

Press Release

Region 2 - New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands



EPA Weighs Six Options to Accelerate the Cleanup of Pollution in the Lower Passaic River

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(New York, N.Y. June 14, 2007) As part of its accelerated plan of action for the lower Passaic River, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today announced six alternatives under consideration for cleaning up the river. The options, developed by EPA along with a partnership of five other federal and state agencies, include dredging and capping the sediments of the lower eight miles and could carry a price tag of \$0.9 to \$2.3 billion. Addressing contaminated sediments in the lower eight miles of the river will target the source that contributes the vast majority of the dioxin and almost half of the PCBs, pesticides and mercury in the river below Dundee Dam. The options will be submitted to a work group consisting of federal and state agencies and environmental and community groups, and parties that are potentially responsible for the contamination, for their input before EPA formally proposes a specific cleanup plan.

“Let there be no mistake about it, we will get this river cleaned up and make it a jewel of New Jersey,” said Alan J. Steinberg, EPA Regional Administrator. “Of course, this can’t happen overnight, but addressing this major source of contamination will take us a long way toward reversing decades of pollution that has blighted this important natural and economic resource.”

The alternatives were developed with extensive input from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, and the New Jersey Department of Transportation. Any accelerated cleanup action would be taken at the same time that EPA is overseeing a supplemental study of the 17-mile tidal stretch of the river, currently being undertaken with EPA oversight, by a group of companies that are potentially responsible for the contamination of the river.

In evaluating alternatives, EPA is required by law to take a number of factors into account, including how well the option protects human health and the environment, how effective the solution is in both the short and long terms, how well the option can be implemented, community acceptance and cost.

The six alternatives and their estimated costs are:

- 1) Removing fine-grained sediment from the lower eight miles by dredging (\$2 - \$2.3 billion)
- 2) Capping the sediments in the lower eight miles by placing clean materials on top of the contaminated ones (\$0.9 - \$1.1 billion);
- 3) Reconstructing a current federally-recognized navigation channel by using a combination of capping and backfilling for the lower eight miles of the river (\$1.5 - \$1.9 billion);
- 4) Constructing a new navigational channel for current use and capping the lower eight miles (\$1.3 - \$1.6 billion);
- 5) Constructing a new navigation channel for new uses that will develop in the future once the river is restored, then capping the lower eight miles of the river (\$1.4 - \$1.8 billion);
- 6) Constructing a new navigational channel for future use; dredging fine-grained materials from a one-mile stretch with the highest concentration of contamination and from another one-mile zone where the most erosion takes place, then capping the entire eight mile stretch (\$1.5 - \$1.8 billion).

EPA is also required by law at all Superfund sites to consider taking no action, which is also an alternative considered in the document. Other alternatives have a range of benefits and costs. The options range in the amount of sediment to be removed – between 1.2 million cubic yards and 11 million cubic yards. The alternatives all rely on proven technologies so that they can be carried out in the near future without extensive research or study.

In the report, the Agency lays out its evaluation of the alternatives based on input from its partners, but doesn't select one. First EPA and its partner agencies will seek input from a work group, which has been attending meetings relating to the project since its inception and includes a range of participants including environmental groups and companies. The work group is requested to provide its input in 30 days. The partner agencies will carefully weigh this input and EPA will make its proposal of one preferred alternative by the end of the year. This proposal will be subject to full public comment before EPA makes its final selection next year.

While it considers early actions, the Agency and its partner agencies continue their comprehensive 17-mile study to search for more sources of pollution and determine what needs to be done to address the broader area of contamination.

For a copy of the proposal and for more information about actions already taken to clean up the Passaic, go to <http://www.ourpassaic.org>. For more information about the Superfund program visit <http://www.epa.gov/region02/superfund>.

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