

# Ala. Power: 'The voices were heard'

## Alexander City Outlook

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Jim Crew, who is driving the federal relicensing effort at Martin Dam for Alabama Power, had just one word to describe the community response exhibited at Wednesday night's public hearing. "Outstanding."

Crew said he'd noticed and heard about the brochures and emails that were circling the Lake Martin community and was impressed, but "I wasn't sure how it would actually play out." "But I was amazed at the turnout, and I know that it made an impression on the (Federal Energy Regulatory Agency Commission) representatives who were there," he said. More than 600 residents and other stakeholders from the Lake Martin area turned out Wednesday night to share their opinions on FERC's initial denial of Alabama Power's request to change the "rule curve" that governs the change in water levels on the lake.

The company wanted to see the water levels remain high later into the fall to extend the peak summertime levels that feed recreational industries on the water and keep lake lovers flowing through the businesses in surrounding communities like Alexander City, Dadeville and Eclectic. Specifically, they hope to maintain levels at or near summer pool through Oct. 15 rather than beginning the annual drawdown in mid-September.

Alabama Power also recommended a three-foot increase in the winter pool lake levels to increase the lake's navigable areas for fishermen and boaters.

The FERC representatives, Crew said, "had not seen or been involved in a (relicensing) public hearing with this many people sharing their voices."

"They made it clear that the voices were heard, and now they have a very good understanding of the importance of the issue to the community and their passion for it," he said.

When the company received word that its recommendation had been denied by FERC's staffers, Crew said he knew the "first piece of the puzzle" was to provide more data "to strengthen the case." "Part two of that puzzle was to make sure FERC's representatives were aware of the overwhelming support of the community for our recommendation," he said. "Puzzle piece No. 2 was taken care of (Wednesday) night."

The comment period on this draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Martin Dam continues until Aug. 13. Then, Crew said, the federal agency will begin working its way through the comments and "determine whether it should take a different direction or to change their draft EIS with a goal toward their final EIS."

The regulators, he said, were still "noncommittal," even in the face of the strong public support of

Alabama Power's recommendation, but "that's usually the way." They'll factor in the content and quantity of written comments submitted, Crew said, and determine the level of analysis that it demands

But regarding their final call, and whether the lake community's voices were truly heard, Crew said he "wouldn't even want to hazard a guess."

One contrary voice at the hearing came from Elmore County Commissioner Trey Taylor, who represents the Lake Martin community, Tallassee, Eclectic and other communities downriver. Taylor, whose family goes back generations in the cotton industry near Tallassee, was concerned the later drawdown and higher winter pools might increase the risk that a flood could damage homes and cotton-producing areas.

Crew said the company "obviously does not want to implement any recommendation to benefit one entity that's to the detriment of another." The downstream land of which Taylor was concerned, he said, is within the Federal Emergency Management's flood plain map. The impact of the slight increase in the 100-year flood is minimal, he said, especially considering the recreation benefits upstream. "We consider upstream and downstream folks equally important, but we're evaluating the impacts of entire project and balancing the impact on both," he said.

For more information on commenting, visit FERC's website at [www.ferc.gov/docs-filing/ecomment.asp](http://www.ferc.gov/docs-filing/ecomment.asp).