



NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

[Docket Nos. 50-321 and 50-366; NRC-2025-0091]

Southern Nuclear Operating Company, Inc.; Edwin I. Hatch Nuclear Plant, Units 1 and 2; Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

AGENCY: Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

ACTION: Notice; issuance.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC, the Commission) is issuing an environmental assessment (EA) and finding of no significant impact (FONSI) regarding the NRC's consideration of subsequent license renewal (SLR) for Edwin I. Hatch Nuclear Plant (HNP), Units 1 and 2. The EA evaluates the environmental impacts of the subsequent renewal of Renewed Facility Operating License Nos. DPR-57 and NPF-5 for HNP, Units 1 and 2, respectively, for an additional 20 years of operation, alternatives to SLR and their environmental effects, and mitigation measures for minimizing adverse environmental impacts, as appropriate. HNP is located approximately 11 miles north of Baxley, Georgia on the Altamaha River, in Toombs and Appling Counties.

DATES: The EA and FONSI referenced in this document were available on March 26, 2026.

ADDRESSES: Please refer to Docket ID NRC-2025-0091 when contacting the NRC about the availability of information regarding this document. You may obtain publicly available information related to this document using any of the following methods:

- **Federal Rulemaking Website:** Go to <https://www.regulations.gov> and search for Docket ID NRC-2025-0091. Address questions about Docket IDs in Regulations.gov to Bridget Curran; telephone: 301-415-1003; email: Bridget.Curran@nrc.gov. For technical questions, contact the individual listed in the "For Further Information Contact" section of this document.

- **NRC’s Agencywide Documents Access and Management System**

(ADAMS): You may access publicly available documents online in the ADAMS Public Documents collection at <https://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html>. To begin the search, select “Begin ADAMS Public Search.” For problems with ADAMS, please contact the NRC’s Public Document Room (PDR) reference staff at 1-800-397-4209, at 301-415-4737, or by email to PDR.Resource@nrc.gov. For the convenience of the reader, instructions about obtaining materials referenced in this document are provided in the “Availability of Documents” section.

- **NRC’s PDR:** The PDR, where you may examine and order copies of publicly available documents, is open by appointment. To make an appointment to visit the PDR, please send an email to PDR.Resource@nrc.gov or call 1-800-397-4209 or 301-415-4737, between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. eastern time (ET), Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ashley Waldron, Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Washington, DC 20555-0001; telephone: 301-415-7317; email: Ashley.Waldron@nrc.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Introduction

On May 15, 2025, Southern Nuclear Operating Company, Inc. (SNC) submitted an application to the NRC for the subsequent renewal of Renewed Facility Operating License Nos. DPR-57 and NPF-5, which authorize SNC to operate HNP, Units 1 and 2. The subsequent renewed licenses would authorize SNC to operate HNP, Units 1 and 2 for an additional 20 years.

II. Summary of Environmental Assessment

Description of the Proposed Action and the Need for the Proposed Action

The current renewed facility operating licenses for HNP, Units 1 and 2 (Nos. DPR-57 and NPF-5, respectively) are set to expire at midnight on August 6, 2034, and June 13, 2038, respectively. Pursuant to SNC’s submittal of an SLR application dated

May 15, 2025, the NRC's proposed Federal action is to determine whether to issue subsequent renewed facility operating licenses for HNP, Units 1 and 2 for an additional 20 years of operation. If renewed, these licenses would authorize SNC to operate HNP, Units 1 and 2 until August 6, 2054, and June 13, 2058, respectively. The proposed action also includes the granting of an exemption from the NRC's requirements in sections 51.20(b)(2), 51.25, and 51.95(c) of title 10 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* (10 CFR).

The need for the proposed action is to provide an option that allows for power generation capability beyond the term of the current nuclear power plant operating licenses to meet future system generating needs. Future system generating needs may be determined by State, utility, and, where authorized, Federal decision-makers (other than the NRC). This definition of purpose and need reflects the NRC's recognition that, unless there are findings in the NRC staff review that would lead the NRC to reject an SLR application, the NRC does not have a role in the energy-planning decisions as to whether a particular nuclear power plant should continue to operate. If subsequently renewed licenses are issued, power plant owners, State regulators, and, in some cases, other Federal agencies would ultimately decide whether the nuclear power plant would continue to operate, based on economics, energy reliability goals, and other factors within their jurisdiction or the owners' purview. If the operating licenses are not subsequently renewed, the nuclear power plant must shut down on or before the expiration dates of the current operating licenses.

Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action

In the EA, the NRC staff discusses the environmental impacts of the proposed action of determining whether to issue subsequent renewed facility operating licenses for HNP, Units 1 and 2 for an additional 20 years of operation. The NRC's *Generic Environmental Impact Statement for License Renewal of Nuclear Plants, Final Report* (LR GEIS) identifies 80 environmental issues, divided into 59 Category 1 (generic to all or a distinct subset of plants) issues, 20 Category 2 (plant-specific) issues, and 1

uncategorized issue, to be evaluated, as applicable, for the license renewal of nuclear plants. Those issues applicable to HNP SLR are discussed in the EA, either generically or on a site-specific basis, as appropriate, and, based on that discussion, assigned an environmental impact significance level of SMALL, MODERATE, or LARGE, as defined in the NRC's regulations, or, as applicable, the appropriate resource-specific effects or impact definitions from environmental laws. For applicable Category 1 (generic to all or a distinct subset of plants) issues, the NRC staff did not identify any new and significant information and, therefore, adopted the conclusions of the LR GEIS for those issues in the EA. For applicable Category 2 (plant-specific) issues, which are not bound or generically dispositioned by the LR GEIS, the NRC staff made an independent evaluation of the environmental impacts associated with those issues in the EA. The NRC staff also considered whether any environmental issues exist for HNP SLR that are not covered in the LR GEIS, but did not identify any. The NRC staff determined that none of these impacts would be significant and, accordingly, concluded that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. The NRC staff also considered the environmental impacts of the exemptions that the NRC granted as part of its environmental review and found that there would be no environmental impacts resulting from granting those exemptions because they only have to do with how the staff conducts its environmental review.

Environmental Impacts of Alternatives to the Proposed Action

For license renewal, the NRC's decision-making authority is limited to deciding whether or not to issue renewed licenses for nuclear power plants; therefore, there are no alternatives to that proposed action that meet the purpose and need of the proposed action. However, as part of its analysis of the no-action alternative (i.e., not subsequently renewing the HNP renewed licenses) and its negative environmental impacts, the NRC staff evaluates in the EA the environmental impacts from the shutdown of HNP and from the construction and operation of reasonable replacement power alternatives. The results of the NRC staff's analysis of the environmental impacts of the proposed action

and the no-action alternative are summarized in the EA and are presented so that they may be compared. Based on the review of the proposed action and the no-action alternative, the environmentally preferred alternative is the proposed action.

III. Finding of No Significant Impact

The NRC's proposed action is to determine whether to issue subsequent renewed facility operating licenses for HNP for an additional 20 years. The NRC staff conducted an environmental review of the HNP SLR application and of exemptions that the NRC granted as part of its environmental review. As explained in Section V of this document, with respect to the HNP SLR application, the NRC granted an exemption from 10 CFR 51.20(b)(2), 10 CFR 51.25, and 10 CFR 51.95(c), which require the NRC staff to prepare an environmental impact statement in the first instance for license renewal applications. Consistent with that exemption, for the HNP SLR application environmental review, the NRC staff instead prepared an EA, which is summarized in Section II of this document and referenced in Section IV of this document, to determine whether the preparation of an environmental impact statement is necessary or whether a FONSI could be issued. On the basis of that EA, incorporated by reference in this finding, the NRC staff concludes that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Accordingly, the NRC staff has determined not to prepare an environmental impact statement for the proposed action and that a FONSI is warranted. A list of agencies and persons consulted and identification of sources used is provided in the EA.

IV. Availability of Documents

The EA and related documents are accessible online in the ADAMS Public Documents collection at <https://www.nrc.gov/reading-rn/adams.html>. The documents identified in the following table are available to interested parties through ADAMS, as indicated.

DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION	ADAMS ACCESSION NO.
Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact for Subsequent License	ML26063A016

Renewal of Edwin I. Hatch Nuclear Plant, Units 1 and 2, dated March 26, 2026.	
Edwin I. Hatch Nuclear Plant, Units 1 and 2, Application for Subsequent Renewal of Operating Licenses, dated May 15, 2025.	ML25135A391
Edwin I. Hatch Nuclear Plant, Units 1 and 2, Applicant's Environmental Report, dated May 15, 2025.	ML25135A392
NUREG-1437, Revision 2, Volumes 1, 2, and 3, Generic Environmental Impact Statement for License Renewal of Nuclear Plants, dated August 2024	ML24087A133 (Package)

V. Exemption

Background

SNC is the holder of Renewed Facility Operating License Nos. DPR-57 and NPF-5 for HNP, Units 1 and 2, respectively. The licenses provide, among other things, that the licensee is subject to all rules, regulations, and orders of the NRC now or hereafter in effect. The HNP consists of two boiling-water reactors and is located approximately 11 miles north of Baxley, Georgia on the Altamaha River, in Toombs and Appling Counties.

On May 15, 2025, SNC submitted an application to the NRC for the subsequent renewal of Renewed Facility Operating License Nos. DPR-57 and NPF-5, which would authorize SNC to operate HNP, Units 1 and 2 for an additional 20 years until August 6, 2054, and June 13, 2058, respectively.

On May 23, 2025, the President issued Executive Order (E.O.) 14300 (90 FR 22587), "Ordering the Reform of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission." Section 5(a) of E.O. 14300 directs, in part, that the NRC "[e]stablish fixed deadlines for its evaluation and approval of ... license renewals...." It further directs that the deadline shall be "no more than 1 year for final decision on an application to continue operating an existing reactor of any type, commencing with the first required step in the regulatory process."

Action

The NRC's regulations in 10 CFR part 51, "Environmental Protection Regulations for Domestic Licensing and Related Regulatory Functions," implement the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA), in a manner that is consistent with the NRC's domestic licensing and related regulatory authority under the Atomic

Energy Act of 1954, as amended, and the Energy Reorganization Act of 1974, as amended. The NRC's environmental protection regulations that implement NEPA in

10 CFR part 51 identify actions that the Commission, in the exercise of its discretion, has determined should be covered by an environmental impact statement (EIS) in the first instance. The renewal of nuclear power plant operating licenses is an action identified as requiring an EIS. However, based on its review of the environmental report (ER) submitted as part of the HNP SLR application, the NRC staff determined that it would be prudent to first prepare an EA to determine whether the preparation of an EIS would be necessary or whether a FONSI could be issued for Hatch SLR.

The NRC staff determined that an exemption from its regulations at 10 CFR 51.20(b)(2), 10 CFR 51.25, and 10 CFR 51.95(c) would be necessary to allow the staff to prepare an EA instead of an EIS in the first instance for the environmental review of the HNP SLR application. The regulation at 10 CFR 51.20(b)(2) requires an EIS for the renewal of a license to operate a nuclear power reactor. The regulation at 10 CFR 51.25 requires that the appropriate NRC staff director determine on the basis of the criteria and classifications of types of actions in, in part, 10 CFR 51.20, "Criteria for and identification of licensing and regulatory actions requiring environmental impact statements," whether an EIS or EA should be prepared. The regulation at 10 CFR 51.95(c) requires, in connection with the renewal of an operating license for a nuclear power plant, the preparation of an EIS, which is a supplement to the LR GEIS. Pursuant to 10 CFR 51.6, "Specific exemptions," an exemption from these regulations may be granted if it is (1) authorized by law and (2) otherwise in the public interest.

The Exemption is Authorized by Law

The exemption from 10 CFR 51.20(b)(2), 10 CFR 51.25, and 10 CFR 51.95(c) would allow the NRC staff to prepare an EA to determine whether the preparation of an EIS is necessary or whether a FONSI could be issued instead of preparing an EIS in the first instance for its environmental review of the HNP SLR application. This exemption is authorized by law because the preparation of an EA and FONSI, as applicable, would

