



Coal plant a surprise to area

Thursday, October 30, 2003

By **MARILYN FONTENOT**, marilynfontenot@npgco.com

An energy company's announcement today to build a coal plant in Atchison surprised some city leaders.

When Great Plains Energy Inc., the parent company for Kansas City Power and Light, said the company plans to build a coal-fired power plant near Weston, it also announced plans to build one in Atchison County.

Glenda Purkis, president of the Atchison Area Chamber of Commerce, said she knew of plans for a coal plant near Weston but she wasn't aware of formal plans for a plant to be built in Atchison. She said she knew that Steve Caplinger of Stranger Creek Realty was working with a company to get options on land but she didn't know whom it was or why they wanted land – a lot of land, she said. Mr. Caplinger couldn't be reached for comment this morning.

"Confidentiality was the utmost importance to them," Mrs. Purkis said. "It's been a long time – so long that I actually forgot about it. As I recall, the contact came in from the (Kansas Department of Commerce and Housing). They asked for a list of realtors."

Doug Berka, regulatory project manager for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said the Corps called a meeting Tuesday between the energy company and several other state and federal resources agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, the Missouri Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and members of the Ozark Chapter of the Sierra Club. The meeting was held at the Iatan, Mo., plant.

"Atchison never came up in the discussions Tuesday," Mr. Berka said. "If they're proposing to build that then all that information would have to come from Great Plains. If and when they determine it to be a feasible project, then they may need to get a permit from us."

However, in a handout passed out at the meeting Tuesday, the Atchison plant was mentioned several times. Great Plains said a study conducted in January 2002 found about 15 to 20 acres of wetlands could be impacted at the Atchison site.

"Some land was not available for purchase. Consequently, the site has been moved and no estimate of impacted wetlands for the Atchison site is available. When the permit application was submitted for Weston, the Atchison site was an alternative but now Great Plains is proceeding with simultaneous permitting of both sites," the handout said.

Mr. Berka said part of the meeting was held so the Corps could get more information and input before it

issues a permit for construction. Because the proposed plan, adjacent to the Iatan plant, is resulting in fill of some wetlands on existing farm fields, the Corps has asked for more information and comments. The proposed coal plant at Iatan is an 850-megawatt pulverized coal-fired unit

“They’re looking at impacting about 43 acres of mostly farm wetlands which will be under the footprint of the facility,” Mr. Berka said. “They are looking at potential mitigation opportunities to recreate wetland acres to offset those that exist on the site. They haven’t acquired any land yet for the mitigation process.”

Atchison Mayor Dan Garrity said he didn’t know of plans for a plant to be built in Atchison County, nor Atchison County Commissioner George Ross Jr.

Mrs. Purkis said she didn’t know if commissioners needed to know about the possible construction of a power plant in the county because the county isn’t zoned.

Melissa Blakely, an organizer for the Sierra Club, said in a press release that coal-burning power plants create huge emissions. They generate acid rain chemicals, emit air-borne mercury, exacerbate smog and contribute to global climate change, she said.

“We know global warming has the potential to disrupt virtually all the lovely outdoor habitats we have fought to protect over the years, as well as making life difficult for humans in many ways,” she said. “All coal-fired power plants emit huge amounts of carbon dioxide, which is the primary greenhouse gas causing global warming.”

Tom Robinson, a spokesman for Great Plains, said in a previous interview that construction on the Iatan plant could begin as early as 1004. He said he didn’t know when construction on the Atchison would start but he did say the two plants combined would be huge. Plans for the Atchison plant call for it to be located about eight miles south of the City of Atchison. However, the company hasn’t applied for permits for the Atchison plant.

“The proposed power plant that we are looking at permitting is directly adjacent to the Iatan plant,” Mr. Berka said. “It could take about 4 to 6 months before we render a decision. We are waiting for some information to be submitted by Great Plains and the individuals that attended the meeting on Tuesday. We didn’t discuss any plans for an Atchison plant. If they have plans, they haven’t told us.”