

Proposed Nuclear Power Expansion in Georgia Suffers Another Setback
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Proposed Nuclear Power Expansion in Georgia Suffers Another Setback:
Judges rule that barging impacts on Savannah River must be considered

Savannah, Ga. – Georgia utilities pursuing nuclear power expansion at Plant Vogtle were told by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s three-judge panel Friday that the impacts of the proposed restoration of navigation and dredging of the Savannah River must be considered before the federal agency can issue permits for the new nuclear reactors. This ruling was another victory for concerned public interest organizations engaged in an ongoing legal effort to prevent environmental damage from the proposed addition of two more reactors at Southern Company’s Plant Vogtle along the Savannah River, near Augusta, Ga.

“This ruling reminds us that certain new power plant proposals are not just costly to our pocketbooks but are costly to the water resources upon which our economy, residents and the environment rely,” said Sara Barczak, program director with Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, one of the intervening organizations in their Savannah field office.

Southern Company plans to use the Savannah River to barge components for the proposed Vogtle expansion. The organizations argued that barging would require dredging the channel, releasing massive amounts of water from lakes Hartwell and Thurmond. And the final Environmental Impact Statement for the early site permit, issued by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) in August, did not analyze these impacts. By admitting the new navigation contention, the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board agreed that these impacts must be considered now, and rejected Southern Company’s argument that these impacts are beyond the scope of the NRC’s permitting authority.

The Savannah River has not been used for navigation in three decades. In fact, the Army Corps of Engineers has allowed the river to begin recovering from the past uses and abuses. Starting commercial navigation would reverse years of the Corps’ environmental stewardship and collaboration. Resumption of regular commercial shipping on the river would require the Corps to use significant amounts of water from

upstream reservoirs. This could impact lake levels at Hartwell and Thurmond (two of the most popular Corps recreation sites in the country), the power generation capacity of reservoirs, and the water supply for other municipal and industrial users. Under recent drought conditions, releases from the reservoirs have been curtailed by the Corps to preserve water in the lakes. It is unlikely that current releases from the reservoirs would be sufficient to support barge traffic on the river.

Resuming commercial navigation for Southern Company's proposed nuclear expansion project would be an expensive project, requiring major dredging of over 116 miles from Savannah to Augusta requiring over 100 barge shipments to nuclear Plant Vogtle. Dredging could stir up contaminated, toxic and even radioactive sediment that could be costly to dispose. The impacts to water quality for water users and aquatic habitat as well as sport fisheries for striped bass, shad, and others could be devastating.

"It is gratifying to see that the Board agrees that dredging the river is a consequence of Vogtle expansion that should have been dealt with in the original Environmental Impact Statement," said Dr. Frank Carl, executive director of the Savannah Riverkeeper. "Indeed, dredging is a very disruptive activity that should be done only if no acceptable alternatives are available. Fortunately, there are alternatives."

The organizations have consistently stated that increased energy demand in Georgia and across the region should be met by aggressive energy efficiency and conservation measures and clean energy choices such as wind, solar and bioenergy. Throughout the legal challenge, the organizations have argued that these other energy measures pose significantly less risk to the economy, local communities and water resources while playing an important role more quickly and affordably reducing global warming pollution.

The Early Site Permit is the first step by Georgia utilities to obtain federal approval for new nuclear reactors at Plant Vogtle. Southern Company's nuclear division, Southern Nuclear Operating Company, filed for the permit with the NRC in August 2006 on behalf of Plant Vogtle's co-owners, Georgia Power (a subsidiary of the Southern Company), Oglethorpe Power, the Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia (MEAG Power) and Dalton Utilities. If approved, the permit could be used at any time for up to twenty years in any future applications with the NRC.

The Board will consider impacts of barging at a hearing, March 16-19, 2009 in Waynesboro, Ga. or Augusta, Ga.

Download the Savannah River navigation and dredging contention that was filed in September 2008.

Download the Atomic Safety and License Board Panel's ruling on October 24, 2008, accepting the filed contention listed above.

The original December 2006 petition filed by the intervening organizations can be seen [here](#).

For more information on the NRC's Vogtle early site permit application process, [click here](#).