The Upper Savannah River Basin Council

A WORK IN PROGRESS

BY JOHN HAINS, *FOLKS representative on the Upper Savannah River Basin Council (USRBC)*

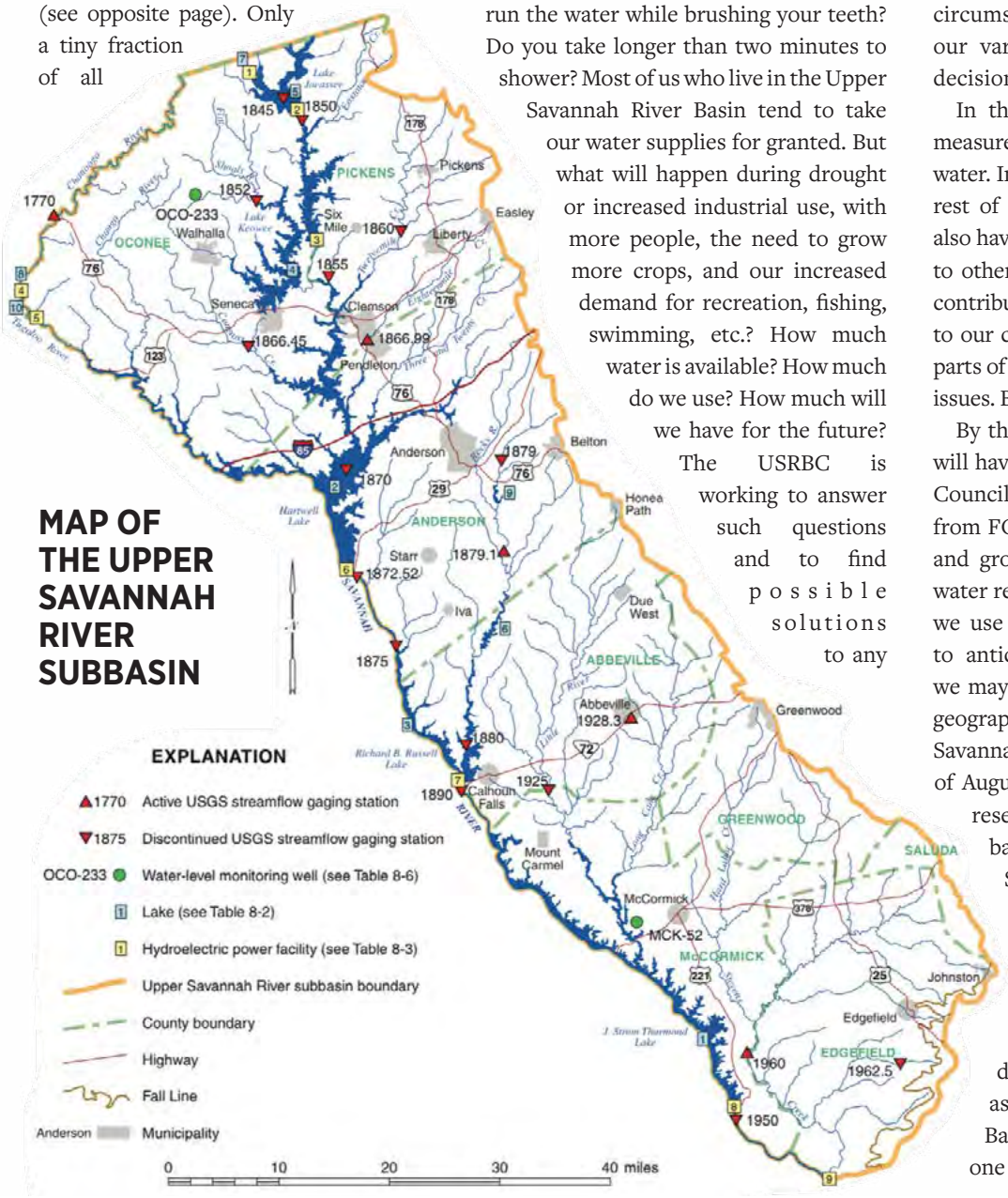
The earth has a lot of water. Most of it (about 97.5%) is too salty to drink or use for many purposes. About 2.5% of the earth's water is freshwater but most of that is in the form of ice or in groundwater (see opposite page). Only a tiny fraction of all the earth's water is in what we would call "surface water": lakes, wetlands, and streams, and even less is conveniently available to everyone.

