

## Opinion

### Editorial: Don't create a dam mess

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On the face of it, there's a superficial plausibility to Stanly County's argument that the Yadkin River is a state resource, ultimately owned by the people of North Carolina, and hence the state, rather than Alcoa, should be the proprietor of the string of power-generating dams along the river now that they no longer power local smelting operations.

Until, that is, you think of the larger, longterm implications. Look at the condition of many of our roads and bridges and then ask yourself: Do you really want the state of North Carolina taking over maintenance and oversight of Alcoa's four dams on the Yadkin — or, by extension, Duke Energy's empoundments on the Catawba? With its mental health quagmire, transportation deficits and parole system debacles, the state doesn't need any new streams of turmoil and strife.

It strains credulity to think that's the goal that Stanly (joined recently by Davidson County) really has in mind in its current public-relations campaign against Alcoa's federal relicensing agreement, which federal regulators are considering. Yet, that's what Stanly officials say they want: "It is the position of the Stanly County Commissioners that the best way to provide for the future of the Yadkin River is for the state of North Carolina and its public to be the undisputed owner of the (Alcoa-Yadkin) Project," one of their recent statements says, in addition to listing some complaints against the relicensing proposal.

So now, five-plus years into the relicensing process, at the request of Stanly, Gov. Mike Easley has asked that the relicensing be delayed for a year so that issues raised by Stanly County can receive more study. Easley's action comes after the relicensing agreement has already been vetted by three state agencies — the Division of Water Quality, Division of Water Resources and Wildlife Resources Commission. They are among the signees who agreed to the relicensing Agreement in Principle after months of meetings between Alcoa-Yadkin and more than 20 stakeholders.

Their approval doesn't mean this was a perfect agreement, by any means. To cite just one well-hashed imperfection of local interest: Salisbury refused to sign on because of its conviction — largely vindicated by federal review — that Alcoa should shoulder more responsibility for sedimentation problems at the city's water intake above High Rock Lake. Stanly raises some relevant issues, including the pace of cleanup of smelting waste sites and other contamination. Considering how the shutdown of Alcoa's local smelting operations affected Badin and Stanly County, you also can understand why these officials are particularly interested in how much Alcoa benefits financially from hydroelectric operations that generate profits, but few local jobs.

As a multinational, for-profit company, Alcoa is a tough negotiator, and you can't blame Stanly County for seeking to enlist the governor and other entities in its cause. To the extent that it focuses on specific relicensing issues relevant to Stanly and the state, further review might be beneficial. The state is a legitimate stakeholder, and it can claim some ownership of the process. But that's a far cry from trying to claim ownership of the dams.

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