



**UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001**

March 19, 2015

Mr. Tom Melius
Regional Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Midwest Region (Region 3)
5600 American Blvd. West, Suite 990
Bloomington, MN 55437-1458

Ms. Louise Clemency
Field Supervisor
Chicago Illinois Field Office
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1250 S. Grove, Suite 103
Barrington, IL 60010

SUBJECT: AVAILABILITY OF THE DRAFT SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR THE PROPOSED LICENSE RENEWAL OF BRAIDWOOD STATION, UNITS 1 AND 2, AND REQUEST FOR CONCURRENCE WITH THE U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION'S DETERMINATION THAT LICENSE RENEWAL WOULD NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT FEDERALLY LISTED OR PROPOSED SPECIES OR CRITICAL HABITATS

Dear Mr. Melius and Ms. Clemency:

With this letter, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC; the staff) is forwarding you a copy of its draft plant-specific Supplement 55 to NUREG-1437, "Generic Environmental Impact Statement for License Renewal of Nuclear Plants," regarding Braidwood Station, Units 1 and 2 (Braidwood), in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA); Title 10, Part 51 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* (10 CFR Part 51); and the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA). This letter refers to the enclosed document as the "Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement" (SEIS).

The purpose of this letter is threefold: (1) to notify the U.S. Fish and Wildlife (FWS) that the NRC staff has determined that the proposed license renewal of Braidwood would have either no effect on or would not adversely affect Federally proposed or listed species or proposed or designated critical habitat under FWS's jurisdiction; (2) to request the FWS's concurrence with the NRC's "not likely to adversely affect" determinations; and (3) to provide FWS with information on the NEPA public comment period and associated public meetings for the draft SEIS.

Project Summary

Braidwood is a two-unit, nuclear-powered steam electric generating facility that began commercial operation in July 1988 (Unit 1) and October 1988 (Unit 2). Braidwood is located about 80 to 97 kilometers (km; 50 to 60 miles (mi)) southwest of the Chicago metropolitan area and 32 to 40 km (20 to 25 mi) south-southwest of Joliet.

The NRC's Federal action is the decision whether to renew the Braidwood operating licenses for an additional 20 years of operation until October 2046 for Unit 1 and December 2047 for Unit 2. The NRC considers the remainder of the current operating license term as well as the renewed operating license term in its analysis of effects to ESA-protected species and critical habitats.

The enclosed SEIS addresses the environmental impacts of the proposed Federal action and alternatives. Chapter 3 of the enclosed SEIS describes the affected environment, including terrestrial resources, aquatic resources, and ESA-protected species and critical habitats. Chapter 4 assesses impacts to these and other environmental resources.

ESA Determinations

As part of preparing the SEIS, the NRC performed an assessment of whether the proposed license renewal of Braidwood has the potential to adversely affect any Federally listed or proposed species or proposed or designated critical habitats. This assessment is documented in Sections 3.8, 4.8, and Appendix C of the SEIS. The NRC considers the SEIS to fulfill its obligation to prepare a biological assessment under ESA section 7(c) and 50 CFR 402.12. Accordingly, the NRC did not prepare a separate biological assessment for the proposed Braidwood license renewal.

In a September 24, 2013, letter to the NRC, the FWS noted the possible presence on or near the Braidwood site of two Federally listed mussels—sheepnose mussel (*Plethobasus cyphus*) and snuffbox (*Epioblasma triquetra*)—and one proposed species—northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*). NRC staff found that the proposed license renewal would have no effect of snuffbox, and that it may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, sheepnose mussel. Any possible effects on sheepnose mussel would occur through possible entrainment and impingement of host fish species, some of which may be unknown at this time. The only known host species for sheepnose is sauger (*Sander canadensis*), and this species has never been reported in impingement and entrainment at Braidwood, so that any adverse effects are likely to be insignificant, if they occur.

