

EXPERTS: MAJOR DAMAGE TO REGION'S WETLANDS SEEN IF LEVY NUCLEAR REACTOR GETS LICENSE TO MOVE AHEAD

Groups: Progress Energy Relying on the Kind of Weak Geology Review That Should No Longer Pass Muster Now that a Respected Geologist Heads the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

BRONSON, FL. – October 31, 2012 – Some of Florida's limited remaining fresh-water wetlands are at serious risk if Progress Energy's problem-plagued Levy nuclear power plant project is allowed to proceed, according to experts testifying here today before a three-judge Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) panel.

Expert testimony from scientists appearing before the NRC judges on behalf of the Ecology Party of Florida and Nuclear Information & Resource Service (NIRS) warned that construction and operation of the proposed dual reactors would deplete the region's aquifer, cause saltwater intrusion to the already-imperiled local water supply, and harm fragile springs and wetland plants and wildlife in the area.

The location of the proposed two-reactor project is nine miles inland from the Gulf coast, in an ecologically rich area consisting of forest and more than 700 acres of fresh-water wetlands. The wetlands play a critical role in the ecological health of the region and provide habitat for endangered and threatened species such as the Florida manatee and wood storks.

“We are talking about Progress Energy trashing important wetland areas of the United States,” said Ecology Party of Florida Treasurer Gary Hecker. **“The notion that a massive nuclear reactor project can reverse the flow of water from fresh to saltwater and have no impact on this delicate ecosystem is preposterous. And we take no comfort whatsoever in Progress Energy's glib assertions that the problem somehow can be ‘mitigated’ after massive and most likely irreversible damage is done in the region.”**

Mary Olson, [director of NIRS' Southeast U.S. office](#), said: **“Now that the NRC is headed by a respected geologist, our hope is that the very weak geology science that went into the Levy reactor site review will be a thing of the past. Knowing of NRC Chair Allison Macfarlane's outstanding credentials, it is our hope that a review that blindly rubberstamps the wishes of industry will be replaced by a more independent and serious-minded approach to bona fide geology concerns.”**

The testimony of the experts contradicts an environmental study prepared by the NRC finding that the effects of the two reactors on the wetlands will be relatively minor.

The groups and their experts contend the NRC's conclusion is wrong because it grossly oversimplifies the complex karst geology and hydrology of the region. Experts on karst geology testified that the planned water withdrawals will very likely dry up springs and wetlands in localized areas throughout the region, threatening wildlife and the fragile wetland ecosystems and causing existing wells to become more saline.

The Ecology Party of Florida is a political party that believes that environmental protection is of paramount importance because without a healthy environment quality of life suffers.

Nuclear Information and Resource Service, founded in 1978 by grassroots activists, serves as an information clearinghouse for members of public concerned about nuclear safety. NIRS also promotes a non-nuclear U.S. energy policy.

MEDIA CONTACT: Alex Frank, (703) 276-3264, or afrank@hastingsgroup.com.