Do you worry about being able to water your lawn, wash your car, irrigate your garden? Do you take your tap water for granted? Do you worry about how much water it takes to flush the toilet? Do you run the water while brushing your teeth? Do you take longer than two minutes to shower? Most of us who live in the Upper Savannah River Basin tend to take our water supplies for granted. But what will happen during drought or increased industrial use, with more people, the need to grow more crops, and our increased demand for recreation, fishing, swimming, etc.? How much water is available? How much do we use? How much will we have for the future? The USRBC is working to answer such questions and to find possible solutions to any anticipated supply problems.

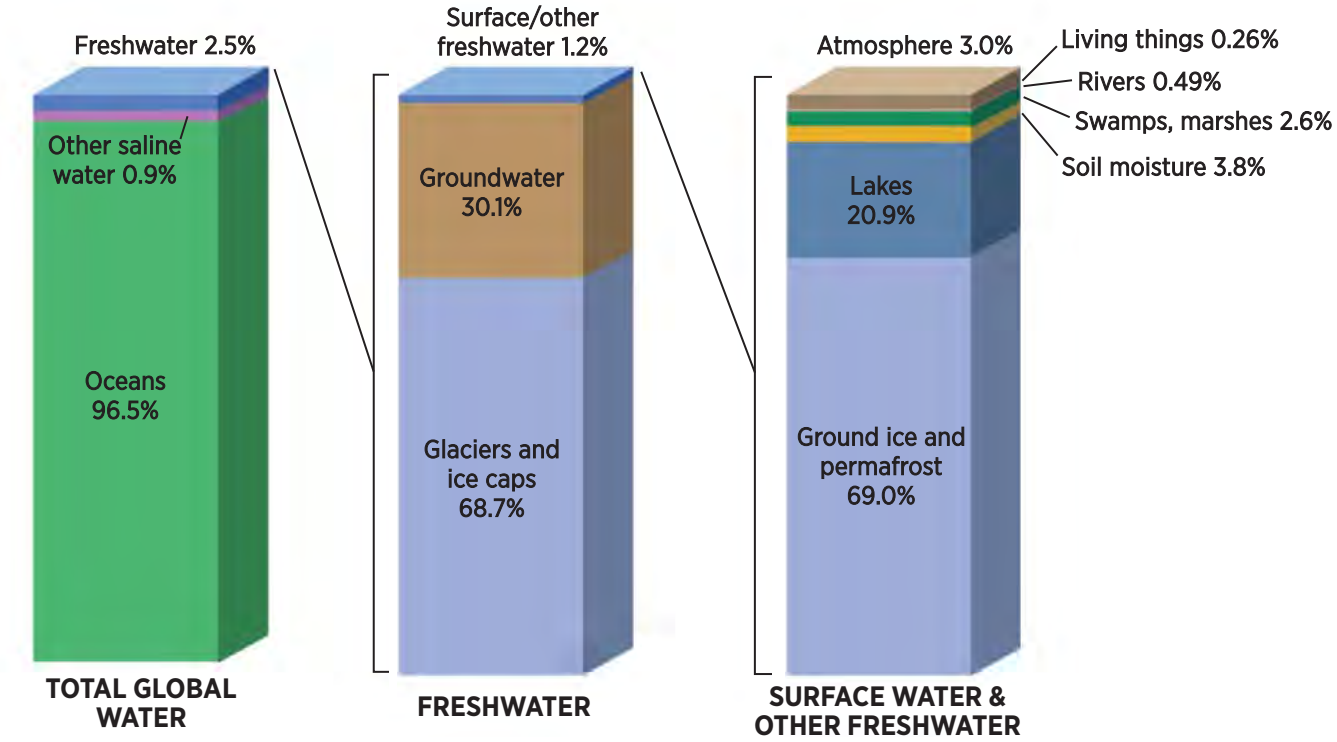
Anyone who remembers the drought that occurred through 2008 has an appreciation for the importance of water resources to every aspect of society. At that time much of this region experienced what the U.S. Drought Mitigation Center categorized as "Exceptional Drought"—the most extreme status. In extreme circumstances what priority do we give our various needs? Who makes those decisions and how?

