



Patty Leon

Sports editor

pleon@coastalcourier.com

912-876-0156 ext. 28

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Although there's a lot of attention currently focused on Liberty County's proposed wastewater treatment facility at Tradeport East Industrial Center, members of the Ogeechee-Canoochee Riverkeepers organization say there's another area that also should be in the limelight — the Ogeechee and Canoochee Rivers.

The Canoochee River is a tributary of the Ogeechee and extends into Liberty County through Fort Stewart. The Ogeechee River flows into the Ossabaw Sound on Georgia's Coast.

"Something that people really need to know about, especially when you talk about water resources along the coast, is the new proposed coal fired power plant in the head waters of the Ogeechee basin near Sandersville," Chandra Brown, executive director of the Ogeechee-Canoochee Riverkeepers organization said.

The proposed Plant Washington, an 850 megawatt coal-fired power plant planned near Sandersville in the Ogeechee basin was cultivated by a group call Power4Georgians. They are a consortium of 10 electric cooperatives.

"Our big concern is that the fish in the Ogeechee and Canoochee Rivers are already laden with toxic mercury," Brown said. "So much so that you can only eat one meal a month of the largemouth bass caught in the river and one meal a week of catfish. That is the state's guidelines not ours."

Brown said 99 percent of the mercury in the river comes from air pollution and the proposed plant will likely put an extra 122 pounds of mercury into the air per year.

"The federal government has said another 19 pounds into the river would make the fish so toxic that no one could eat them," Brown said. "So we are in a serious crisis mode. People all over the area, if they care about eating fish from the river to the coast, they need to be opposing this coal plant."

On Thursday, Sandersville residents were allowed to ask questions to a panel of representatives from the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, Power4Georgians and elected officials before building plans and permits are finalized. Environmentalist and conservationist hope they will allow for other public meetings and forums in an effort to thwart any permits from being issued on the proposed plant.

"It's a new threat. We've got a bad situation already and we have the opportunity to keep it from getting worse," Brown said.

Mercury is not the only threat the plant brings. An environmental group called Georgians for Smart Energy recently issued a statement to the Macon Telegraph warning that the Harriman, Tenn., disaster, where ash spilled into the rivers and polluted miles and miles of waterways, could happen at Plant Washington.

Brown said everyone should express their concerns because the people in Sandersville alone can't fight the battle.

"It's a small community going against a big power company coming in from Atlanta that wants to put a power plant here and send 90 percent of the energy back to Atlanta," Brown said. "They are putting it here, polluting our water to generate power for Atlanta and that is just unacceptable."