

Expansion of the Nuclear Energy Industry; Devastating Impacts on the Savannah River Watershed

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“U.S. Supports New Nuclear Reactors in Georgia” – The New York Times, Feb. 16, 2010

The Savannah River forms the border between South Carolina and Georgia.

In South Carolina, Friends of the Earth is challenging at State Supreme Court the federal loan guarantee attempt to expand the nuclear industry.

South Carolina Public Service approved a plan for two additional nuclear reactors at V.C. Summer nuclear plant site near Columbia and about a hundred miles from the South Carolina Savannah River Site. Among Friends of the Earth objections: costs of new nuclear projects will be tacked on to electric bills; the loan-guarantee mechanism forces U.S. taxpayers to underwrite the projects' corporate investors and hides fiscal accountability.

The new reactors (AP-1000s) are to be supplied by Westinghouse (Toshiba owned ~ Japan); the Wall Street Journal notes four AP1000's are being built by the Chinese, with the design not yet approved by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission due to uneasiness about the reactor's ability to withstand earthquakes. Other reactors considered for loan guarantees contingent on NRC licenses, are in Maryland (Unistar, Calvert Cliffs); Texas (2 at NRG's South Texas Project, and the two new Georgia reactors as announced by the President. Meanwhile South Carolina's Duke Energy has applied to build 2 new Westinghouse AP1000 reactors for its William States Lee Site II, Cherokee County. In early February Duke noted excessive tritium levels in two of the monitoring wells at its Oconee Nuclear Station, a three reactor station at the headwaters of the Savannah River. Oconee's forty year licenses have been renewed another twenty years.

The watershed of the Savannah River is already at severe risk through contamination by the U.S. owned Savannah River Site, Barnwell County on the South Carolina side of the river. Nightslantern's environment page [December 17th](#), noted U.S. Department of Energy plans for two new plants to process weapons grade plutonium at the Savannah River Site. Production of MOX fuels from weapons grade plutonium increases risk of alpha particle radiation through large amounts of liquid waste. As [previously noted](#) the U.S. has reclassified drinking water standards: “residual high-level waste” is renamed “incidental waste” multiplying by a hundred risk of alpha radiation in drinking water. Savannah River Site facilities started in the 1950's produced 40% of the U.S. nuclear warheads arsenal; the Site is increasingly used for nuclear waste storage after the most recent [1.6 billion dollar](#)

[contamination reduction operation; nightslantern noted a nuclear waste warning for the Savannah River watershed, March 24, 2008](#), due to extended 'temporary' storage of nuclear waste. Utah recently refused two new trainloads of nuclear waste from the facility. Barnwell County also receives low level radioactive waste from eight Southern states in the Southeast Interstate Low-Level Radioactive Waste Management Compact. An expanding U.S. nuclear program has no humane answer to the nuclear waste storage problem. This strongly suggests terminal contamination of some portion of the land mass; nightslantern continues to note an early warning for ecocide in Canada and particularly northern Ontario currently being prepared for nuclear storage by [Canadian government information programs](#) targeting First Nations peoples of the area. Envisioning the increased use of local nuclear facilities for long term storage of radioactive wastes, the Attorney General of South Carolina has stated plans to take the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to court.

On the Georgia side, threatening the Savannah River watershed with finality, the Obama administration has approved a loan guarantee for Southern Company's two new nuclear plants to accompany Southern's two reactors at its Vogtle Plant Site in Burke County (25 miles downriver from Augusta). Reuters notes a division of Southern runs the plants for - Georgia Power (another division of Southern), Oglethorpe Power, Georgia's Municipal Electrical Authority, among less heavily invested partners. In Georgia electric bills carry costs of the current energy projects. The Savannah River already carries a terrible overload of nuclear facilities yet supplies drinking water for the City of Savannah (Wikipedia demographics: 57.08% African American). Georgia's Environmental Protection Division's Environmental Radiation Surveillance Report 2000 - 2002 (subsequent information is not available - the U.S. Department of Energy withdrew funding for Georgia's radiation monitoring of the U.S. owned Savannah River Site) revealed excessive levels of radiation in fish, animals, milk, vegetation and fauna, drinking water, and air samples, all along the river.

A historical note on the Savannah River watershed:

history reveals a region currently at risk where people have been sacrificed to economic interest since the 16th century. In 1540 the Spaniard Hernando deSoto reached what is now Augusta Georgia. Spain's claim to the area lasted about a century. Spanish called the Savannah river, "Rio Dulce." Paleo-Indian remains and artifacts in the area trace back to 12,000 B.C. or earlier. At deSoto's incursion the "first" peoples were the Apalache, mound builders from the Mississippian culture, muskogean-speaking and to the east, called "Coosa." DeSoto's account shows native community patterns similar to an early Icelandic account, c.1000 AD, carried in the Bjorn Asbrandson saga. The mound building culture "disappeared" about 1560. Portions may have survived as fragmented smaller southern tribes of the Creek confederacy. First Nations people called the river "Isondega." When the French traded in the area - Jean Ribault named the river "La Grande." With the founding of Charleston South Carolina about 1670, the English colonists (Carolinians) worked the Indian trade aggressively. The "Indian trade" was for animal skins and in return for guns, Indians as slaves, often exported to Caribbean Island plantations. Guns and the commercialization of slavery were the first formative European cultural contributions to the region. The Westo tribe of Indians pushed from the north by Iroquois (with Dutch arms) settled in the Savannah river area from 1600 to 1680, and were used by the English to fight the Spanish, allowing points north of the Savannah (called the Westobou river for a while) to develop an English based culture. The colonists double-crossed the Westos for control of the Indian slave and deerskin trade: in 1680 the Savanna (Shawnee / Algonquin also from the north) were set against the Westos and won the river's current