In the Savannah River Basin, by any measure, we enjoy a luxurious supply of water. In addition to Lake Keowee and the rest of the Keowee-Toxaway Project, we also have access to numerous streams and to other lakes in the region, all of which contribute to water abundance, relative to our current needs. Compared to other parts of the U.S. we have few water-related issues. But that could change in the future.

By the time you read this, the USRBC will have met monthly for at least a year. Council attendees include representatives from FOLKS and many other individuals and groups that use or depend on our water resources. They have explored how we use these water resources and tried to anticipate what kinds of challenges we may face in the future. The USRBC's geographic region encompasses the Savannah River Basin that is upstream of Augusta, Georgia and includes all the reservoirs and streams in the upper basin that exist at least partially in South Carolina. Similar councils exist for other river basins in South Carolina, including the Lower Savannah Salkehatchie River Basin Council (LSSRBC) that includes the water resources downstream to Savannah, Georgia as well as the Salkehatchie River Basin. The USRBC and LSSRBC had one joint meeting in February 2024.



WHERE IS EARTH'S WATER?

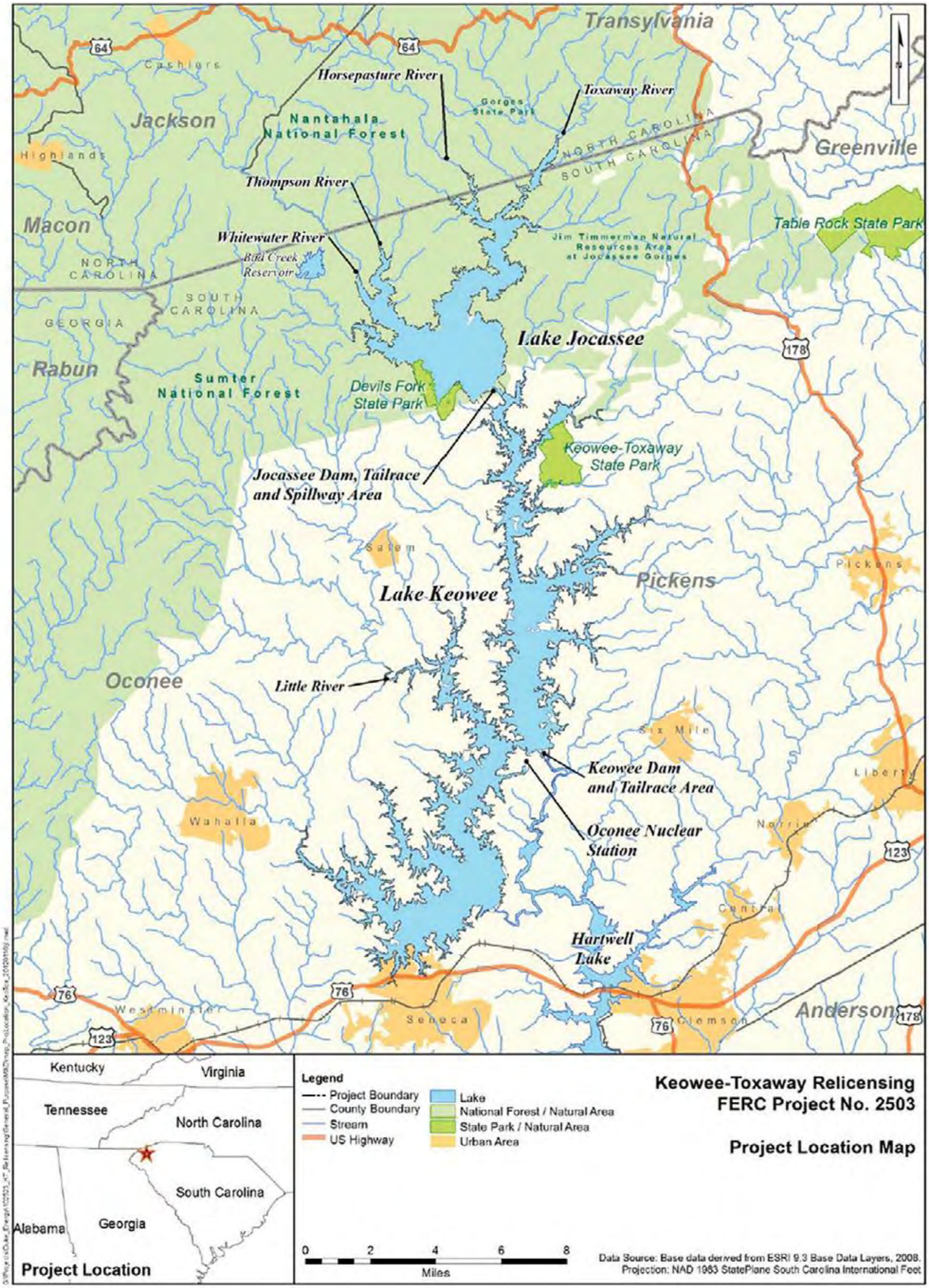


Credit: U.S. Geological Survey, Water Science School. https://www.usgs.gov/special-topic/water-science-school; Data source: Igor Shiklomanov's chapter "World fresh water resources" in Peter H. Gleick (editor), 1993, Water in Crisis: A Guide to the World's Fresh Water Resources. (Numbers are rounded.)

Representatives from water treatment systems, industry, agriculture, government agencies, and yes, FOLKS and other citizen groups have presented a broad spectrum of activities and concerns, past and present, to the Council with the goal of understanding the current status and planning for the future of these essential resources. Thus far, we have been collecting information on the current status of our water resources, learning how this information is gathered, gaining an understanding of technical details, and learning about modeling efforts to understand and predict future trends and the factors that may impact those trends. The intent is to be able to predict and plan for our future through the year 2070.

