

NPPD Board Says Cooper Nuclear Power Uprate Too Expensive

(KLZA) At its regular monthly meeting, Nebraska Public Power District's Board of Directors voted to decline a project that would have increased the power output of Cooper Nuclear Station by approximately 18 percent.

Management had been conducting a detailed feasibility study for the proposed project since late last year. During Friday's meeting, the Board voted not to proceed with the proposed extended power uprate (EPU) following a recommendation from NPPD President and CEO Pat Pope.

"After reviewing the costs and schedule risks associated with conducting an extended power uprate at Cooper, it was management's recommendation not to move forward on this project," Pope explained. "I appreciate the efforts of the team that conducted a 'deep dive' on the cost estimate, but in light of other utilities' inability to come in on time and on budget with similar projects, I have significant concerns how that would impact our Nebraska customers. NPPD most likely would not see sufficient returns to justify that expense.

The more detailed estimated cost for this project has reached \$409 million, which is more risk than I want to expose our customers to," he continued. "Instead I want to see NPPD continue making Cooper Nuclear Station the best boiling-water reactor in the country from an operational and cost standpoint."

Pope noted that NPPD's 'deep dive' into the costs for the work had increased \$120 million, from an earlier estimate of approximately \$289 million. He noted similar cost increases for current uprate projects at other nuclear facilities, along with two cancelled projects were also factors to consider. Other contributing factors to the Board's decision included unresolved technical issues with regulators at similar nuclear facilities, low natural gas prices, NPPD's existing surplus generating capacity, and the District's upcoming participation in the Southwest Power Pool's Integrated Marketplace next spring.

The uprate would have added 146 megawatts of electrical power to the station, located near Brownville, Neb. While the project did not need any additional facilities or buildings, or an increase in staff, it would have required equipment and system upgrades. These upgrades were proposed to be completed by 2018 during a series of refueling and maintenance outages.

Due to long lead times in manufacturing, NPPD had previously ordered a new, high pressure steam turbine to replace Cooper's existing unit, which, though still operating well, is currently the oldest in the industry. The turbine is needed regardless of a decision for an uprate. Other equipment and systems identified as part of the EPU will be reviewed to determine if they are needed to conduct safe operations without an EPU.

Cooper Nuclear Station employs 700 employees and generates approximately 800 megawatts of electricity. The plant began operations in 1974, and two years ago received a 20-year extension of its original license to operate through 2034.