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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Catawba River Feels Daily Sting from Coal Ash Ponds

October 13, 2009 (*Charlotte, NC*) – A steady flow of information regarding the safety and security of pollutants from Duke Energy’s four EPA listed “High Hazard Potential” coal ash ponds along the Catawba River continues. Recent articles have explained data that shows heavy metal contamination in groundwater supplies. Catawba Riverkeeper David Merryman exclaims “These ponds threaten more than groundwater. All day, every day- these coal ash ponds are discharging directly into our primary drinking water reservoir!”

Now is the time for the public to hear what has been permitted to enter our primary drinking water reservoir by NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources (NCDENR). On Valentine’s Day 2005, NCDENR authorized Duke Energy to continue its discharge from Riverbend Steam Station into the Catawba River at Mountain Island Lake, upstream of Charlotte’s, Gastonia’s and Mount Holly’s primary drinking water intakes. This permit explicitly states a concentration limit for Copper and Iron (1.0 mg/L) in the effluent stream from Duke’s coal ash ponds, but omits several other heavy metals known for their prevalence in coal ash such as arsenic and selenium. For these metals, NCDENR only requires quarterly monitoring. Why would the State omit concentrations limits for arsenic, a known killer?

Since the issuance of this State discharge permit under the Federal Clean Water Act to Duke Energy, one-third of Duke Energy’s required surface water discharge monitoring reports for arsenic have exceeded groundwater concentration limits, with some discharge concentrations nearly triple the groundwater limit. “I’ve not received any assurance that our River, its wildlife, or our drinking water is being protected by these state permits,” states Merryman. Recent numbers reported by Duke Energy show their coal ash pond discharged approximately 1.35 lbs of arsenic into Mountain Island Lake on January 31, 2009.

Why have concentration limits for arsenic in groundwater but not surface water? Water does not discern surface to ground; it moves freely above, around and below our feet. Can the Department of Environment and Natural Resources decide whether or not, much less how, to protect North Carolinians from coal ash waste and poisonous surface water discharges?

Yes, Riverbend Steam Station discharge permit is scheduled to expire on February 28, 2010. At that time, NCDENR will make an important decision: protect our residents and their source of water from heavy metal, laced discharges from coal ash ponds or continue ignoring the facts and data as it comes to light.