

Cooling Water Intake Structure Rule Key Messages

The cooling water intake structure rule sets standards to protect billions of fish and other aquatic life drawn each year into cooling water systems at large power plants and factories.

Section 316(b) of the Clean Water Act requires that National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits for facilities with cooling water intake structures ensure that the location, design, construction, and capacity of the structures reflect the best technology available to minimize harmful impacts on the environment. The rule will apply to about 1,000 facilities across the country.

The withdrawal of cooling water by facilities removes billions of aquatic organisms from waters of the United States each year, including fish, larvae and eggs, crustaceans, shellfish, sea turtles, marine mammals and other aquatic life. Most impacts to fish and shellfish are through impingement (being pinned against cooling water intake structures) and entrainment (being drawn into cooling water systems and affected by heat, chemicals or physical stress).

The Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries support the rule. EPA worked closely with the FWS and NOAA Fisheries since 2012 on the development of the rule to protect threatened and endangered species and critical habitat.

NOAA Fisheries and FWS will continue to collaborate with EPA, delegated State and Tribal authorities, and facilities to ensure streamlined implementation of the rule and regulatory certainty under the Endangered Species Act.