

OCCURRENCE OF THE WOOD STORK, BALD EAGLE, AND
RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER AT THE VEGP SITE
AND ALONG THE ASSOCIATED TRANSMISSION LINES

Prepared by Georgia Power Company
for submittal to
the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission

September 14, 1984

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THE PLANT SITE

Section 2.2.3 of VEGP's Environmental Report - Operating License Stage (ER-OLS) addresses endangered species that may be found at the site and nearby vicinity. The wood stork has recently (February 28, 1984) been designated as an endangered species and was not included in the endangered species section of the ER-OLS. The wood stork was observed on the plant site during the 1977-1981 bird study. This study was submitted to the staff by D. O. Foster's letter to H. R. Denton dated February 10, 1984. During the study period five wood storks (all in August 1981) were noted on site presumably from the Birdsville Colony in Jenkins County. The wood storks were in trees and were not observed foraging (feeding).

A recent study conducted by the Savannah River Plant(1) (SRP) identified main foraging areas on the SRP site and in the vicinity. There were no foraging sites identified by this study on the VEGP plant site. Two of the main foraging sites are on the SRP across the river from the VEGP. Therefore, wood storks can be expected to occasionally fly over the site and possibly stop at the site or nearby vicinity on their way to and from foraging areas across the Savannah River. Plant operations are not expected to impact the wood stork colony or foraging activities.

TRANSMISSION LINES

The transmission line rights-of-way associated with the VEGP are shown on Figure 1. These rights-of-way traverse a variety of ecological communities and habitats. Fly overs of the proposed rights-of-way were conducted to identify major habitat types associated with endangered species. Ground surveys have been conducted in specific areas to determine if the species are present. The following addresses occurrence along the transmission line corridors of the wood stork, bald eagle, and red-cockaded woodpecker.

Wood Storks

Ron Odom, Coordinator of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Endangered Species Program, was contacted to determine the proximity of the Vogtle transmission lines to wood stork colonies (rookeries). There are three known wood stork colonies in the State of Georgia.(2) They occur in Jenkins County (Birdsville Colony, see reference 1), Glynn County, and Camden County. These counties are designated with hash marks on Figure 1. Of these three counties, only Glynn County contains a transmission line associated with Vogtle. Odom requested that the exact location of the wood stork colonies not be made public. Instead, the location of the line was described to Odom and he gave an approximate distance to the colony. The above information and the SRP study was used to determine that all the colonies are greater than 10-15 miles from any transmission line associated with the Vogtle Project.

NOTE: Numbers in parenthesis refer to references listed at end of report

Wood stork colonies are very distinctive and are easily visible from the air. No here-to-fore unknown wood stork colonies were observed by Georgia Power Company (GPC) biologists during fly over or ground surveys of the proposed transmission line rights-of-way.

Bald Eagles

Discussions with Odom(2) revealed that there are three known active bald eagle nests in southeast Georgia. All three nests are associated with a coastal estuarine ecosystem. At the closest point the Vogtle-Thalman line is greater than 10-15 miles from an eagle's nest. Bald eagles, like other migratory birds, cross over transmission lines; however, construction and operation of these transmission lines are not expected to adversely impact bald eagles or their nesting habitat.

Eagle nests are generally distinctive and easily viewed from the air. No here-to-fore unknown eagle nests were observed by GPC biologists during fly over or ground surveys of the proposed transmission line rights-of-way. No eagle trees were observed within the right-of-way. An eagle tree is a large, usually dead tree overlooking a large expanse of water where eagles fish.

Red-cockaded Woodpecker

Figure 1 shows the known historical (inactive) and active red-cockaded woodpecker colonies that have been identified in the State of Georgia. This figure was reproduced from the report titled Distribution, Status, and Future of the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker in Georgia (3). Figure 1 shows five areas (designated by letters A through E) where an active or inactive colony exists in close proximity to a right-of-way.

