

# Groups say coal plant killing too many fish

BY KRISTINA SMITH HORN •

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OREGON -- A coal plant on the Maumee Bay kills more fish than any other plant on the Great Lakes, costing Ohio \$29.7 million annually, environmental groups said Wednesday.

That figure covers the value of the fish, larvae and eggs -- including prized sport fish walleye and yellow perch -- that are killed, plus lost opportunities to make money in charter, sport and commercial fishing, said Kristy Meyer, director of agricultural and clean water programs for the Ohio Environmental Council.

Meyer cited a [study](#) paid for by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and other environment groups. Results were released Wednesday.

Meyer and other environmentalists said it's time for the Bay Shore Power Plant's owner, FirstEnergy Corp., to address the problem.

The council, the Western Lake Erie Waterkeepers Association, Ohio Citizen Action and other groups are urging the Ohio EPA to make FirstEnergy install cooling towers at the plant -- which touches the Maumee River on one side and the Maumee Bay on the other -- in order to reduce the kills. "They have never paid a dime for the fish they've killed," said Sandy Bihn, director of the Western Lake Erie Waterkeepers Association. "They've never done anything. It's amazing to me that they've been able to get away with this all these years."

FirstEnergy, however, maintains it is aware of the problem and has been working to address it, company spokesman Mark Durbin said. The company plans to use shutter-like devices, called louvers, designed to deter fish from being sucked into the plant along with water used to cool its equipment, he said. FirstEnergy is spending \$500,000 on the initial test louvers. If the technology works, the company will [invest](#) in making them permanent, he said.

The plant, which Durbin said produces enough energy to power 450,000 [homes](#) annually, draws 650 million gallons of water daily from an intake on the Maumee River.

Millions of fish are killed two ways at the plant, environmentalists said. One is by impingement, in which the fish are slammed into the intake screen meant to filter out debris, said Dina Pierce, Ohio EPA spokeswoman.

Other small fish, fish eggs and larvae are sucked through the screen and into the plant, where they are killed, Meyer said. This is called entrainment. "It seems like everyone is trying to associate whatever problems the lake is having to the plant, and that's just not true," Durbin said.

The plant has been in operation for 50 years, and for the past 43, it's used about the same amount of water, he said. During that time, fish populations have been cyclical.

The Lake Erie walleye population is down from 80 million in 2004 to 20 million this year, according to report Meyer cited. The council and other environmental groups paid \$25,000 for Gentner Consulting Group of Silver Spring, Md., to complete the study, Bihn said.

Lake Erie has more edible fish than all the other Great Lakes combined, and most of them are in the Western Basin.

"Given the location of Bay Shore, it is especially a problem," Pierce said. "The numbers are just exponentially higher at Bay Shore (than other plants)." FirstEnergy has applied for a renewal of its National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit, which facilities must get from the EPA every five years, Pierce said. The environmental groups want Ohio EPA to require FirstEnergy to install cooling towers at the plant as part of the permit approval, because the towers would reduce fish kills by 95 percent.

Pierce said the agency likely will not deny FirstEnergy's permit because the plant needs to be able to provide power to customers. Ohio EPA plans to work with FirstEnergy on its louvers concept on a trial basis, she said.

"If it proves to be effective to the degree that we want, we'll say go ahead and use that technology," she said. "If it's not effective, we'll say you have to try something else. We're still considering everything."

Although cooling towers -- like the one used at the Davis-Besse Nuclear Power Station in Carroll Township -- might be effective at keeping the fish out, there are downsides to them, Durbin said. FirstEnergy will need three towers, and they will cost \$100 million and add a 3 to 6.5 percent increase in customers' bills, according to a study FirstEnergy hired a consultant to complete.

Towers also could block the view of the lake and could make noise, he said.

Bihn said FirstEnergy has declined to shut down the plant during the fish-spawning season.

"It's again very easy for someone to tell someone else to shut down an [asset](#)," Durbin said. "Very few people have businesses that they could shut down for part of the year and remain viable." FirstEnergy, however, would consider reducing its water intake during spawning season, he said.