Dated: May 10, 1999.

Bernard Kulik,

Associate Administrator for Disaster Assistance.

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TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY

Kingston Fossil Plant (KIF) Alternative Coal Receiving Systems, Roane County, TN

AGENCY: Tennessee Valley Authority

ACTION: Issuance of Revised Record of Decision.

SUMMARY: This notice is provided in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations (40 CFR part 1500 to 1508) and TVA's procedures implementing the National Environmental Policy Act. TVA has decided to adopt the preferred alternative (Alternative D) identified in its Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) on Kingston Fossil Plant (KIF) Alternative Coal Receiving Systems. A Notice of Availability of the Final SEIS was published in the **Federal Register** on April 2, 1999. Under Alternative D, TVA would receive coal deliveries via the existing rail line with minor upgrades. In addition, TVA would construct a new high-speed coal unloading/loading system in its existing coal yard at KIF. The previously planned new rail spur between Harriman and the existing coal delivery yard would not be constructed. This decision to adopt Alternative D supersedes the previous decision to build the new rail spur signed on March 10, 1997 and published in the **Federal Register** on April 3, 1997 (62 FR 15957–15960).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Harold M. Draper, NEPA Specialist, Environmental Management, Tennessee Valley Authority, 400 West Summit Hill Drive, WT 8C, Knoxville, Tennessee 37902–1499; telephone (423) 632–6889 or e-mail hmdraper@tva.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

The KIF receives by rail about 4 million tons of medium sulfur coal per year. This coal is transported by Norfolk Southern (NS) and CSX Railroads to Harriman, Tennessee. At Harriman (CSX origin), the coal is transported over a short NS spur for transport to NS's Emory Gap rail yard and then to TVA's Caney Creek yard. TVA then moves the coal by rail from Caney Creek yard to KIF, a distance of about 4 miles. While NS has direct access to Caney Creek, CSX trains are charged a switching fee, now approximating $2 million annually for use of the NS spur. This switching fee contributes to higher fuel costs at KIF when compared to the fuel costs at other TVA fossil plants. In order to enhance the competitiveness of the KIF plant and to provide more economical access to lower sulfur coals necessary to meet new air quality regulations, TVA investigated alternative methods of coal delivery to the plant in an EIS.

TVA provided public notice of its intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement on alternatives for coal delivery to KIF on May 22, 1995. A public meeting on the proposal was held on June 29, 1995. TVA released a draft EIS on May 15, 1996, and held a public meeting to receive comments on the document on June 11, 1996 in Kingston, Tennessee. All comments received were given due consideration in preparing the Final EIS. Notice of Availability of the Final EIS was published in the **Federal Register** on January 31, 1997.

Subsequent to the signing of a Record of Decision and prior to the beginning of construction, TVA received a proposal from one of the railroads affected by the decision for a new delivery system configuration that would avoid construction of a new rail spur. TVA decided to more fully evaluate this new, not previously available alternative in an SEIS. Notice of Availability of the Draft SEIS was published in the **Federal Register** on December 18, 1998. A public meeting was held on January 21, 1999 in Kingston, Tennessee. Six comment letters were received during the public comment period. The comments were given due consideration in preparing the Final SEIS. A Notice of Availability of the Final SEIS was published in the **Federal Register** on April 2, 1999.

Alternatives Considered

In order to reduce the fuel costs for KIF, direct rail delivery was evaluated because it would eliminate rail line switching fees, reduce operation and maintenance costs, and increase competition between the rail carriers. Alternatives initially considered included construction of an overland conveyor, a new barge unloading facility, and a coal slurry pipeline. Also, increased truck deliveries were considered. However, all of these were rejected because they were not feasible from an economic or engineering standpoint. A longer 13-mile rail line from Oliver Springs was also rejected on economic and other grounds. Three alternatives were initially formulated that represented economically feasible options. These were no action and two alternatives that involved construction of a new rail spur. In the SEIS, a fourth alternative, which would upgrade the existing rail line and install a new high-speed unloading and loading facility with stacking tubes to facilitate blending of coals, was evaluated.

Under *Alternative A,* No Action, conditions and impacts resulting from the existing coal delivery system would not change. However, this route, which passes through downtown Harriman, blocks five street crossings and impacts the ability of the city and county governments to provide emergency services during portions of the day. There are also ongoing noise impacts resulting from 30-car rail trips to the plant about six times per day.

Under *Alternative B,* Rail Spur Route #1, new rail spurs would originate at the CSX Harriman Yard or near the NS line at Walnut Hill. From north to south, the route would cross Bullard Branch and Quarry Branch (CSX spur only), pass south of the Fiske Road community, pass through the Harriman Industrial Park, cross the Emory River, and extend overland about three miles to the plant. Proceeding south from the Emory River, the route would cross Swan Pond Circle Road, cross an unnamed stream, pass under existing transmission lines, cross Swan Pond embayment on a causeway, cross Swan Pond Circle Road, cross Swan Pond Road, cross Swan Pond Creek, and link up with the existing rail line.

Implementation of Alternative B would result in the construction of a rail spur approximately 4.5 miles in length. From an infrastructure standpoint, trains would bypass downtown Harriman; however, in order to avoid two road crossings in a short distance, Swan Pond Road and Swan Pond Circle would need to be relocated near their junction, creating one crossing. Bridges would need to be constructed across the Emory River and two small creeks; and there would be a new causeway across Swan Pond embayment. Other traffic impacts would be that one existing and two new crossings would be blocked to allow trains to pass; however, because the roads are used less than the ones crossed by the current route, fewer vehicles would be impacted. Under this alternative, there would be 24,730 fewer vehicle crossings of the rail route per day than under the No Action alternative.

