

## Watershed Council challenges VY permit

By ANDY ROSEN, Reformer Staff

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BRATTLEBORO -- An environmental group is challenging a state permit that allows Vermont Yankee to discharge water into the Connecticut River.

The Connecticut River Watershed Council has asked the state Environmental Court to rescind an amendment to a water release permit, which allows the plant to increase the temperature of the river during the summer and early fall.

The council is appealing the Agency of Natural Resources decision and wants the court to issue a stay of the permit until that appeal has been heard.

Rep. David Deen, D-Westminster, river steward for the council, said raising the Connecticut River's temperature could harm its ecosystem.

The plant's position is that using the river to cool its components makes it more efficient, because the plant does not have to use its electric-powered cooling towers.

Spokesman Larry Smith said the towers use about 20 megawatts of electricity.

"That's power that's not on the New England grid," he said.

The council has particular concerns about the health of native fish, like shad and salmon. Deen said the summer months are a critical period for both species.

"Mid-June is an important time in the river in terms of returning fish," Deen said. "We are in the middle of the return of the American shad and the Atlantic salmon."

He estimated that there are about 155,000 shad in the river, and about 177 salmon.

The Watershed Council said in a statement that higher temperatures can affect both species' metabolism, resulting in adverse effects on growth, reproduction, mortality, and ability to adapt to life in the ocean.

The warm water may also disorient fish, the statement reads.

According to the new rules, the plant will be able to release water into the river, so long as its temperature, measured at a sensor just below the Vernon Dam, doesn't exceed an hourly average 85 degrees.

The changes were approved in March. They only apply under certain conditions. They are in effect from June 16 through Oct. 14, and Vermont Yankee officials say they don't apply if the upstream river temperature exceeds 78 degrees.

The council will likely have to wait to see if the stay will be granted. The Environmental Court is expected to take up the motion on July 5, and will make a decision after that.

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