

BRATTLEBORO REFORMER

Judge tells VY to cool it

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BRATTLEBORO -- Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant must reduce the temperature of the water it releases into the Connecticut River until spring 2007 and possibly later, a Vermont Environmental Court judge ruled Monday.

In March, the plant was granted a permit to increase the temperature of the Connecticut River by 1 degree. That decision was appealed by the Connecticut River Watershed Council, which also asked for a stay at that time.

The stay means that river conditions will remain the same as under Vermont Yankee's previous permit.

But because the plant will have to use its 20 megawatt water towers to cool the water instead, it may mean that less power is sold into the New England electricity grid.

The watershed council's central argument revolved around the American shad population in the river.

This year, 156,000 American shad made it over the Holyoke dam in Holyoke, Mass. Less than 500 made it past the Vernon dam, said David Deen, a steward with the Connecticut River Watershed Council. Deen is also a state lawmaker, representing Dummerston, Putney and Westminster.

"The overall picture is that the three years of largest returns were 1990 through 1993. Vermont Yankee raised the temperature of the river in 1992," said Deen.

"But the challenge isn't about the science, per se," said Deen. "It's that Entergy Vermont Yankee has to make their case. We do not feel like they have made their case. They have to prove that there will not be irreparable harm done to the river."

The decision from the court says that "the best interests of the public" would be best served if the stay were in effect not only for September and the first half of October 2006, when the new American shad are returning to the ocean, but also in April when the adults return to spawn.

"We have a full-time environmental staff and they made a very good case for a change in this permit," said Rob Williams, spokesman for Vermont Yankee. "We are looking forward to discussing the merits of it in January 2007."

"In the meantime, we'll ensure that we comply with the conditions of the previous permit," said Williams.

The permit that allowed the increase in river temperature was issued by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.

Deputy Commissioner John Sayles said he did not have any comment Monday "other than to say that the agency supports the permit that it issued," Sayles wrote in an e-mail correspondence.

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