United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Mississippi Field Office
6578 Dogwood View Parkway, Suite A
Jackson, Mississippi 39213
January 21, 2004

Proj-720
52-009

Mr. Pao-Tsin Kuo
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555-0001

Dear Mr. Kuo:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) received your letter dated January 8, 2004, regarding the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the construction of one or more new nuclear power plants in Claiborne County, Mississippi. Our comments are submitted in accordance with the Endangered Species Act (87 Stat. 884, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.).

The following listed species could be found in the proposed project area:

The endangered interior least tern (*Sterna antillarum*) migrates up the Mississippi River and lays its eggs directly on the sandbars associated with the river. Hundreds of these birds may nest together to form a colony.

The endangered pallid sturgeon (*Scaphirhynchus albus*) is found in the lower Mississippi River, although it is rare throughout its range. These fish require large, turbid, free-flowing riverine habitats, and feed mainly on other fish. They are usually found near the bottom of streams or lakes in sand flats or gravel bars. Little information is known on spawning or migration habits of these fish, although spawning likely occurs in the spring and summer months.

The breeding/spawning season for terns and sturgeons is approximately May through July. Avoidance of these areas during the above time would prevent adverse impacts to either species. Both species can change nesting/spawning areas from year to year, so an onsite survey for both species just before start of construction is recommended.

The threatened Bayou darter (*Etheostoma rubrum*) is found only in Bayou Pierre and its tributaries: White Oak Creek, Foster Creek, and Turkey Creek. The darter prefers stable gravel riffles or sandstone exposures with large sized gravel or rock. Habitat loss or degradation has been a major contributor to the reduction in bayou darter numbers.

Add: Laura Dudes
Steve Koenick
Andy Kugler
Tom Kenyon
Jim Wilson

D069

The threatened bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) is the only species of "sea eagle" regularly occurring on the North American continent. The bald eagle is predominantly a winter migrant in the southeast; however, increasing occurrences of nesting have been observed. The bald eagle nests in the transitional area between forest and water. They construct their nests in dominant living pines or bald cypress trees. Eagles often use alternate nests in different years with nesting activity occurring between September and January of each year. Young are usually fledged by midsummer.

The federally listed threatened Louisiana black bear (*Ursus a. luteolus*) occurs primarily in bottomland hardwood and floodplain forests along the Mississippi River and the southern part of the state. Although the bear is capable of surviving under a range of habitat types, some necessary habitat requirements include hard mast, soft mast, escape cover, denning sites, forested corridors, and limited human access. Forest management practices, agricultural, commercial and industrial development, and highways can cause adverse impacts to bear habitats by increasing human disturbance, fragmenting forests, and removing den trees.

All of the above listed species are very sensitive to human disturbance, and could be affected directly and also indirectly by the proposed projects. Therefore, before the use or transportation of any heavy construction equipment, or the removal of any vegetation within potential habitats, the Service recommends a qualified biologist conduct a visual survey for these species. Areas surveyed should also include ingress and egress areas, equipment storage areas, and staging areas.

The Service will provide you additional information and specific project recommendations during the EIS preparation process. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact Kathy Lunceford in this office, telephone: (601) 321-1132.

Sincerely,

Curtis B. James

Curtis B. James
Assistant Field Supervisor