

Article published June 5, 2010

Fish killed at power plant may exceed \$30M a year

Court values bass alone at \$50 apiece

By **TOM HENRY**
BLADE STAFF WRITER

If \$30 million worth of fish sounds like a lot for northwest Ohio's economy to sacrifice each year for electricity generated by Oregon's Bay Shore power plant, consider this: The real impact might be a lot greater.

On Wednesday, as a number of nonprofit groups were releasing what is believed to be the region's first-ever report to quantify the annual loss of 60 million fish in dollars, Magistrate Lou Wargo of Ottawa County Municipal Court in Port Clinton issued a court order that put the value of smallmouth bass at \$50 a fish on behalf of the state of Ohio.

The figure is almost triple the \$16.77 value placed on smallmouth bass in a report released to the public that same day by activist and outdoor groups. The lower figure was included in a report compiled by Gentner Consulting Group of Silver Spring, Md., and issued by the Western Lake Erie Waterkeeper Association, the Sierra Club, the Ohio Environmental Council, the Lake Erie Charter Boat Association, the Izaak Walton League of America, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and Ohio Citizen Action.

It claimed that FirstEnergy Corp.'s failure to modernize its coal-fired Bay Shore power plant with effective fish barriers has been costing the region \$30 million annually for years.

The report, which cost the groups \$25,000 and took four months to produce, listed values for fish species between 24 cents per fish for freshwater drum and carp to \$20.38 per fish for walleye.

"We're finding out now our report was extremely conservative," the Sierra Club of Ohio's Natchy Kanfer said on a boat tour of the plant's intake channel hosted for reporters yesterday by Sandy Bihn of the Western Lake Erie Waterkeeper Association.

Mr. Kanfer was referring to an order issued against three Tennessee men and three Georgia men for illegally taking 141 smallmouth bass from Lake Erie in April. According to a news release issued Thursday by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the men pleaded guilty May 3 to 30 poaching charges and were ordered by the magistrate to pay \$16,290 in fines, court costs, and restitution.

The restitution, according to the state agency's news release, included \$50 "for each fish taken illegally in accordance with legislation that places a value on wild animals unlawfully held, taken, bought, sold, or possessed."

Mr. Kanfer said the state's value of smallmouth bass is further evidence that FirstEnergy's damage to the region's coveted fishing industry isn't exaggerated.

Ellen Raines, FirstEnergy spokesman, said the utility has no interest in reading the report or debating its credence. "It's not going to have any impact on the decisions we make," she said.

The estimate of an annual loss of 60 million fish - 46 million adults and 14 million juveniles - came from a FirstEnergy consultant for a permit request now before the Ohio EPA.

"We think those numbers are low. They're the company's own numbers," Mr. Kanfer said.

Those losses include an estimated 4,445 smallmouth bass, according to the report by FirstEnergy's consultant, Toronto-based Kinectrics Inc.

The state agency has said it likely will allow the utility to do a pilot study with barriers known as reverse louvers instead of requiring a cooling tower.

The latter would save 95 percent of the fish and reduce the thermal impact of the plant's outfall on Maumee Bay but cost \$100 million or more. The louvers would cost about \$500,000 to be put across the intake.

Ms. Bihn, who lives along the bay, said Bay Shore's discharge is so hot that water along the shoreline between the plant and Maumee Bay State Park rarely freezes, even when deeper water in the lake's western basin has frozen over.

The 55-year-old power station lies smack in the middle of one of the Great Lakes region's most important fish nurseries, a site that Ohio EPA officials have said would not be authorized if the power plant was being built today. Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland recently said he is personally aware of the problem, though adding that he does not plan to intervene with whatever the Ohio EPA decides.

Contact Tom Henry at:
thentry@theblade.com
or 419-724-6079.