The red-cockaded woodpecker is very habitat specific. This species requires mature to overmature southern pine stands (40 to 116 years of age) usually infected with red heart fungus for roosting and nesting. Clearcutting and short-term-rotation timber management currently being practiced in the Southeast have virtually eliminated this species from certain areas and reduced its numbers in the rest of its range. Short-term-rotation prevents the development of mature, diseased pine trees that are necessary for roosting and nesting (4).

Along with Ron Odom(2), Dr. Jerome Jackson (5), a noted red-cockaded woodpecker specialist, was contacted to discuss potential impacts of the rights-of-way. According to Dr. Jackson, as long as the construction and operation of the transmission line did not involve the actual removal of nesting trees or removal of a significant portion of suitable habitat, adverse impacts to this species should be minimal or nonexistent.

The Vogtle-Thalman 500 kV transmission line was surveyed by air and by foot. No suitable habitat that could support the red-cockaded woodpecker was observed within the right-of-way or within several feet on either side. Areas B (near the Burke-Screven County line) and E (near Fort Stewart) were surveyed by foot and no suitable habitat was found. The colony located at E in Effingham County (i.e. the colony closest to the right-of-way) was inactive as of 1980 (3). In Screven County, area B, three active colonies and four inactive colonies remained in 1980 (3). Area B is within the 36,000 acre Millhaven Plantation, a timber and soybean plantation. It is unlikely, in view of typical timber management practices, that the two colonies at area B are still active. This area is being resurveyed and authorities contacted to determine the status of these colonies and, if still active, their proximity to the right-of-way.

The Vogtle-Scherer 500 kV line has been surveyed from the air and by foot. In areas B and C there is indicated three colonies each. As of 1980, the three colonies in area B were inactive and of the three colonies in area C, two were destroyed and one is inactive (3).

The transmission line corridor between Wallace Dam and Plant Scherer does not cross any public lands but passes in close proximity to the Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge. Near the Ocmulgee River, the corridor is approximately 100 feet from a segment of the refuge at one point. Area D on Figure 1 is on the Piedmont Wildlife Refuge. Representatives of the refuge were contacted concerning the Wallace Dam-Scherer portion of the transmission line (6, 7). They were not aware of any colonies within the proposed rights-of-way. Also, they indicated that there were no active colonies on the south end of the refuge. Most of the suitable habitat and active colonies in this area occur on public lands where timber is managed to maintain or increase red-cockaded woodpecker habitat.

The area between Wallace Dam and Plant Scherer was surveyed by air and six locations were sited that looked like potential suitable habitat. These locations will be surveyed by foot in the near future to determine if there are any colonies in those areas. It will be necessary to obtain landowner permission to enter some of these areas. Preliminary car surveys in this area revealed that this land is mainly being managed for short-term-rotation timber thus lowering the likelihood of encountering any here-to-for unknown colonies.

The Vogtle transmission line rights-of-way will not adversely impact any of the known historical or active red-cockaded woodpecker colonies. Georgia Power Company has conducted aerial and ground surveys and has not identified any colonies of the red-cockaded woodpecker on or in close proximity to the transmission line rights-of-way. For the remaining areas identified along the Wallace Dam/Plant Scherer segment, ground surveys will be conducted in the near future. If evidence of red-cockaded woodpecker colonies is found, the NRC staff will be notified.

REFERENCES

1. Meyers, Joseph M., Wood Storks of the Birdsville Colony and Swamps of the Savannah River Plant, Savannah River Ecology Laboratory, SREL-15, UC-66e, March 1984.
2. Odom, Ron, Wildlife Biologist, Endangered Species Program Coordination, Department of Natural Resources, Route 2, Box 119A, Social Circle, Atlanta, Georgia 30279 (personal communication).
3. Proceedings of the Non-Game and Endangered Wildlife Symposium, August 13 and 14, 1981.
4. The Red-Cockaded Woodpecker, Selected Vertebrate Endangered Species of the United States, Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, FWS/OBS-80/01.7, March 1980.
5. Jackson, Jerome A., Department of Zoology, Mississippi State University, P. O. Box Z, Mississippi State, MS 39762. (personal communication)
6. Shell, R., Manager, Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge, Round Oak, Georgia 31038 (personal communication)
7. Mausaus, Mark., Biologist, Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge, Round Oak, Georgia 31038 (personal communication)

