

Indian Point gets public support over Hudson water use

By: Greg Clary

CORTLANDT — In what some believe is a battle between fish and humans, the debate over how Indian Point uses Hudson River water showed that Tuesday's early rounds go to the two-legged creatures.

"I feel sorry for the fish, I really do," Jerry Gershner, an Ossining real estate broker, told state regulators during an afternoon public hearing. "But the person that I most feel sorry for is me, my family and my neighbors."

Gershner was one of dozens of speakers at the hearing, convened by two administrative law judges who will rule on the state Department of Environmental Conservation's decision that Indian Point must change the way it uses the Hudson River to stay open.

The DEC ruled in April that Indian Point's current operation harms the river's habitat too much and must be changed to a closed-cycle cooling process that requires much less water by reusing it.

Without a valid water-use permit from the DEC, Indian Point would not be able to have its license renewed for 20 years by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and would have to cease operating in 2015.

Officials for Entergy, which owns and operates Indian Point, have said the ruling would require the construction of two cooling towers, each the size of Yankee Stadium, and building those would do more environmental damage than allowing the installation of an underwater filtering system known as Wedgewire.

Entergy also maintains that the impact on the river is minimal, primarily because the harm is to a fraction of the wildlife that lives in the river.

Gershner said he wasn't qualified to say if the plant's operation was doing harm to the fish, but if the DEC forced Indian Point to build cooling towers, his electricity rates would go up and he'd be looking at two huge structures along the Hudson River.

Speakers supporting the nuclear plant outnumbered those opposing it by 10-1 in the afternoon session at Colonial Terrace on Oregon Road, with the evening session predicted to be more balanced, as has been

the case in many Indian Point public meetings. Hundreds of people attended the sessions.

Manna Jo Greene, environmental director for Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, delivered a 1,500-signature petition supporting the DEC's water-quality ruling.

"The (permit) has been denied based on the fact that the fish in the Hudson River are in serious decline," Greene said. "Ten of the 13 signature Hudson River fish are in decline."

Environmental groups have pointed to the river water being pulled in from the Hudson — 2.5 billion gallons daily — to cool the nuclear plant's operation and then returned at higher temperatures that some believe are significantly harming the river's habitat.

John Pike, an 81-year-old physicist who spoke, isn't one of those.

After a nearly 50-year career and training from professors who worked in the earliest years of splitting the atom, Pike said the United States is losing ground on using nuclear power for electricity, partly because not enough people understand questions exactly like what impact the hotter water has on the Hudson River.

"The estuary and the river combined have a flow of water constantly going by Indian Point, and that lowers your temperature problems significantly," Pike said. "You basically don't need high cooling towers. It's not a plant next to a stagnant lake area."

Matthew Cordaro, who headed up the Midwest Independent System Operator, which coordinates regional power supplies to ensure reliability of the electrical grid, said shutting down Indian Point for 42 weeks to build cooling towers would hit local residents in their on-off switches.

"Independent experts ... conclude that the closing of one plant at (Indian Point) would drastically change the generation needs for the downstate area and the closing of two plants would result in a crippled grid," Cordaro said.

The next step in the DEC-Entergy disagreement takes place today in New Paltz, N.Y., where opponents and supporters alike will make their cases to the two administrative law judges and will be included as participants in the case as it proceeds through the agency.