Residents turn out to fight power plants

By AYANNA McPAIL
The Kansas City Star

Concerned Platte County residents filled the West Platte Junior/Senior High School cafeteria last week.

The Missouri Department of Natural Resources called the meeting Thursday to answer geological questions and address the permit process for Great Plains Energy Inc., which is interested in building two power plants and landfills near Weston.

Great Plains Energy, parent company of Kansas City Power and Light, is considering building the power plants because analyses show that additional supply of electricity will be needed by 2010, said Tom Robinson, spokesman for Great Plains Energy.

"But why here? Why Platte County," one resident shouted.

Platte County is one of the fastest-growing counties in Missouri, Robinson said. Plus, rail lines for coal delivery and transmission lines already are established because of the Iatan facility.

Although the new site would be convenient for Great Plains Energy, nearby residents are not happy about a possible power plant in their community. Many residents fear environmental and health issues.

The meeting was held to answer residents' questions.

Representatives from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources drove more than 200 miles to conduct the two-hour meeting. The agency is responsible for approving or disapproving the application for a landfill.

"You guys are pretty brave to have the first public meeting when we are all fired up, and I thank you," resident Susan Byrego said.

To receive an OK from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources to build a landfill for the power plant, Great Plains Energy would need to take several steps. The process takes a minimum of three years and typically takes up to five years to complete, said Peter Price, an environmental geology section chief with the department. Great Plains Energy has not applied.

Residents brought up several concerns, including recent budget cuts at the Missouri Department of Natural Resources and the possible lack of supervision over the application process.

Price acknowledged recent cutbacks in his department. He stated that they may not be able to supervise the process as closely as with a larger staff, but he reassured residents that Great Plains Energy must meet state and federal requirements to get its application approved.

Residents also mentioned possible flooding of the landfill. Precautions would be set up to prevent flooding, but residents fear they might not be adequate.
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The Platte County commissioners recently approved an economic-development agreement that allows Great Plains Energy to move forward with its plans near the Missouri River.

Platte County Commissioner Steve Wegner commented after a resident initiated a conversation about the role of public officials supporting them.

“At this point and time I still trust the people looking out for our interest,” Wegner said. “This is really a state and federal issue.”

Some residents see the situation differently.

The Missouri Department of Natural Resources has its job, “and we've got ours, too—and that's to protect our environment,” resident Marcia Hankins said.

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First glance

• Numerous residents attended a meeting to voice concern over the proposed building of a power plant and landfill in Platte County.

• Great Plains Energy Inc. officials are considering Platte County because it is a fast-growing area and already has much of the necessary infrastructure.

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