If 2070 seems a long time from now, you are correct. And while our predictions may not be completely accurate, the response time to a crisis can be very long—as a result it is good to plan such responses in order to be ready, just in case. Moreover, it is important to be realistic and flexible enough to modify plans as our predictions become more accurate—or if conditions change.

Those of us who live in the Upper Savannah River Basin are lucky to be able to construct such plans starting with a status of adequate water supplies. If the USRBC is successful, a robust plan will extend that status past the target date. This correspondent will continue to represent FOLKS and you can be sure that once the USRBC has formulated its report and plans, those will be made available to the public. Stay tuned. ✿


Transylvania
Cashiers
Horsepasture River
Toxaway River
Gorges State Park
Jackson
Nantahala National Forest
Highlands
Greenville
NORTH CAROLINA
SOUTH CAROLINA
Thompson River
Macon
Whitewater River
Bad Creek Reservoir
Jim Timmerman Natural Resources Area at Jocassee Gorges
Table Rock State Park
GEORGIA
Lake Jocassee
Rabun
Sumter National Forest
Devils Fork State Park
Keowee-Toxaway State Park
Jocassee Dam, Tailrace and Spillway Area
Salem
Pickens
Lake Keowee
Oconee
Little River
Six Mile
Keowee Dam and Tailrace Area
Liberty
Walhalla
Oconee Nuclear Station
Norris
Central
Hartwell Lake
Westminster
Seneca
Clemson
Anderson
Kentucky
Virginia
Tennessee
North Carolina
South Carolina
Alabama
Georgia
Project Location
Legend
Project Boundary
County Boundary
Stream
US Highway
Lake
National Forest / Natural Area
State Park / Natural Area
Urban Area
Keowee-Toxaway Relicensing
FERC Project No. 2503
Project Location Map
0 2 4 6 8
Miles
Data Source: Base data derived from ESRI 9.3 Base Data Layers, 2008.
Projection: NAD 1983 StatePlane South Carolina International Feet