

NRC holds hearing on Utah's proposed nuclear power plant

Published: Thursday, Oct. 27, 2011 9:26 a.m. MDT

ROCKVILLE, Md. — Blue Castle officials presented details to federal regulators Thursday of an analysis on a proposed nuclear power plant site near Green River, Utah.

The details related to seismic evaluations, environmental analysis and geo-physical surveys were heard at a day-long hearing by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission as part of the early site permit process.

Blue Castle Holdings is proposing to put a two-unit nuclear power plant on the 1,700-acre parcel west of Green River.

The licensing process before the federal regulatory agency takes years, with extensive environmental reviews and site preparation that have to take place.

This first hearing was designed to give Blue Castle a heads up about the expectations of the NRC about what site analysis is required.

The actual permit will not be submitted until early 2013, said Joe Manicelli, project manager of an engineering and environmental firm hired by Blue Castle.

Manicelli said the firm and Blue Castle have surveyed the parcel of land for such things as endangered species and are working with the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program because the nearby Green River is home to several species of endangered fish.

Blue Castle has also meet with multiple agencies such as the Utah Department of Public Safety and the Utah Department of Environmental Quality to develop an emergency plan required for such a facility.

Manicelli said a number of wells have been drilled for groundwater sampling, as well as bore holes for seismic analysis.

Much of the work remains in the analysis stage, and NRC has made two visits to the site.

The water required for the plant's cooling process hinges on a pending decision by the Utah State Engineer's Office, which has received applications to divert 53,600 acre feet of water from the Green River.

The water would be leased from the Kane County and San Juan County water districts, which acquired it from two companies when a pair of coal-fired steam generation power plants were not built.

Environmental groups and some government agencies have filed protests over the proposed diversion, asserting that the Green River cannot sustain such a withdrawal.

Aaron Tilton, a former Utah legislator and now chief executive officer and president of Blue Castle Holdings, said 2.2 percent of the state's water is used to generate electricity. By comparison, the nuclear power plant would use less than 1 percent of the state's water to generate 50 percent more electricity, he said.

He said studies show that even in extreme drought conditions, the 3,000-megawatt plant would affect the river's level by less than an inch.

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