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NRC: Indian Point has little impact on fish

By Abby Luby

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission said on Monday that the Indian Point Nuclear Power Plants have little environment impact on Hudson River fish and recommended that the plant's operating license should be renewed.

The statement was in the NRC "General Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS)" which is part of the plant's license renewal application. Last spring plant owner Entergy applied to renew their license for Unit 2 and Unit 3 which expires in 2013 and 2015. A new license would keep the twin plants running for an additional 20 years.

The NRC preliminary decision alarmingly contrasts a 2003 ruling by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) that said adverse environmental impacts on Hudson River aquatic life was directly caused by Indian Point's cooling water intake system. The DEC ruling has led to a legal battle now before the U.S. Supreme Court.

The current legal battle is being waged by the environmental group Riverkeeper who claims that the plant's daily intake of 2.5 billion gallons of Hudson River water used to cool the plant's giant heated steam turbines causes fatalities of over 1.2 billion fish each year. The environmental group wants Entergy to install a cooling system known as "closed-cycle cooling" which re-circulates most of the water after dispersing the heat, reducing fish fatalities by 95 percent. The industry has argued that the new system is too costly.

A decision for the Supreme Court case is expected in the spring of 2009. Although the NRC references the Supreme Court case and the DEC ruling they claim because the case is pending, certain reports and studies referenced in the case and looked at by the NRC have a "level of uncertainty in the data provided."

Data used by the NRC on the environmental impact of the plants was from their own studies, a report submitted by Entergy, consultations with federal state and local agencies and public comments. They concluded that "renewing Indian Point's license is a reasonable decision."

In the GEIS the NRC states that in lieu of the DEC's concluding studies on the thermal impact on aquatic life the "NRC staff did not find data that suggest the effect of heat shock is likely to rise to LARGE."

Sixty-nine environmental issues were covered in the 413 page GEIS. Some data was found to be inconclusive; "neither Entergy nor the NRC staff has identified information that is both new and significant for any issues that apply to IP2 and/or IP3." The statement goes on to say that the NRC staff "concludes that the impacts of renewing the operating licenses for IP2 and IP3 will not be greater than the impacts identified for these issues in the GEIS."

The deadline for comments on the GEIS is March 11, 2009. Two public meetings are planned, the first will be held on Feb. 12, 2009; the date for the second meeting is still to be announced.