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Governor Doyle Announces Record of Decision for Fox River Cleanup

GREEN BAY – At a news conference in Green Bay, Governor Jim Doyle announced today that the Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have released the Record of Decision on the plan for cleaning up polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contaminated sediment from a 13-mile portion of the Lower Fox River in Green Bay.

"After decades of work, discussions and debates that have spanned several administrations, we are finally poised to move forward with the cleanup of the Fox River and turn our efforts to negotiating the remedy implementation with the responsible companies," Governor Doyle said. "I am confident that we can continue going forward at a pace that will produce clean water, safe fish and a healthy ecosystem sooner rather than later."

The Record of Decision (ROD) represents the final decision by the state and the EPA on the plan for sediment cleanup of two sections of the Lower Fox River from Little Rapids to the mouth of the river at Green Bay and Green Bay itself.

"Cleaning up the Fox River has been one of my top environmental priorities since I took office in January," Governor Doyle said. "The Fox River has always been vitally important to Wisconsin and the Fox River Valley. But if we want to preserve this valuable resource for the future, we must repair the damage of 150 years of heavy wear and tear on the river and surrounding lands. And we must clean up the PCBs that have contaminated the river."

The signing of the ROD means that DNR and EPA have worked through a range of choices and combinations of options to reach a technical decision to clean up the Lower Fox River and Green Bay. The ROD sets out a flexible plan, calling for dredging in the river and monitored natural recovery in Green Bay – a plan which both DNR and EPA believe will be effective.

The Governor said the process of removing toxic PCBs from the Fox River could begin as early as next summer. When the cleanup is finished, millions of cubic yards of polluted sediments and tons of PCBs will have been removed from the river.

"Together, these two projects will remove about 90 percent of the PCBs in the river," said EPA Region 5 Administrator Tom Skinner. "That's a major step on the road to recovery for the Fox."

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The ROD estimates that work in the sections of the river from Little Rapids to the mouth of the river will cost \$284 million, with another \$40 million to be spent on monitored natural recovery in the bay. The entire cleanup – including the upper sections announced earlier this year – is estimated at \$400 million.

“Cleanup of the river will be paid for by those responsible for placing the pollutants in the river,” Governor Doyle said. “This flexible cleanup plan is fair, and it will protect the taxpayers and our environment.”

Technical Summary of Record of Decision

The river sections covered by the ROD are designated as Operable Unit 3 (from Little Rapids to De Pere), Operable Unit 4 (from De Pere to Green Bay) and Operable Unit 5 (Green Bay).

The remedy of dredging has been selected for OU-3 and OU-4, and the remedy of monitored natural recovery has been selected for OU-5.

During the design phase of the projects, more detailed, site-specific information will be collected. Depending on the information collected, the agencies may consider changes to the scope and design of the remedy that could affect the amount of dredging to be done or other potential techniques.

Engineers estimate that OU-3, the reach from Little Rapids to the DePere dam, contains approximately 2750 pounds of PCBs in 3,030,100 cubic yards of sediment. This ROD calls for hydraulic dredging of 586,800 cubic yards of contaminated sediment, which will remove approximately 2,444 pounds of the PCBs. In addition, the ROD call for removal of approximately 9,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment containing 68 pounds of PCBs from Deposit DD in OU-2 directly adjacent to the Little Rapids dam.

The section of the river containing the largest amount of PCB contaminated sediment is OU-4. Engineers estimate that OU-4 contains approximately 58,620 pounds of PCBs in 8,491,400 cubic yards of sediment. This ROD provides for removal of 58,150 pounds of PCBs from OU-4 through the dredging of 5,879,500 cubic yards of contaminated sediment. Included in this estimate is the contaminated sediment that contains PCB concentrations above 1 part per million located in Green Bay near the mouth of the river.

For Green Bay, OU-5, the selected remedy is Monitored Natural Recovery. MNR is the monitoring of natural processes, such as degradation, dispersion and the burial of contaminant concentrations to the point at which the contaminants are no longer of concern. The MNR alternative includes a 40-year monitoring program for measuring PCB levels in water, sediment, fish and birds to effectively measure progress toward and achievement of the remedial action for OU-5. Analysis by DNR and EPA show that the proposed remediation of the Lower Fox River is expected to reduce the amount of PCBs moving into Green Bay in the future by 98 percent. Also, the results of additional sampling done in Green Bay in 2002, showed concentrations of under 1 part per million except at the mouth of the river. That area, with a maximum concentration of 30 parts per million, will be dredged as part of the OU-4 cleanup. The agencies believe that addressing continuing PCB discharges into Green Bay will be more cost-effective at reducing long term risks in Green Bay than would active remediation in any portion of the Bay.

The estimated cost for remedial action in Operable Units 3 and 4 is \$284 million, and \$39.6 million for OU-5, which represents an increase from the estimate found in Proposed Plan. This, combined with the estimated cost of the cleanup for OUs-1 and 2 of \$76.1 million, brings the total estimated cost of the entire cleanup to \$399.7 million.

A public information meeting on the completed ROD will be held on Tuesday, August 19 at the Brown County Library, 515 Pine St. in Green Bay. The meeting will begin with an availability session with DNR and EPA staff on hand to answer individual questions and discuss the ROD and other Fox River cleanup issues at 6:00 PM. Presentations discussing the ROD will begin at 7:00 followed by a public question and answer opportunity until 9:00.

PCBs were discharged into the Lower Fox River and Green Bay during the manufacturing and recycling of carbonless copy paper, primarily between 1954 and 1971. Removal of contaminated sediment will result in reduced risks from PCBs in fish tissue to levels protective of human health and the environment, and help DNR and EPA reach their stated goal for the removal of all fish consumption advisories for the river and the bay.

The ROD for the Lower Fox River and Green Bay, the accompanying Responsiveness Summary and associated White Papers are available at the DNR and EPA Web sites, the Fox River information repositories, and in the Administrative Record for the Site. The DNR Lower Fox web page is located at www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/wm/lowerfox/index.html. The EPA web page can be found at www.epa.gov/region5/sites/foxriver.

The Administrative Record file for the Lower Fox River and Green Bay, including the ROD and all documents that formed a basis for the DNR/EPA's selection is available for public review at:

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Public information repositories are located at:

Appleton Public Library
225 N. Oneida St.
Appleton

Brown County Library
515 Pine St.
Green Bay

Door County Library
107 S. Fourth St.
Sturgeon Bay

Oneida Community Library
201 Elm St.
Oneida

Oshkosh Public Library
106 Washington Ave.
Oshkosh