Residents question coal-fired plant plan
Monday, January 12, 2004
By SCOTT LAUCK, scottlauck@npgeo.com

WESTON, Mo. — About 80 area residents living near the site of a proposed power plant came to a meeting Thursday night armed to the teeth with questions — more questions than the presenters were prepared to answer.

The public awareness session, hosted by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources at West Platte High School in Weston, concerned only the power plant’s landfill. However, it was the first official public meeting to be held on the proposed plant, scheduled to begin construction as early as this year.

Great Plains Power, the holding company for Kansas City Power & Light, announced in 2001 that it would build the 800-megawatt coal-fired plant near an existing plant at Iatan, Mo. Recently, the company disclosed that it might also build a second plant across the Missouri River, in Atchison County, Kan.

Residents came to Thursday’s meeting with questions ranging from air pollution to water use to the effects on quality of life.

Nancy Nelson, a Weston resident who came to the meeting seeking information, said she was “hoping to find out that plant’s not a done deal.”

“I think money’s the main push behind it,” she said.

However DNR officials tried to keep a narrow focus.

“This has nothing to do with the power plant itself,” said Peter Price of the department’s Geologic Survey Program. “Just the landfill.”

Yet even just the landfill prompted concern. Several audience members asked why the plant had chosen to locate the plant’s landfill in the floodplain of the Missouri River. The proposed landfill would store waste from burned coal, known as fly ash.

Terry Eaton, manager of environmental services for Great Plains Power, responded that building the landfill next to the plant was the best choice, as it would reduce traffic on adjacent Missouri Highway 45.

“It’s simpler, and it reduces the concern, the effect on the public,” he said.

However, Mr. Eaton declined to answer other questions about why the plant was being built in the first place.

“This is not the right time to address this question,” he said.

The audience also addressed Steve Wegner, a Platte County commissioner. The commission in December 2002 signed an economic-development agreement with Great Plains Power.
Mr. Wegner said he continued his support for the project and that he trusted the government agencies to protect the environment.

"These guys are neutral," he said. "That's why I trust them."