

socioeconomic impacts that [sic] those projected in the FES. Two more recent Environmental Impact Statements analyze potential impacts at higher levels than those in the FES. The first of these analyzed potential impacts of converting and operating the Bellefonte site as a fossil-fueled power plant (Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Bellefonte Conversion Project, Tennessee Valley Authority, October 1997). The second analyzed the impacts associated with the production of tritium at various TVA nuclear sites, including the BLN site (Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Production of Tritium in a Commercial Light Water Reactor, U.S. Department of Energy, DOE/EIS-0288, March 1999). Impacts of a peak construction employment level of 4,500, almost the same as now projected, were analyzed in the latter report. Based on these analyses, we would anticipate that about 1,500 workers would move into the area at peak construction (at sometime during the fourth year of construction). Of these, about 1,100 are likely to move to Jackson County, and the remainder to surrounding counties. This number of movers would result directly in a population increase in Jackson County of about 3,000 persons or less at peak construction. The maximum impact on Jackson County schools is estimated to be somewhat less than 1,000 additional students, roughly a ten percent increase. This level of impact, however, would be only for a short time with lesser impacts leading up to this peak and following it. Impacts on other public services, such as hospitals, transportation, and utilities are discussed in more detail in the documents referenced above. They would be significant at or near peak, but the higher levels would have a relatively short duration. Possible impacts on construction worker shortages would depend on the magnitude of other construction projects in the larger area around the BLN site. The labor market area for construction workers is much larger than for most other types of work, and construction workers typically move around within large areas thereby decreasing the likelihood of significant problems for other construction projects. All of these impacts would occur gradually, as the construction workforce builds up to its peak during the fourth year. If construction resumes, TVA will work with state and local officials and civic groups to mitigate possible adverse socioeconomic impacts caused by activities undertaken to complete construction of BLN or to operate the plant after its completion.

Based on TVA's response, and the recent environmental impact statements cited above, the NRC staff concludes that, while the impacts will be larger if construction resumes, the mitigative actions will be commensurate with the larger impacts and, therefore, the conclusions reached in the FES remain valid.

The staff questioned if there were any projects or activities occurring or planned for the area that may lead to additional cumulative impacts to the surrounding population or to the natural

environment. TVA responded that, in general, this growth has consisted of numerous small-to-medium size changes rather than one or a few very large events, except for the starting and stopping of TVA nuclear construction. The projected construction employment would be a major addition to the economy of Jackson County. However, many of the workers would live elsewhere in the labor market area, including some who would temporarily relocate. Within the construction labor market area, the employment increase at peak construction would be about 46 to 50 percent of the recent annual increase in employment. During most of the construction period, however, the level would be smaller. In contrast to construction at or near peak, operating employment levels would be small compared to the normal growth of the area. In the 1974 FES, TVA committed to work with state and local officials and civic groups throughout the construction and operation of the BLN site to mitigate the possible socioeconomic impacts. Based on the above commitment contained in the FES, the conclusion of the FES remains valid.

Regarding threatened and endangered species, the NRC staff, in its June 5, 2002, letter, asked if any biota has been added to or removed from the list of threatened or endangered species for the BLN site environs (including transmission line rights-of-way) based on field studies or revisions to the threatened and endangered species list since the 1974 FES. TVA responded that no species indigenous to the BLN site have been added to the federal or state lists of threatened or endangered species since the original FES. The Peregrine Falcon has been delisted. Two species, the Bald Eagle and Indiana Bat, are currently listed as threatened or endangered for Jackson County, Alabama, by the Environmental Protection Agency. Osprey, Pandion haliaetus, is not federally listed, but is listed as threatened by the State of Alabama. Population levels of osprey have been increasing on Guntersville Lake, and several nests have been observed in the vicinity of Coon and Crow Creeks. This species would use shoreline habitats fronting the BLN site for foraging. The current list of federally threatened or endangered species for Jackson County, Alabama, contains several species which were not identified or discussed in the original FES for BLN. However, none of these except the Gray Bat are known to occur at or adjacent to the BLN site, including transmission line rights-of-way, and

none of these were added based on field studies at the BLN site. Gray bats forage in the sloughs and main channel of the Tennessee River. However, because of the nature of the activities undertaken at the plant and the distance of these plant activities from the foraging area, Gray Bats would not be adversely impacted by the proposed actions.

The staff also questioned if there were any known potential adverse impacts to any listed or candidate species that might result from the resumption of construction at BLN. TVA responded that resumption of construction activities at BLN would not be expected to cause adverse impacts to any Federal or State-listed or candidate species or their habitats. This is primarily because almost all ground or river disturbance construction activities have long since been completed. Therefore, resumption of construction is unlikely to have any significant effect on threatened or endangered species at BLN.

Since almost all of the construction required for completion of BLN as a two-unit nuclear plant has already been, at least, started, very few facilities remain that would require new land disturbance; therefore, most of the construction impacts discussed in the FES have already occurred. This action would extend the period of construction as described in the FES. It does not invalidate any of the conclusions reached in the 1974 FES. The proposed extension will not allow any work to be performed that is not already allowed by the existing construction permit. The extension will grant TVA more time to complete construction in accordance with the previously approved construction permit. In addition, it is the policy of the Commission that a licensee will notify the NRC at least 120 days before plant construction is expected to resume.

Based on the foregoing, the NRC staff has concluded that the proposed action would have no significant environmental impact. Because this action would only extend the period of construction activities described in the FES, it does not involve any different impacts or a significant change to those impacts described and analyzed in the FES. Consequently, an environmental impact statement addressing the proposed action is not required.

Environmental Impacts of the Alternatives to the Proposed Action

A possible alternative to the proposed action would be to deny the request. This would result in expiration of the construction permit for BLN, Units 1 and 2. This option would require submittal of another application for