

Free Flow Power assessment aims to ease fears about underwater work



One of the companies planning to generate electricity from the Mississippi River's natural current has proposed a wide-ranging study to answer concerns that its project could interfere with other river users, including barge operators, fishermen and even sand- and gravel-mining firms.

In plans filed with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Massachusetts-based Free Flow Power said it will assess the potential impacts of installing hundreds of underwater turbines in the Mississippi between St. Louis and the Gulf of Mexico, including a site in the Memphis area.

The planned study is needed before Free Flow can formally apply for a power-generating license from FERC. The company envisions a project costing up to \$3 billion involving clusters of turbines that either would be mounted on the river bottom or suspended from moored barges and would spin in the Mississippi's current.

If the licensing process goes smoothly, installation of the turbines could begin by late 2012.

Company officials say they're confident the project won't harm other users of the Mississippi.

"I think the flow volumes and velocities still show a tremendous opportunity ...," said Jon Guidroz, director of project development for Free Flow. "We think there's enough current out there to fit into the competing uses."

Amid intensified calls for renewable, or "green" energy, hydrokinetic power projects such as the one pursued by Free Flow have been proposed for a number of rivers and coastal areas in recent months. Another firm, Houston-based Hydro Green Energy, also is planning to generate power on the Mississippi.

The scope of Free Flow's proposed study was defined largely by concerns raised last year in public meetings and in comments by representatives of industry and resource agencies. After reviewing the proposal and comments about it, FERC will determine which issues the company needs to study.

Free Flow is proposing to look at ways to minimize any effects the turbines would have on commercial navigation.

It would further assess the extent to which the turbines would alter the velocity and flow of the

Turbine company proposes Mississippi River study

Escrito por The Commercial Appeal
Lunes 11 de Enero de 2010 00:00

river current, which could have ramifications on fish habitat, flooding patterns and the channel-dredging conducted by the Corps of Engineers.

Free Flow also would examine the likelihood of fish being injured or killed by turbine blades and whether the electromagnetic fields created by the equipment would interfere with navigation or aquatic life. And the company would study the threat of turbines breaking away from structures.

Beth Guynes, regulatory project manager with the corps, which oversees navigation and flood-control work on the Mississippi, said it's too early to know whether the power-generating project will harm other users of the river.

"Until we see the results of these studies, we won't really know the answer," she said.