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N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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Dam safety inspection at Cliffside Plant; further monitoring results from the Dan River

RALEIGH – Staff from the state Dam Safety Program today inspected the ash pond structure at Duke Energy's Cliffside Steam Station in Rutherford County, where the energy company is developing an engineered solution to the failed emergency yard drainage overflow pipe discovered last week.

Discharge from the pipe at the Cliffside Steam Station is still being collected and transported to a coal ash pond onsite.

During a routine inspection of the plant site last Thursday, Duke Energy officials discovered a discharge of approximately 0.8 gallons per minute coming from the permitted outfall of an emergency pond designed to hold comingled stormwater and wastewater overflow from an adjacent basin during extreme storm events. Duke Energy found that a corrugated metal pipe was perforated due to corrosion and allowed groundwater to enter and move up through the pipe to where the groundwater discharged and infiltrated the soil at a riprap area. The discharge never reached the Broad River, the waterbody closest to the plant.

At the Cliffside site, DENR has required Duke Energy to collect flow data and samples of discharge water to be tested for total suspended solids, oil and grease and pH, total metals, total dissolved solids, nutrients, turbidity and sulfates. The company is awaiting results from the sampling tests.

DENR expects the full dam safety inspection report for the Cliffside facility to be available Wednesday afternoon. Dam Safety inspectors were also on site of the Cliffside facility and Duke Energy's other 13 coal ash facilities this past weekend to inspect the dam spillway pipes.

Dan River coal ash spill update

Aluminum and iron levels still exceed surface water quality standards upstream and downstream of the coal ash spill from the Duke Energy power plant facility in Eden. State water quality officials say the elevated levels of aluminum and iron are likely due to background concentrations found in sediments throughout the Dan River basin.

Cleanup efforts at the site of the spill continue. Removal of an ash deposit near the spill site continued Sunday. Several tanker truck loads of the material were removed from the Dan River. Divers were employed to better identify and remove the ash. Efforts were halted Monday because of a winter storm. Officials will resume efforts to remove the ash deposit as soon as weather and river conditions allow. Officials estimate one or two more days of work will be required to complete the task.

State officials continue to assess the impacts of the coal ash spill on the health of the Dan River. While high river levels and fast currents have temporarily halted sediment sampling, DENR officials plan to continue collecting fish for tissue analysis Wednesday at the headwaters of John H. Kerr Reservoir in Virginia.

DENR, the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are working with Duke Energy to develop a plan to remove larger coal ash deposits from areas where it has collected along the Dan River.

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