

Clean Wisconsin

(Founded as Wisconsin's Environmental Decade)

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DNR Issues New Permit for “Giant Fish-Killing Machine”

Environmental groups will keep fighting for compliance with federal law

MADISON—The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has issued a revised permit that allows WE Energies to operate a highly controversial cooling water intake system at the new Elm Road coal plant in Oak Creek – a system that Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. called a “giant fish-killing machine” during a recent visit to Milwaukee.

Ignoring a state court ruling that requires the plant to use the best available technology to protect Lake Michigan's fisheries, DNR granted WE Energies' request for an exemption from the more protective standards. Environmental groups Clean Wisconsin and Sierra Club have contested the permit for this facility since it was proposed, and last November a state court judge agreed that the coal plant must comply with federal laws that protect the Great Lakes.

“DNR has admitted this is not the best technology for cooling this plant,” said Katie Nekola, attorney for Clean Wisconsin. “We have a court decision that this facility must meet stricter standards. Yet DNR continues to defer to WE Energies at the expense of the health of Lake Michigan.”

The system, called “once-through cooling,” is a technology that has been banned in Illinois, Indiana and other states because it is so destructive of fish and other aquatic life. It consists of a 1.5-mile-long pipe that will pull billions of gallons of water out of the lake per day, returning it 10-15 degrees warmer. In the process, small fish and other organisms are either trapped against the screens or sucked into the pipe, where they die in large numbers.

“Elm Road is the largest construction project in the history of the state,” Nekola said. “You'd expect DNR to exercise the highest level of care and scrutiny for a project with this much potential for environmental damage. Instead, they're willing to help WE Energies avoid federal rules that would protect our natural resources.”

DNR will accept public comments on the revised permit, and will hold a public hearing on June 9, 2008 in Racine. Clean Wisconsin will continue to challenge the permit for what has been called “WE Energies' Mistake on the Lake.”

Clean Wisconsin, an environmental advocacy organization, protects Wisconsin's clean water and air and advocates for clean energy by being an effective voice in the state legislature and by holding elected officials and polluters accountable. Founded in 1970 as Wisconsin's Environmental Decade, Clean Wisconsin exposes corporate polluters, makes sure existing environmental laws are enforced, and educates citizens and businesses. On behalf of its 10,000 members and its coalition partners, Clean Wisconsin protects the special places that make Wisconsin such a wonderful place to live, work and play. Phone: 608-251-7020, Fax: 608-251-1655, Email: information@cleanwisconsin.org, Website: www.cleanwisconsin.org.

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