FPC Will Inspect Blue Ridge Site

By Bill Connelly
Journal Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — In an expected move, the five embers of the Federal Power mmission announced yester- y that they will personally spect the site of the proposed ue Ridge hydroelectric project Dec. 13.

They will view the sites of the oposed reservoirs in Grayson unty, Va., and in Alleghany d Ashe counties in North rolina, then fly north by licopter to take a look at rts of the New River in rginia and possibly West rginia.

The commissioners made it ain, however, that they are ing to look and not to hear guments. They said pointedly at "no counsel or party will heard" during the visit.

They invited parties in the case to join them for the on-site inspection, which will begin at the proposed lower reservoir area at 9:30 a.m., but said there will be no room on the helicopter except for the commissioners.

An FPC examiner, William C. Levy, has recommended that Appalachian Power Co. be licensed to build and operate the proposed $350 million Blue Ridge project on the New River at the Virginia-Carolina border.

Hearings have been completed, and the full FPC now must make a final decision on whether to license the project.

The project is opposed by the states of North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia, project area residents, conservation groups and many others — primarily because of the Interior Department's demand that the project store up to 650,000 acre-feet of water for diluting the chemical industry's pollution of the Kanawha River 250 miles downstream in West Virginia.

Until yesterday the commissioners had not expressed an interest in seeing the Blue Ridge site.

They may have been motivated by persistent complaints from the three-county project area that no FPC member or other federal policymaker has visited the area to see what is involved.

Edmund I. Adams, the lawyer for Alleghany and Ashe counties, told the FPC at the final hearing on Nov. 11:

"The fact that absolutely nobody representing any government agency that we know of has ever visited the project site since the conflict surrounding the modified project began is deplorable."

Adams noted that an official of the Environmental Protection Agency, which supports the project, was quoted by The New York Times as saying, "What could I learn by going down there?"

Lorne Campbell, the lawyer for Grayson County, urged at the same hearing that the FPC or its staff make an on-site inspection — a request he had made many times before.

The five FPC members are John N. Nessikas, chairman, John A. Carver Jr., Albert B. Brooke Jr., Pinkney Walker and Rush Moody.

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