Trains following the new rail line would increase noise levels in the Fiske Road community of Harriman. However, the largest potential noise increase in this community over existing levels is 0.4 decibels (dBA). The quieter Swan Pond Circle Road community south of the Emory River would also be impacted

by operation of a new rail line. Noises in this community would result from crossing bridges, road crossing bells, train whistles, and wheel squeal due to track curvature. In this area, the largest potential noise increase would be 2.0 dBA over existing levels. In order to reduce this impact, welded rail would be used rather than jointed rail in the Swan Pond Circle area. Construction of the rail spur in Alternative B would result in the loss of 7 acres of prime farmland and a 5-acre beaver-created wetland. However, to the extent practicable, TVA would locate the rail spur above the 750-foot contour in the Swan Pond embayment area to avoid wetland involvement. With strict adherence to Best Management Practices during construction of the proposed rail spur, no significant impacts to water quality, floodplains, wildlife, recreation, or endangered species are expected. However, because the rail construction would take place in a karst geology area, there is some risk of sinkhole subsidence. This would be minimized by proper geotechnical investigations. Approximately 43 views from residences would be affected. There would be a 31 percent reduction in locomotive emissions as compared to the No Action alternative. An archaeological survey of the proposed route identified four sites that were eligible or potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places that could be impacted by the proposed route. These impacts would be mitigated by conducting data recovery excavations. Although most of the area is sparsely populated, it appears that compared to the no action alternative, fewer minority population groups would be affected; however, slightly more low income individuals would be affected.

Under *Alternative* C, Rail Spur Route #2, the route would not cross Swan Pond embayment after crossing under transmission lines, but would proceed south along the east side of Swan Pond, cross Swan Pond Circle Road, cross the narrow embayment fronting the KIF ash stack on a causeway, and run parallel with Swan Pond Road and the existing rail line to the plant rail yard. Implementation of Alternative C would result in construction of a rail spur 4.75 miles in length. Under this alternative, there would be 28,600 fewer vehicle crossings of the rail route per day than under the No Action alternative. Construction along the Alternative C route would not result in loss of prime farmland and would only involve minor wetland crossings. Approximately 37 residential views would be affected. There would be slightly higher impacts on low-income individuals than Alternative B. Other impacts would be similar to those of Alternative B.

Under *Alternative D*, New Coal Unloader and Blender Facility, the origin part of the coal burned at KIF would be different, resulting in impacts from the transportation of this coal along a different route. While eastern coal from Tennessee and Kentucky would continue to be transported to Kingston, a blend of eastern and western Powder River Basin coals would be burned. Trains arriving from the West or from the East would utilize rapid discharge hopper cars. The hopper cars would arrive as part of ''unit trains'' consisting of 90 to 120 cars. These would be longer trains than the ones currently used under the No Action Alternative. If coal were blended only for Kingston, implementation of Alternative D would mean fewer passes per day. However, TVA anticipates that coal would also be blended for two other facilities, John Sevier Fossil and Bull Run Fossil plants. The number of train passes per day at a given intersection would not change if blending for other plants also takes place at KIF. A loaded train would begin unloading operations while slowly moving at less than one mile per hour. This alternative would involve occasional nighttime deliveries which may increase noise heard by nearby residents. In addition, emissions from locomotives would be increased due to the longer coal transport distances. However, plant emissions would be greatly reduced due to the burning of western coal. In addition, existing crossings at U.S. 27 and Carlock Avenue in Harriman would be removed, decreasing delays for traffic and emergency vehicles in the area. No additional property would be needed, and there would be no new floodplain, wetland, cultural resource, or environmental justice impacts, in comparison with No Action.

TVA Decision

The Final SEIS identified Alternative D as the preferred alternative. Alternative D avoids the construction of a rail line at a new location, and as a result avoids wetland, cultural, navigation, water quality, and prime farmland impacts. It also eliminates two heavily used railroad-highway intersections, and reduces sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions from plant boilers. With the implementation of Alternative D, TVA would be able to reduce fuel costs and produce electricity at the lowest possible rate.

After carefully considering all comments, TVA has decided to implement Alternative D.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

Because Alternative A, No Action, would result in no change in existing conditions, it could be characterized as the environmentally preferable alternative. However, Alternative A does not accomplish the goal of reducing fuel costs. Of the action alternatives, Alternative D is substantially better from an environmental standpoint than the two rail spur alternatives because it does not involve construction along a new rail corridor and does not have effects on wetlands, floodplains, water quality, and prime farmlands.

Environmental Consequences and Commitments

In evaluating Alternative D, TVA found that occasional nighttime deliveries may increase noise levels. In addition, construction noise may also be noticeable at night. While sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and lead emissions would decrease in comparison with the other alternatives, other emissions would slightly increase due to the longer coal transport distances. In commenting on the Final SEIS, the Environmental Protection Agency recommended that noise levels be monitored at nearby residences and requested commitments to noise mitigation. TVA has decided to commit to construction noise mitigation measures, including inspection of equipment for muffler effectiveness, limitation of high noise operations to daylight hours, minimization of second and third shift construction activities, and notification of nearby residents during any blasting operations. The noise impacts from unit train unloading and locomotive movement at night would be infrequent and have an incremental impact of only 2 to 3 decibels (dBA) above current levels in the area. Therefore, TVA does not believe that monitoring of noise levels or implementation of physical noise barriers would be needed. However, TVA will reconsider train noise mitigation measures if night deliveries become a frequent occurrence.

Dated: May 7, 1999.

Kathryn J. Jackson,

Executive Vice President, River System Operations & Environment.

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