



Lawsuit Against Federal Agencies Filed on Behalf of Sea Turtles

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A lawsuit has been filed against two federal agencies alleging that they are complicit in the deaths of thousands of endangered sea turtles. The lawsuit was filed on behalf of the sea turtles by a coalition of conservationist groups, including the Center for Biological Diversity which released a statement about the lawsuit. They maintain that the legal action is directed against two specific federal agencies which have allowed power plants to continue to use out-dated systems that endanger wildlife. The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) have apparently not taken into account the effect on the wildlife and their environment when they determine whether to allow power plants to use older cooling systems rather than having them update to more eco-friendly ones.

The system in question is called a once-through cooling system, which uses water from a large



outside source in a one-off usage before being dumped back into the source. The only protections for wildlife are screens across the vents and intakes for water. It is these parts of the system that allegedly cause the most harm to wildlife. Animals, especially sea turtles skirting the coastline, get sucked in to the system and end up dying because they are stuck inside it. There is also a concern about how the temperature of the water is affected by the process as even the most subtle differences in temperature can affect an ecosystem or harm the animals who depend on certain temperatures to live.

Sea turtles are a main focus of the lawsuit filed against federal agencies because of their status as endangered species. There are a variety of sea turtle species who are affected by these systems. Historically long-lived, even longer-lived than many humans, these beautiful creatures face

dwindling numbers and loss of habitat. Oil spills, damage to their environment and changes in world temperatures represent substantial challenges to their existence. Thus, conservation groups are eager to eliminate at least one threat to these creatures.

They allege in their lawsuit that these two federal agencies are not taking into account the loss of marine life when they look to regulate power plant operators. There is apparently newer technology which is safer for the sea turtles and other marine animals, but the FWS and NMFS have failed to require they be put in place. For the conservation groups' case, this amounts to a dereliction of duty. As Jaclyn Lopez of the Center for Biological Diversity said, "We hope they will now live up to their names." They want to compel the agencies to follow the portion of the Clean Water Act that calls for "Best Available Technology" and would mean the upgrade of outdated and dangerous cooling systems to the newer, safer kind.

Lawsuits on behalf of animals, including the sea turtles, are not necessarily uncommon, but this one is quite bold in taking on federal agencies. If successful, the legal action could result in the upgrade of many power plant cooling systems all over America and save the lives of many endangered species. Whether or not the case is good is up to a court to decide, but there it is at least for a good cause.