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For immediate release

DEC Urged to “Reel In” the Power Industry to Protect NY State’s Waterways
Environmentalists strike back against power industry PR blitz
Two new reports show economic and environmental benefits of DEC’s position

Albany – The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is preparing to finalize its policy to stem the destruction of aquatic life by power plants’ cooling systems statewide. Amid furious lobbying by the power industry, environmental groups are urging DEC to stick to its position, announced by Commissioner Pete Grannis in March, that “closed cycle cooling is the best technology available and must be implemented to protect the environment.”

Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE), Network for New Energy Choices (NNEC) and other groups traveled to Albany today to counter attacks on DEC’s proposed power plant policy. That policy would require the plants to upgrade their facilities to stop the slaughter of 171 million fish and 17 billion fish eggs each year. The groups, which also included Riverkeeper, NRDC and Eastern Environmental Law Center, released a new report calling for existing power plants to install the same cooling systems that new plants are required to use.

This technology, [closed-cycle cooling](#), recirculates water, eliminating the need for 95 percent of the water power plants currently withdraw from the state’s rivers, lakes and estuaries. At the same time, the technology reduces the destruction of fish and other aquatic life by 95 percent. Closed-cycle cooling conforms to federal Clean Water Act requirements, administered by the State, that power plants use the “Best Technology Available” (BTA) to protect aquatic life.

The public comment period for DEC’s draft policy was set to end last Tuesday, June 8, but was extended to July 9, after the power industry, at the eleventh hour, requested more time to submit comments. On June 4 a coalition of organizations submitted comments commending DEC’s draft policy and requesting that some potential loopholes be closed as it is finalized. Today the advocates also released a detailed economic analysis by McCullough Research showing that upgrading the plants will not make the electric grid less reliable and that any increase to the cost of power will be minimal (less than one percent).

“Twenty-five New York power plants are huge fish-killing machines,” said NNEC Director Kyle Rabin. “The enormous impact power plants have on fish has been widely understood going all the way back to congressional hearings that took place in 1967, and for those same forty-plus years, the power industry has fought every effort to stop the slaughter. While the fishing industry operates under increasing regulation, the power industry will make any claim to avoid changing its ways. Ironically, anyone caught fishing out of season could be fined and lose their license, but the power plants continue to kill billions of fish every year, regardless of season. DEC has a plan to significantly

reduce power plant fish kill. We are here today to support DEC in sticking to its position that closed cycle cooling is the best technology available for power plant cooling.”

“New Yorkers have spent millions of dollars to protect and restore our estuaries, rivers, Great Lakes and waterways,” said Adrienne Esposito, Executive Director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment. “We rely on the health and productivity of our waters to assist our region’s economy, produce jobs and maintain our quality of life. Our report shows that these antiquated power plants are the biggest predator to fish, shellfish and marine life in New York State. The continued decline of our waterways is resulting in massive economic and societal costs to the public and our environment.”

“Perhaps even more galling than power plants slaughtering aquatic life to generate electricity are the ones that slaughter aquatic life while not generating electricity,” said environmental attorney Reed Super. “Many so-called ‘peaker’ plants, for example Glenwood and Far Rockaway, operate very infrequently – as little as two percent of the time – but kill as many fish as if they were operating 80 percent of the time. While the power companies tell us to flip off the switch when we’re not using our lights, they leave their intake pumps running when they aren’t producing power.”

“Detailed analysis shows that requiring closed-cycle cooling at every large power plant in New York would provide huge environmental benefits, while having no significant adverse effect on grid reliability or on the price of electricity,” said Richard Webster, Legal Director for Eastern Environmental Law Center. “Implementing DEC’s proposed policy will be a win-win for everyone, including the power companies that have been refusing to upgrade their old power plants to modern standards. Furthermore, ratepayers are already paying for closed-cycle cooling. They’re just not getting it.”

According to Robert McCullough of McCullough Research, who did the economic analysis the groups released today, New York’s wholesale electricity market is one of the most profitable in the nation. Dividends from high prices in New York are more than adequate to cover the costs of environmental compliance for many years in the future across a variety of scenarios.

“We need to close the loophole that allows older, dirtier power plants to continue to harm our waterways and ecosystems,” said Katherine Kennedy, Counsel to the Air & Energy Program at the Natural Resources Defense Council. “One important way to level the playing field between old polluting plants and efficient new plants with new state of the art technologies is to rebuild or ‘repower’ the old ones. Repowering old, antiquated power plants is a win-win solution. We can increase electric reliability, reduce fossil fuel use and global warming emissions, and also install state of the art air and water pollution technologies. To protect our public health for all New York, our waterways and the environment, let’s move power generation in New York State into the 21st century.”

“Too many New York power plants have been allowed to operate with once-through cooling technology for decades, in clear violation of the Clean Water Act,” said Riverkeeper President Alex Matthiessen. “This antiquated technology is responsible for

the needless, massive slaughter of billions of fish each year, contributing substantially to the overall ecological degradation of the Hudson River and other water bodies across the state. We applaud Commissioner Grannis and DEC staff for upholding the law contained in the proposed policy, by requiring closed-cycle cooling or its equivalent, and we urge the State to stand firm against any efforts to weaken the policy.”

Reeling in New York's Aging Power Plants: The Case for Fish-Friendlier Power, can be found online, [here](#), along with McCullough's economic analysis, an interactive map of New York's 25 outdated power plants, a fact sheet about closed-cycle cooling, a video interview with CCE's Adrienne Esposito and NNEC's Kyle Rabin, and an animation explaining how power plant cooling systems work.

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