



United States Department of the Interior

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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11/9/00

65 FR 67418

(17)

July 25, 2002

P. T. Kuo, Program Director
United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Office of Public Affairs
Washington, DC 20555-0001

Re: FWS Log NG-02-462-Appl

Dear Mr. Kuo:

Thank you for your June 25, 2002 response to our November 27, 2001 comments on the "Generic Environmental Impact Statement for License Renewal of Nuclear Plants" regarding the Edwin I. Hatch Nuclear Plant. We submit the following comments and recommendations under the Endangered Species Act (Act) of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) and the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (48 Stat. 401, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 661 *et seq.*).

Endangered Species Act

The federally-listed shortnose sturgeon (*Acipenser brevirostrum*) is under the jurisdiction of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Requirements of section 7 of the Endangered Species Act with regard to species under the Service's jurisdiction have been satisfied. However, obligations under the Act must be reconsidered if (1) the project is modified in a manner not considered in the current ecology report; (2) a new species is listed or critical habitat is determined that may be affected by the project; or (3) new information indicates that the project may affect listed species or critical habitat in a manner not considered.

Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act

Currently there are two species in the Altamaha River, the Altamaha spiny mussel (*Elliptio spinosa*) and the robust redhorse (*Moxostoma robustum*), which are not listed at this time but may be listed in the future. The Altamaha spiny mussel is a Federal candidate species (as of June 2002) and the robust redhorse is a Federal species of concern. We would be happy to provide you with any information and technical assistance you may need.

The Altamaha spiny mussel is a freshwater mussel endemic to the Altamaha River drainage of southeastern Georgia. The historical range of the Altamaha spiny mussel was restricted to the Coastal Plain portion of the Altamaha River and the lower portions of its three major tributaries, the Ochopee, Ocmulgee, and Oconee Rivers. Recent surveys have revealed a dramatic decline in the number of populations and number of individuals within populations throughout the species'

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historical range due to sedimentation, increased turbidity, and contaminants. The Altamaha spinymussel is associated with stable, coarse to fine sandy sediments of sandbars and sloughs and appears to be restricted to swiftly flowing water. It has been found buried approximately 2 to 4 inches below the substrate surface.

Extremely active conservation efforts are underway to prevent listing the robust redhorse. This State of Georgia endangered species is the focus of an intensive interagency Robust Redhorse Conservation Committee (RRCC) formed by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 1995. Current members of the RRCC include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Georgia Power Company, Duke Power Company, Carolina Power and Light Company, U.S. Geological Survey Biological Resources Division, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, U.S. Forest Service, Georgia River Network, South Carolina Aquarium, and Georgia Wildlife Federation.

The historic range of the robust redhorse is believed to include Atlantic Slope drainages from the Pee Dee River in North Carolina to the Altamaha River in Georgia. The only recent verified records from natural populations are from the Pee Dee River, North Carolina, the Savannah River, Georgia/South Carolina, and the Oconee and Ocmulgee Rivers, Georgia. Based on the best available information, the RRCC believes that the limited geographic distribution may present a substantial threat to the survival of the species. Reproduction of this species appears to be sensitive to sedimentation. Robust redhorse require clean gravel beds for spawning and development of eggs and larvae. Greater amounts of fine sediment are related to reduced survival, caused by increased egg or fry mortality within the substrate.

A Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) was developed between the private sector, State, and Federal resource agencies in order to expedite the reintroduction of the robust redhorse into the Ocmulgee River. The long-term goal of the CCAA is to form an adult refugial population that will establish a self-sustaining population. Robust redhorse have been reintroduced into the Ocmulgee River between Lloyd Shoals Dam and a low head dam at Juliette, Georgia. Current telemetry studies show that tagged individuals have moved downstream past Juliette Dam and Hawkinsville.

If you have any questions or would like more detailed information on these species, please contact staff biologist Alice Palmer at (706) 613-9493 ext. 26.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sandra S. Tucker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "T".

FOR Sandra S. Tucker
Field Supervisor