name. At English founding of Savannah Georgia in 1733, a peace was made with Indian tribes who controlled the interior of Georgia and the 18th century witnessed a conflict of basically English and usually Creek (including "Appalachians") cultures. French Huguenot influx into Charleston was absorbed by the English. To note: early fragmentation of the mound-building culture into place and river-named tribes allowed some portions of the primary culture to make peace with European incursions / colonization but piecemeal, while other portions made war. As Georgia made peace with the Indians, Indian wars continued in the Carolinas. On the Carolina side of the river the Yamassee revolt of 1715 was a war against the English as well as a gathered First Nations rebellion against the selling of their peoples. Europeans encouraged classification and fragmentation of tribes to set one group against another and "legitimize" through treaties, the takeover of hunting, trading, land and human rights. There isn't much new to say of English Colonial controls. The commercial slave trade of Africans is well known and well documented. The ownership of people, their lives and their deaths, was slow to be considered a crime, with its parallel to today as the fate of the region's people and generations rests with a nuclear industry. The context of white slavery for a majority of early immigrants is less well-known and remains essentially suppressed. The coining of individual liberty for economic units of indentured servitude extended from the slavery of indenture to all in poverty. Indenture maintained the principle that people could be bought and sold. Manifests of the ships from England note the wealthy, tradespeople, convicts under sentences of indenture, and indentured servants who were effectively without rights until their terms of indebtedness were complete. American control after a war for Independence, transferred use of the land from one wealthy European group to another. It did not free slaves, black, white or Indian. Eurocentrically it did not break the economically imposed slavery of the poor who sold themselves or were sold or sentenced into slavery. The richness of Colonial and American history finds its way back to initial purposes of colonialization, coining the land for profit to a few, requiring some form of slavery for others. Shared cultural and economic patterns of slavery prepared the region's people for continuing an unacceptable injustice. Poverty was enforced by the region's defeat in the Civil War and subsequent Reconstruction. Black slaves were free until they were forced back into a slavery of common poverty. A racism quite apart from the commonality of servants and slaves, was encouraged in the post Civil War South, setting the poor against each other. When maximum profits necessary to colonization could no longer be taken from the region it was used as a non-unionized low wage labour pool by government / northern capital, and for soldiers, where one of the largest influxes of investment became in the 20th century... the nuclear industry. Six of the seven new plants under consideration for NRC "loan guarantee" approval are in former slave states, each with a history of accepting subjugation.

What a nuclear overload of the Savannah River means to all the region's people is that in less than 300 years since the founding of Savannah and Augusta, the entire environment (and all creatures within) is now risked to terminal use.

The Savannah River watershed is simply one example of a region at risk and where the people are historically prepared to accept eventual loss of their future.

To the credit of Vermont, on February 24th the State Legislature successfully voted to shut down Vermont Yankee nuclear plant which has been leaking tritium, endangering the Connecticut River. After forty years of use the plant license will not be renewed. Nuclear consultant Arnie Gunderson, who has previously found the Nuclear Regulatory Commission susceptible to payoffs, was able to reveal the company's purposeful misrepresentation of facts about the leak.

But in New York on the Hudson, the nuclear plant at Indian Point, run by the same company as Vermont Yankee (Entergy), is up for review this Spring. Indian Point is about 24 miles north of NYC on the river. Two of its three reactors (Unit 2 -1974, Unit 3 - 1976) remain in operation. Unit 1 had to be shut down in 1974. The national cancer rate in the area around Indian Point is 66% higher than the national average. The rate of hypothyroidism in newborns is 109.3% higher in Westchester County on the plant side of the river, and 115% higher in Rockland County on the other side ("Newborn Hypothyroidism Near the Indian Point Nuclear Plant," Joseph Mangano, Nov. 25, 2009, Radiation and Public Health Project). Despite aging and a history of "events" its operating license application is for another twenty years. The "Indian Point" location amidst a massive population base clarifies the differing interests of its investors and the people.

While the dangers of conventional nuclear weapons are well known, military uses of depleted uranium clarify the risks of radiation exposure from low level radioactive waste in both [Iraq](#) and [Afghanistan](#). Current information on this area of concern is increasingly suppressed. Concerning the dangers of depleted uranium production in the U.S., for an introduction see: "Talk - Leuren Moret on Depleted Uranium," April 6, 2005, Seattle [entirety](#)

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