FWS has proposed to list the northern long-eared bat as an endangered species throughout its range and also found that it could not determine critical habitat for this species at this time. Because FWS has identified the northern long-eared bat as potentially occurring on the Braidwood site; because FWS has identified the primary threat to northern long-eared bat as the disease white-nose syndrome, which is typically spread in the winter hibernacula and such hibernacula do not occur on the Braidwood site; because the Braidwood site has and would harbor little summer roost habitat; because that habitat has not been nor would be prime habitat for summer roosting; and because the applicant plans no landscape-altering activities, the NRC staff believes that any adverse effects on this species from the proposed relicensing of Braidwood would be small and insignificant. Accordingly, in Section 4.8 of the SEIS, the NRC

staff concludes that the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect the northern long-eared bat.

The NRC staff also considered five additional Federally listed species—Hine’s emerald dragonfly (*Somatochlora hineana*), eastern prairie fringed orchid (*Platanthera leucophaea*), lakeside daisy (*Hymenopsis herbacea*), leafy prairie clover (*Delea foliosa*), and Mead’s milkweed (*Asclepias meadii*)—and two species that are candidates for Federal listing—the eastern massasauga (*Sistrurus catenatus*) and rattlesnake-master borer moth (*Papaipema eryngii*). In the SEIS, the NRC staff concludes that the proposed action would have no effect on these species because none of the species occur in the action area.

Because the SEIS constitutes the NRC’s biological assessment, the NRC staff is submitting a copy for your review in accordance with 50 CFR 402.12(j). The NRC requests your concurrence with its effect determinations of “not likely to adversely affect” for the sheepsnose mussel and northern long-eared bat within 30 days of receipt of this letter. Although the NRC understands that FWS does not typically provide its concurrence with “no effect” determinations by Federal agencies,¹ the NRC also welcomes any comments you may have on its finding of “no effect” for the snuffbox and other ESA-protected species considered in the SEIS. You can submit your comments by letter directly to me or through the NEPA comment process described below. Should you need to discuss the project before making a determination, please contact Dennis Logan of my staff. Dr. Logan’s contact information is below.

NEPA Comment Period and Public Meetings

Pursuant to NEPA, the NRC is seeking comments on the draft SEIS through May 12, 2015. During the comment period, the NRC staff plans to hold two public environmental meetings at Godley Park District, 500 S. Kankakee Street, Godley, Illinois 60407, on Tuesday, April 21, 2015 at 2:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. The meetings will be transcribed and will include a presentation of the contents of the draft SEIS and the opportunity for interested government agencies, organizations, and individuals to provide comments on the draft report. I invite you and your staff to attend the public meetings and to submit comments on the draft SEIS. Go to <http://www.Regulations.gov> and search for documents filed under Docket ID NRC-2013-0169 for additional information on the NEPA process and on how to submit comments.

Conclusion

I look forward to future coordination with your offices to ensure the continued protection of Federally listed species and designated critical habitats at Braidwood and other NRC-licensed operating nuclear plants in your respective regions. If you have any questions regarding this

¹ [FWS] U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2013. “Consultations: Frequently Asked Questions.” Available at <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/faq.html>.

T. Melius and L. Clemency

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letter, please contact Dr. Dennis Logan, Biologist, at 301-415-0490 or by e-mail at dennis.logan@nrc.gov.

Sincerely,

/RA/

David J. Wrona, Chief
Environmental Review and
Guidance Update Branch
Division of License Renewal
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Docket Nos. 50-456 and 50-457

Enclosures:
As stated

T. Melius, and L. Clemency

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DISTRIBUTION: See next page

ADAMS Accession Nos.: ML15077A448 (package), ML15077A447 (letter)
Enclosures: ML15062A428 (draft SEIS) *concurrent via email

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NAME	IBetts	BGrange	BWittick	DWrona
DATE	3/19/15	3/19/15	3/19/15	3/19/15

OFFICIAL RECORD COPY

Letter to T. Melius and R. Clemency from D. Wrona dated March 19, 2015

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DISTRIBUTION:

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