Attachment 36 to

GNRO-2012/00039

Aquatic Ecology Audit Needs Attachment D: Correspondence to James Thomas, Enercon, from Stephen M. Ricks, Field Supervisor , United States Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Mississippi Field Office, Jackson, MS. February 8, 2010.

Attachment D

Mississippi Field Office Response 2010

United States Department of the Interior

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

February 8, 2010

Mr. James A. Thomas
Enercon
5100 East Skelly Drive, Suite 450
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74135

Dear Mr. Thomas:

The Fish and Wildlife Service has received your letter dated January 18, 2010, requesting information regarding federally listed threatened and endangered species on a site in Warren County, Mississippi. Grand Gulf Nuclear Station proposes to increase the licensed core thermal level at its existing power facility on the Mississippi River near Port Gibson, River Mile 406. 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 species could be found within a six-mile radius of the subject property:

The endangered fat pocketbook mussel *(Potamilus capax)* is found in the Mississippi River and associated tributaries. It is a broad, rounded, and slightly angular mussel with a smooth, yellowish exterior color that is frequently clouded with brown. Fat pocketbooks occur primarily in sand and mud substrates, although the species has been found in fine gravel and hard clay occasionally. Water depth ranges from a few inches to several feet. The fish host for this species is primarily freshwater drum.

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 aquatic invertebrates and other small fish. They are usually found near the bottom of streams or rivers on 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 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 breeding season for terns is approximately May

through July. Avoidance of these areas during the above time would prevent adverse impacts to this species.

The threatened Louisiana black bear (*Ursus a. luteolus*) occurs primarily in bottomland hardwood and floodplain forests along the Mississippi River. 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 habitat by increasing human disturbance, fragmenting forests, and removing den trees.

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.

The rabbitsfoot mussel (*Quadrula cylindrica cylindrical*), a Candidate Species, is an historical resident of the Bear Creek, Big Sunflower River and Big Black River watersheds. Population declines can be attributed to water-quality degradation, loss of stable substrates, sedimentation, channelization, gravel mining, dredging, impoundments, and competition of exotic mussel species.

Although the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) was officially removed from the List of Endangered and Threatened Species as of August 8, 2007, it continues to be protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA).

Bald eagles nest in Mississippi from December through mid-May in mature trees (e.g., bald cypress, sycamore, willow, etc.) near fresh to intermediate marshes or open water. Nest sites typically include at least one perch with a clear view of the water or area where the eagles usually forage. Bald eagles are vulnerable to disturbance during courtship, nest building, egg laying, incubation, and brooding.

The Service developed the National Bald Eagle Management (NBEM) Guidelines to provide landowners, land managers, and others with information and recommendations regarding how to minimize potential project impacts to bald eagles, particularly where such impacts may constitute "disturbance," which is prohibited by the BGEPA. A copy of the NBEM Guidelines is available at http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/issues/BaldEagle/NationalBaldEagleManagementGuidelines.pdf.

If you need any additional information, please contact our office, telephone: (601) 321-1132.

Sincerely,

for Stephen M. Ricks
Field Supervisor

Cc: Robert Smith, FWS, Lafayette, LA