



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

February 28, 2018

Ms. Debra Bills
Field Supervisor
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
2005 NE Green Oaks Blvd., Suite 140
Arlington, TX 76006

SUBJECT: REPLY TO REQUEST FOR INFORMATION RELATED TO THREE SPECIES OF FRESHWATER MUSSELS THAT ARE CANDIDATES FOR LISTING AS ENDANGERED OR THREATENED UNDER THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

Dear Ms. Bills:

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is in receipt of your letter dated January 31, 2018, regarding three species of freshwater mussels that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is currently reviewing to determine if listing these species as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA), is warranted. The three species, triangle pigtoe (*Fusconaia lananensis*), Louisiana pigtoe (*Pleurobema riddellii*), and Texas heelsplitter (*Potamilus amphichaenus*), are endemic to the east Texas region.

As part of its review of whether listing of these species is warranted, the FWS has requested information from its Federal partners, including the NRC, on available survey and distribution data; ongoing and planned activities within the range of the four species; the likelihood of future consultation if the species were to be listed; and conservation efforts currently being undertaken, among a list of other detailed requests. The NRC has reviewed the nuclear power plants and other NRC-licensed, authorized, and proposed activities within the range of the three species and determined that it does not have information responsive to FWS's information requests.

The NRC staff understands the three species to be restricted to Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana. The triangle pigtoe is endemic to the Angelina River, Attoyac Bayou, and Village Creek drainages within the Neches River basin in eastern Texas. The Louisiana pigtoe is endemic to the Little River basin in Arkansas; Calcesieu, Red, and Sabine River basins in Louisiana; and San Jacinto, Trinity, Meches-Angelina, Sabine, Big Cypress, and Sulphur River basins in Texas. The Texas heelsplitter has been documented or potentially occurs in Sabine River tributaries in Louisiana and the Neches, Sabine, and Trinity River basins in Texas. All three species require streams with stable substrate, an abundance of host fish, and low to moderate stream flows.

Two operating nuclear plants are located in Texas: Comanche Peak Nuclear Power Plant, Units 1 and 2 (Comanche Peak), in Glen Rose, Texas, and South Texas Project, Units 1 and 2 (South Texas), in Bay City, Texas. One operating nuclear plant is located in Arkansas: Arkansas Nuclear One, Units 1 and 2, in Russellville, Arkansas. Two operating nuclear plants are located in Louisiana: River Bend Station, Unit 1, in St. Francisville, Louisiana, and

Waterford Steam Electric Station, Unit 3, in Killona, Louisiana. However, activities associated with these plants do not affect any of the waterways in which the three freshwater mussels are known to occur.

In May 2011, the NRC staff assessed the impacts to construct and operate two new reactors at the Comanche Peak site.¹ While the NRC staff did not identify any records indicating that any of the three species of mussels occur at or near the proposed site, all three species occur in the vicinity of the Pineland Site, one of the alternative sites evaluated by the staff. The staff determined that only the Texas heelsplitter had the potential to be directly affected by the intake or discharge of water by the facility, if it were to be built at the Pineland Site. However, this review was suspended in November 2013 at the request of the applicant, and the approval to build and operate the new reactors is no longer being sought. Therefore, no impacts to the Texas heelsplitter or other two mussel species is expected.

The NRC has also assessed the environmental impacts of two additional nuclear reactors that would be constructed at the South Texas site.² The NRC staff did not identify any records indicating that any of the three species of mussels occur at or near the proposed site. While the staff determined that all three species occur in the vicinity of one of the alternative sites evaluated by the staff, the Trinity 2 site, this site was not ultimately selected for the new reactors. The NRC issued a combined license for the new reactors at the South Texas site in February 2016. Therefore, no impacts to any of the three mussel species is expected as a result of construction or operation of the new reactors.

Based on the above information, the NRC does not have any information relevant to the three freshwater mussels and does not anticipate that the FWS's potential future listing of these species or designation of critical habitat would necessitate ESA Section 7 consultation between the NRC and FWS. Similarly, the NRC does not have any relevant input regarding the additional questions listed in the FWS's January 31, 2018, letter.

Thank you for your coordination with the NRC related to your review of the triangle pigtoe, Louisiana pigtoe, and Texas heelsplitter. The NRC appreciates receiving the information provided in your letter as well as the opportunity to comment. If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Ms. Briana Grange, Biologist, at 301-415-1042 or by e-mail at briana.grange@nrc.gov.

Sincerely,

/RA by KFolk for/

Benjamin Beasley, Chief
Environmental Review and NEPA Branch
Division of Materials and License Renewal
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

¹ Final Environmental Impact Statement for Combined Licenses (COLs) for Comanche Peak Nuclear Power Plant Units 3 and 4. NUREG-1937. May 2011. Available at <https://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/nuregs/staff/sr1943/>.

² Final Environmental Impact Statement for Combined Licenses (COLs) for South Texas Project Electric Generating Station Units 3 and 4. NUREG-1937. February 2011. Available at <https://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/nuregs/staff/sr1937/>.

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