

November 13, 2001

Mr. Heinz J. Mueller, Chief
Office of Environmental Assessment
United States Environmental Protection Agency
Region 4
Atlanta Federal Center
61 Forsyth Street
Atlanta, Georgia 30303-8960

Dear Mr. Mueller:

In a letter dated July 16, 2001, you provided comments on the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) staff's "Generic Environmental Impact Statement for License Renewal of Nuclear Plants," (GEIS, NUREG-1437), Supplement 4, regarding the Edwin I. Hatch Nuclear Plant (HNP), Units 1 and 2. This final supplemental environmental impact statement (FSEIS) was published in May 2001. In this letter the staff responds to your comments.

First you asked that the staff define the term "small" as it is used in the FSEIS to describe environmental impacts, particularly with respect to surface and groundwater use conflicts. As discussed in the FSEIS (page 1-3 and other locations), the staff defines small impacts as environmental effects that are not detectable or that are so minor that they will neither destabilize nor noticeably alter any important attribute of the resource. This definition was developed starting from the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ's) definition of "significantly" (40 CFR 1508.27). In evaluating surface water use conflicts, the staff found that the maximum decrease in the level of the Altamaha River (the cooling water source for HNP) would be around 1 inch during periods of minimum river discharge. This level change is orders of magnitude less than the average annual level fluctuation. In addition, spawning of fish species of interest (e.g., shortnose sturgeon) occurs during periods of high river flow when the level change caused by HNP would be less than the 1-inch maximum. Based on these factors, and on the staff's review of the Clean Water Act 316(a) demonstration for HNP, the staff concluded that the potential impacts related to surface water use conflicts are small and mitigation is not warranted.

The staff also evaluated the potential for groundwater use conflicts. The staff found that the data on the aquifer used to supply groundwater for HNP indicates that the water usage by the plant is expected to have little effect on the aquifer. Specifically, data indicate that a properly designed well in the affected aquifer can safely yield approximately 1100 gpm. The two large onsite wells are designed to pump at 750 gpm, with actual plant groundwater requirements of approximately 126 gpm. In addition, tests showed that the onsite wells would not interfere with each other or with any offsite wells. Based on this information, the staff concluded that the potential impacts related to groundwater use conflicts are small and mitigation is not warranted.

You also recommended that further action should be taken by the NRC and Southern Nuclear Operating Company (SNC, the licensee for HNP) to plan for and implement future changes to

environmental regulations. To the extent that any changes in environmental regulations apply to HNP, SNC will have to implement these changes. However, the staff does not believe that any special measures or programs are necessary for HNP (as opposed to the myriad other facilities which would be affected by these regulations) to ensure that the appropriate actions are taken. SNC works closely with the various Federal and state regulatory agencies to ensure it complies with environmental regulations and the staff expects that this cooperation will continue in the future.

If you have any questions concerning these responses, please contact Andy Kugler of my staff at (301) 415-2828.

Sincerely,
Original Signed By: CACarpenter
Cynthia A. Carpenter, Chief
Risk Informed Initiatives, Environmental,
Decommissioning, and Rulemaking Branch
Division of Regulatory Improvement Programs
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Docket Nos. 50-321 and 50-366

cc: See next page

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*See previous concurrence

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Southern Nuclear Operating Company
Edwin I. Hatch Nuclear Plant Units 1 and 2

Docket Nos.: 50-321, 50-366

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