lake Greenwood is drained. "It would be so devastating. There is no way anybody would let it happen," said Jeff Fowler, CEO of the Partnership Alliance, the city/county, public/private industry recruiting and quality-of-life enhancement agency.

"It would turn out the lights in Greenwood.

"It would have the same effect as a war — a war on our territory."

Greenwood area industries that use millions and millions of gallons of water a day would go out of business. People out of work would move away. Businesses dry up and government has no money to function. And, perhaps worst of all, there's no drinking water in the City of Greenwood

— and no water for public sanitation.

Without Lake Greenwood, "we never would have gotten Capsugel, Fuji or Eaton," Fowler said, "and there are so many companies we would never have a shot at. Land values at the lake would be 5 to 10 percent of what they are now. Actually, it would have an effect on land values everywhere in the town. There would be no people. Companies would have to shut down."

Let's be clear — there is no way Greenwood County is going to lose Lake Greenwood. Although the county government swallowed hard at the pricetag of what FERC wants it to do, plans are in the works to get it done, without a property tax hike.

FERC says Greenwood County must make arrangements to control the 100-year flood and the water it would dump into the lake. That work is expected to cost \$10 million to \$15 million.

FERC also says Greenwood County might have to construct a second, on-bedrock dam that would hold up to an earthquake. It's uncertain if the current earthen dam would survive a quake. If not, the failure would send a massive amount of water downstream, flooding Saluda and dangerously raising the level of Lake Murray, with Columbia just downstream. Building a second dam could cost \$10 million to \$15 million more.

To raise the money, Greenwood County Council has autho-

ried a study of a Capital Projects Sales Tax, allowed by state law, to fund the project(s) at the dam and, perhaps, a replacement county library.

A new jail and sheriff's office administration building also is a capital need reaching critical proportions, council has been told, but no council discussions have put that project on the sales tax radar.

A five-member committee will study the projects and make recommendations to council about what to fund. Depending on those recommendations, and what council decides to do about them, a 1-cent sales tax question could be on the Greenwood County ballot in November.

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Once the projects are paid for, the tax comes off the books. State law says it must, another government mandate in which local officials have no choice but to comply.

Fowler said the Partnership Alliance will take no active role in influencing the committee's recommendations. The organization does not inject itself into political questions, he said.

However, a discussion of this "big ticket" item will be part of the agenda for the upcoming State of Greenwood meeting, being organized by the Partnership Alliance.

The meeting will be 6:30 p.m. May 23 at the Arts Center in the Federal Building.

"It won't be just the Partnership. This will be a yearly address by many groups, the city and county — representatives from agencies that make Greenwood a better place to live," Fowler said. "We will address job creation and retention. The county will address major infrastructure. The city will address tourism and the City Center Master Plan. And we will have a new business announcement that night."

What the various governments and agencies needs, Fowler said, is someone to call the meeting. "We coordinate the activities. There are many people working day to day on programs to enhance the quality of life," he said. "We act more as a staffing position instead of taking actual political views. We have no influence or say-so over what projects (the proposed sales tax would fund)."

But, when asked, Fowler doesn't shy away from promoting Greenwood's watery jewel. "New development on the lake is good for everyone in the county," he said. "It helps hold the line on everyone's property tax, since government needs a set amount of money to provide the services that people demand."

That "holding the line" aspect is something else Fowler can take with him on the road to talk to business and industry prospects. Penny-watching CFOs are bound to perk up when they