

AP headline misleads readers about threat to Kansas power plant

While reading news from my home state of Kansas Tuesday morning (Aug. 28), a headline caught my eye on the Topeka Capital-Journal Web site: [Drought rais](#)

es concern at Wolf Creek nuclear plant: Cooling waters at John Redmond reservoir are dwindling. The article, which had been posted just an hour prior, was a five-paragraph AP story about concerns over the low water levels and the impact on the nuclear power plant.

Two things pulled me in to this article.

First, the dateline on the article was Burlington, Kan., something you don't see often. Burlington is home to both Wolf Creek nuclear plant and to me. I am very familiar with the operations of Wolf Creek, and the 5,000-acre lake that was made to cool it. In fact, in the 1970s the company that owns Wolf Creek purchased a considerable chunk of my father's farm in rural Coffey County, Kan. The former farmland is now several feet under water and provides the bed for the power plant's cooling lake, Coffey County Lake.

This leads me to the second reason for reading the article: Why did the headline reference a lake other than the primary cooling lake?

After reading the article I was even more confused. The headline led me to believe there was an issue due to drought conditions and the water level needed for cooling the nuclear reactor. But in just the second paragraph of the article power plant officials are said to feel the low water level poses no safety risk. So, I ask, why write the article? Or perhaps more

specifically, why reference the nuclear power plant in the headline and pair it with the wrong lake?

These questions sent me searching the web for the original, not the AP, article. The original was posted online on Aug. 27. It was written by Chad Lawhorn with the Lawrence Journal World. While the Lawhorn headline was not much better, [Diminishing reservoir levels raise nuclear plant and other concerns](#), the article was greatly improved.

Information from a Lawrence city official who also serves on the Kansas Water Authority board gave the Lawhorn article traction, and helped to convey the greater significance to the state lakes due to the drought. Lawhorn's version also provided quotes from Wolf Creek officials and an explanation of how the Coffey County Lake (the actual cooling lake) is designed to withstand extreme weather conditions.

In his article, Lawhorn explains the connection between John Redmond reservoir, the lake in the AP headline, and the Coffey County Lake, the primary cooling lake. After reading the full Lawrence Journal World article, I felt reassured that Wolf Creek engineering and planning would prevail against Mother Nature. I did not have that twinge of panic like I did after reading the AP headline.

As someone who follows agriculture and environmental news closely, I appreciate the concern over significantly lower lake water levels due to drought. The fact that John Redmond reservoir could be as low as 5 percent by Nov. 1 is of great concern.

However, I feel the headline used by AP is a gross misuse of two loosely, very loosely, related items. It is sensational and designed solely to pull in readers, as it did me. "But that is what a headline is supposed to do," you say. My concern is that it could also easily elevate worries over safety issues, when really there is no immediate safety issue.

The sensationalism of the headline is evident by how quickly it was picked up and posted online by other AP outlets. Less than 30 minutes after the cjonline.com post, I found the AP article had spread across the Internet and could be found on other sites like the [Sacramento Bee](#).

Furthermore, in the digital age, why not just use the entire Lawhorn article? The article was informative and well-written. The Lawrence Journal World is obviously part of the AP network. Using the full article would make better sense; unless of course, sensationalism, and not journalism, was the goal.