

## Hundreds pack hearing on future of Lake Martin water levels



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ALEXANDER CITY, AL (WSFA)- Hundreds packed a meeting room in Alexander City as the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission held a public hearing on Alabama Power's proposal for higher winter lake levels on Lake Martin.

The plan is part of Alabama Power's application to renew its license to operate Martin Dam.

"In the end, the license application that we filed with FERC contains what we thought was an appropriate balance between the interests of those down the lake and the downstream stakeholders," said Matt Bowden, with Alabama Power.

Alabama Power currently lowers levels by 10 feet in the winter, the proposal would allow them to lower it by seven feet. Most in the audience supported the plan, saying those three feet could mean a major economic impact.

"Those people come to the Lake, when the water level is higher and they can use their boat, enjoy the lake, fishing, skiing and other activities," said Kevin Eason, General Manager of the Stillwaters Residential Association.

The plan would also allow Alabama Power to maintain the higher summer levels until October, under certain conditions, which could also provide an economic boost.

FERC's staff has issued a draft recommendation, which would renew the license, but decline Alabama Power's request.

"Staff does not recommend of Alabama Power's proposed increase in the winter flood pool elevation because the reduction in flood storage would result in an increase in flood elevation downstream of the projects," the staff wrote in a summary of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. " Staff also does not recommend Alabama Power's proposal for the conditional fall extension, because it would be irregularly implemented, would provide only modest benefits to recreation, and may reduce downstream flood protection."

Some of those who attended the hearing agreed with FERC's recommendations.

"If you look at the dynamics of it in Tallapoosa County, the raising of it, it is a great economic impact," said Trey Taylor, an Elmore County Commissioner. Below this, there's millions and millions of dollars of farmland, below Thurlow dam that's impacted every year."

"When they proposed these projects, flood control, flood, control, flood control," said Curtis Tucker, who lives on the Tallapoosa River. "But now as time has gone by, recreation. Forget about flood control. If you own property along the river, we're not worried about you anymore."

FERC will take the input from the hearing and other meetings as it makes its final recommendation. The public comment period runs through August 13<sup>th</sup>.

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