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Date: Wed, Jul 13, 2005 2:38 PM  
Subject: Department of the Interior Comments on DEIS for Early Site Permit (ESP) at the Grand Gulf ESP Site (NUREG-1817) (Virus checked)

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Attached is a PDF copy of the signed Department of the Interior comments on the subject draft environmental impact statement. Please send by return e-mail a response indicating that it has been received so that I can have it for our records. Thank you.

Steve Spencer

(See attached file: ER05364.pdf)

4/28/05

70 FR 28155

389

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# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance  
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IN REPLY REFER TO:

July 12, 2005

9043.1  
ER 05/364

Chief, Rules Review and Directives Branch  
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Mail Stop T6-D59  
Washington, DC 20555-0001

The U.S. Department of the Interior (Department) has reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), NUREG-1817, for an Early Site Permit (ESP) at the Grand Gulf ESP Site, Co-located with the Existing Grand Gulf Nuclear Station, Claiborne County, Mississippi. In this regard, we are providing the following comments for your use as you prepare the final document.

## General Comments

The applicant, System Energy Resources, Inc., is requesting the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to determine if the existing Grand Gulf Nuclear Site is suitable for installation of up to two new nuclear units. The site is on the east bank of the Mississippi River at River Mile 406, approximately 25 miles south of Vicksburg and 37 miles north-northeast of Natchez, Mississippi. The actual licensing or construction of a nuclear unit is a separate action and will require its own EIS.

## Endangered Species

We have determined that the federally-listed species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) described below could be found in the proposed project area and could be affected by the proposed project.

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.

The endangered fat pocketbook mussel (*Potamilus capax*) has recently been found in the main channel of the lower Mississippi River. The fat pocketbook occurs 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 life cycle of fat pocketbooks is similar to that of other freshwater mussels. They are long-term brooders, with females becoming gravid in the fall, retaining glochidia over winter, and releasing the progeny during spring and summer. The fish host for this species is primarily freshwater drum. The greatest impact on the fat pocketbook throughout its historic range has been from activities resulting in the loss of habitat and a reduction in water quality.

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 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 project. Therefore, before the use or transportation of any heavy construction equipment, or the removal of any vegetation within potential habitats, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommends the following:

1. Onsite surveys for federally-listed species should be conducted prior to any construction activities.
2. Important fish and wildlife habitats (e.g., wetlands, fish spawning grounds) should be avoided during construction of the proposed project. If unavoidable adverse effects to important fish and wildlife habitats would result from this project, those

impacts should be fully mitigated or compensated in-kind via close coordination with State and Federal resource agencies.

3. Existing water quality should be fully protected and maintained during construction, operation, and maintenance of the proposed project.

If a permit is required from a Federal agency for the proposed development, you must comply with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. The Federal agency, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, must conduct an analysis of the proposed project for potential impacts to federally-protected species. Using this analysis, the Federal agency (or its designated non-Federal representative) makes a determination of effect for federally-protected species. The Federal agency must make one of the following determinations: (1) no effect; (2) is not likely to adversely affect; or (3) is likely to adversely affect. "No effect" is the appropriate conclusion if the proposed action will not affect listed species. "Is not likely to adversely affect" is the appropriate conclusion when effects on listed species are expected to be discountable, insignificant, or completely beneficial. "Is likely to adversely affect" is the appropriate conclusion if any adverse effect to listed species may occur as a direct or indirect result of the proposed action or its interrelated or interdependent actions (50 CFR 402). If a "no effect" determination is made, the Federal agency is not obligated to contact the Service for concurrence. If a "not likely to adversely affect" determination is made, the Federal agency must contact the Service for written concurrence. If a determination of "likely to adversely affect" is made, the Federal agency must initiate formal consultation with the Service (See 50 CFR 402 for additional information).

### Wetlands

The proposed project could adversely impact wetlands and other waters associated with the Mississippi River. The Department will provide additional comments regarding wetland impacts during the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permitting process.

We recommend that the applicant coordinate early in the planning process with the State and Federal resource agencies. These agencies should be contacted for recommendations on measures needed to mitigate adverse impacts and compensate for unavoidable losses to fish and wildlife values.

### **Specific Comments**

Page 2-25, Section 2.6.1.3 Hydrological Monitoring, second paragraph - There is only one gauging station at Vicksburg, with river stage currently being monitored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and reported on their website. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) ceased to operate the gauge, number 07289000 (not 0789000 as reported in the document), on September 30, 1998. The river stage information collected by the Corps also is reported on the USGS website for convenience.

Corps website:

<http://www2.mvr.usace.army.mil/WaterControl/stationinfo2.cfm?sid=CE40FF58&fid=VCKM6&dt=S>

USGS website:

[http://nwis.waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/nwisman/?site\\_no=07289000&agency\\_cd=USGS](http://nwis.waterdata.usgs.gov/nwis/nwisman/?site_no=07289000&agency_cd=USGS)

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft EIS. If you have any questions concerning our comments, please contact Lloyd Woosley, Chief of the USGS Environmental Affairs Program, at 703/648-5028 or [lwoosley@usgs.gov](mailto:lwoosley@usgs.gov), and Kathy Lunceford from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the Mississippi Field Office, at 601/321-1132 or [kathy\\_lunceford@fws.gov](mailto:kathy_lunceford@fws.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen R. Spencer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Stephen" being more prominent.

Stephen R. Spencer  
Regional Environmental Officer