satisfy the NRC's NEPA obligations and would not violate any other applicable statute or regulation. NEPA provides flexibility for how the NRC can satisfy its statutory obligations. Section 102(2)(C) of NEPA, as amended by the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023, states that agencies must provide a "detailed statement" for "major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment." Section 106(b)(1) of NEPA states that an agency shall issue an EIS for an action "that has a reasonably foreseeable significant effect on the quality of the human environment." Section 106(b)(2) of NEPA states that an agency shall prepare an EA for an action "that does not have a reasonably foreseeable significant effect on the quality of the human environment, or if the significance of such effect is unknown," unless the agency finds that the proposed agency action is excluded pursuant to, among other things, another provision of law. Further, Section 106(b)(2) of NEPA provides that the EA shall be a concise public document prepared by a Federal agency to set forth the basis of such agency's finding of no significant impact or determination that an EIS is necessary. Consistent with these statutory provisions, the NRC staff determined that HNP SLR does not have a reasonably foreseeable significant effect on the quality of the human environment based on the previously disturbed and industrialized nature of the HNP site, findings from the NRC's 2001 environmental review for the initial renewal of the HNP operating licenses, and the absence of new and significant information since the issuance of the LR GEIS in 2024. Additionally, the EA that the NRC staff prepared set forth the basis of the NRC's FONSI. As such, the NRC has satisfied its statutory obligations under NEPA. Therefore, the NRC finds that the exemption is authorized by law.

The Exemption is Otherwise in the Public Interest

The exemption from 10 CFR 51.20(b)(2), 10 CFR 51.25, and 10 CFR 51.95(c) would allow the NRC staff to prepare an EA to determine whether the preparation of an EIS is necessary or whether a FONSI could be issued instead of preparing an EIS in the first instance for its environmental review of the HNP SLR application. This exemption is in the public interest because it would support the NRC's mission and the NRC's

Principles of Good Regulation. The NRC's mission is to "protect public health and safety and advance the nation's common defense and security by enabling the safe and secure use and deployment of civilian nuclear energy technologies and radioactive materials through efficient and reliable licensing, oversight, and regulation for the benefit of society and the environment." The NRC adheres to Principles of Good Regulation in carrying out this mission. These principles focus on ensuring safety and security while appropriately balancing the interests of NRC's stakeholders, including the public interest. One of these principles is the "Efficiency" principle, which the NRC describes, in part, as follows: "Regulatory activities should be consistent with the degree of risk reduction they achieve. Where several effective alternatives are available, the option which minimizes the use of resources should be adopted. Regulatory decisions should be made without undue delay." Consistent with the "Efficiency" principle, granting the exemption would allow the NRC staff to "minimize the use of resources" and make its regulatory decision as efficiently as possible while continuing to fulfil its NEPA obligations through the issuance of an EA and FONSI. The NRC staff estimates that the duration of the HNP SLR application environmental review would be reduced by up to 3 months by preparing an EA and FONSI instead of preparing an EIS. The time and resource savings on this environmental review would allow the NRC staff to allocate those resources to the environmental reviews of other proposed projects, thereby helping the agency to better fulfill its mission and to do so in a timely manner.

Additionally, preparing an EA and FONSI instead of an EIS would help the NRC follow the direction of E.O. 14300 that final decisions on license renewal applications take no more than 1 year. Following the direction of E.O. 14300 is in the public interest, which is served by agencies efficiently using their resources and not performing requirements, such as preparing an EIS for the HNP SLR application environmental review, that are unnecessary.

For these reasons, the NRC finds that the exemption is otherwise in the public interest.

Environmental Considerations for Exemptions

In accordance with 10 CFR 51.31(a), the Commission has determined that the granting of this exemption will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, as discussed in the NRC staff's EA and FONSI. A summary of the EA and the FONSI are in Sections II and III of this document, respectively.

Exemption Conclusion

Accordingly, the Commission has determined that, pursuant to 10 CFR 51.6, the exemption from 10 CFR 51.20(b)(2), 10 CFR 51.25, and 10 CFR 51.95(c) with respect to the HNP SLR application is authorized by law and otherwise in the public interest.

Therefore, the Commission hereby grants an exemption from the requirements of 10 CFR 51.20(b)(2), 10 CFR 51.25, and 10 CFR 51.95(c) to allow the NRC staff, for its environmental review of the HNP SLR application, to prepare an EA to determine whether the preparation of an EIS is necessary or whether a FONSI could be issued instead of preparing an EIS in the first instance. The exemption is effective on **[INSERT DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE *FEDERAL REGISTER*]**.

Dated: March 31, 2026.

For the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Stephen Koenick,
Acting Deputy Director,
Division of Rulemaking, Environmental,
and Financial Support,
Office of Nuclear Material Safety,
and Safeguards.

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