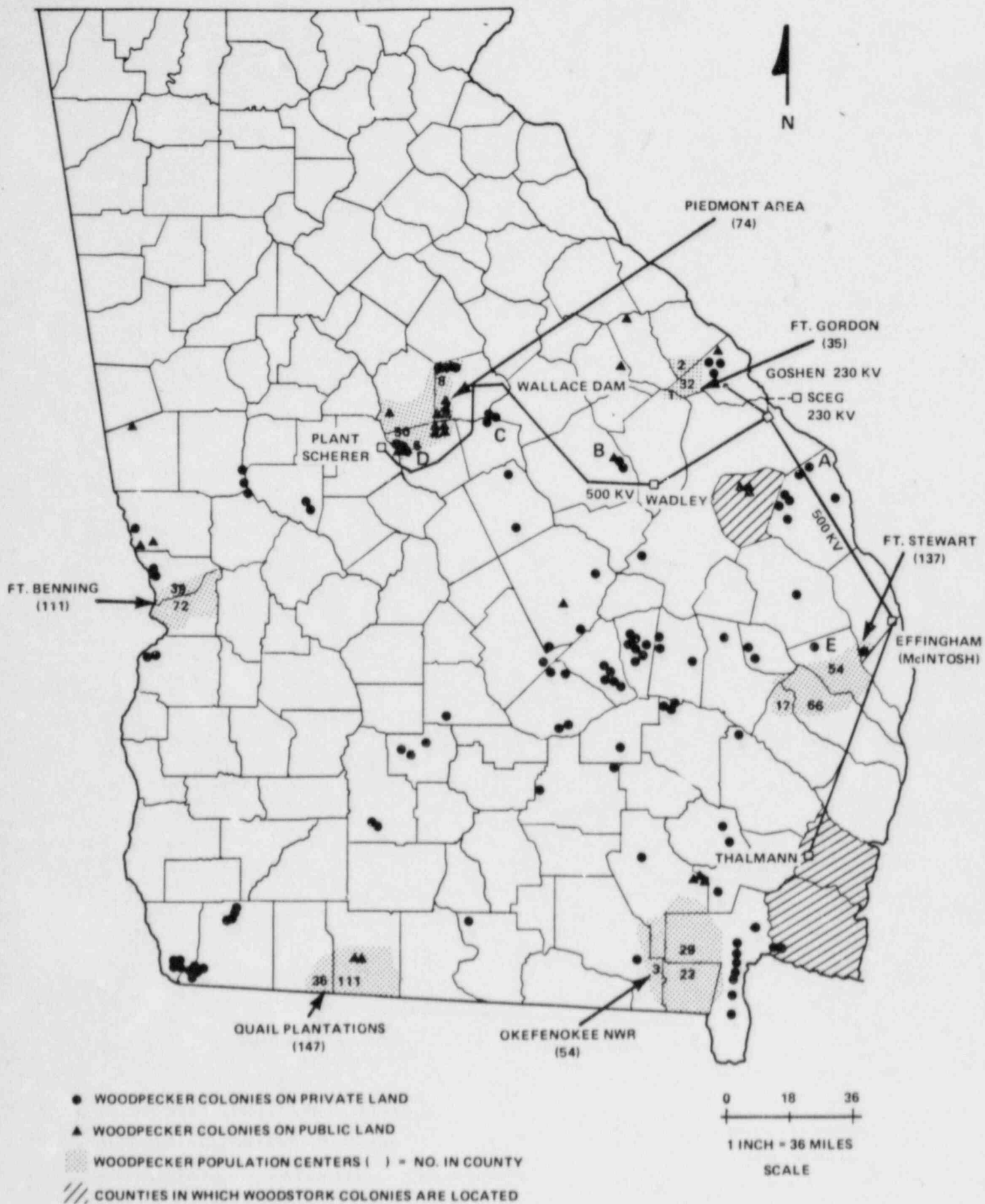


FIGURE 1. RED-COCADED WOODPECKER & WOODSTORK COLONIES IN GEORGIA