

Arkansas power plant deal could benefit Oklahoma

Oklahoma is poised to reap some benefits from a new power plant being built in southwestern Arkansas.

BY JAY F. MARKS jmarks@opubco.com  0
Published: January 6, 2012

A settlement agreement that will allow Southwestern Electric Power Co. to complete a new coal plant in southwest Arkansas could pay dividends for Oklahoma as well.

The \$1.7 billion John W. Turk Jr. Power Plant near Texarkana, La., is more than 80 percent complete, officials said. It is expected to be operational by the end of the year.

The 600-megawatt coal-fueled power plant will contribute about 41 megawatts of electricity to the Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority, but the project could contribute more to the state over the next few years, officials said.

Construction of the Turk plant began in November 2008, but it has been dogged by legal challenges from environmental groups.

Those issues were resolved last year with a settlement that will allow SWEPCO to proceed with the Turk plant in exchange for provisions, including commitments to close another coal plant in northeast Texas and add 400 megawatts of renewable energy resources.

Sierra Club spokeswoman Jenna Garland said those promises could benefit the entire region, including Oklahoma.

She said SWEPCO's Welsh Power Plant near Pittsburg, Texas, has no pollution controls so shuttering one of its three coal-fired units will result in cleaner air for the region.

Garland and SWEPCO spokesman Peter Main said the company's need to add renewable energy likely will mean new wind development in Oklahoma.

“The greatest wind resources ... are going to be in western Oklahoma, Kansas, the Texas Panhandle,” Main said. “That's where our two existing wind power commitments come from right now.

“That's a pretty good direction to look for future wind resources.”

SWEPCO serves about 540,000 customers in Arkansas, Texas and Louisiana, while providing wholesale power to the Arkansas cities of Hope, Bentonville and Prescott. It is a sister company of Public Service Co. of Oklahoma.

PSO spokesman Stan Whiteford said the Tulsa-based utility company has no plans to

add any more coal-fired power plants.

The state's other major electricity provider, Oklahoma Gas and Electric Co., has stated it does not plan to add any further generation facilities until at least 2020.

Oklahoma tie

Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority partnered with SWEPCO on the Turk project in 2007, signing up for a 6.7 percent share.

“Turk is a state-of-the-art power plant with the best currently available environmental controls and the plant represented the optimum choice for our power supply program over others considered at that time,” said Drake Rice, OMPA's director of member services.

Rice said OMPA has worked to maintain a balanced power program, with about 20 to 30 percent of its electricity coming from renewable sources such as wind and hydro. OMPA intends to add another project and a landfill gas program this year.

“Our goal remains to provide a reliable power supply at an economic price to our 39 cities,” he said.

The new plant uses advanced coal combustion technology called “ultra-supercritical” generation, which uses pulverized coal to reduce emissions.

“When completed, it will be among the cleanest, most efficient coal plants in the country,” according to American Electric Power, SWEPCO's parent company.

Main said the Turk plant will meet the stringent regulatory limits set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

“We have no doubt that it will meet the new EPA requirements,” he said.

Main said AEP had made a preliminary decision to retire one of the aging coal units at the Welsh plant because of to the new regulations.

That decision was cemented in the settlement agreement unveiled last month on the Turk plant.



Show / Hide Comments