



NEW YORK STATE
DEPARTMENT OF
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
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NEWS

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DEC ANNOUNCES PROPOSED CLEANUP PLAN FOR CUMBERLAND BAY SLUDGE BED
Plan to restore full use of site released for comment

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) today released for public comment a proposed cleanup plan for Cumberland Bay in Lake Champlain that calls for the dredging and removal of PCB-contaminated sludge.

The 34-acre sludge bed is adjacent to Wilcox Dock in the City of Plattsburgh. It has been on the State Registry of Inactive Hazardous Waste Sites since November 1994 and is a Class 2 site, meaning it presents a significant threat to public health and the environment. Action is required to clean up these sites.

DEC's proposed remedy calls for:

- * isolating the sludge bed with temporary sheet piling and silt curtains;
- * removing the sludge bed through dredging and dry excavation;
- * constructing and operating a temporary dewatering facility and wastewater treatment facility;
- * transporting the dewatered sludge off site for disposal at a permitted landfill; and
- * conducting follow-up fish sampling and fish monitoring.

Because of intense public interest in the cleanup strategy, DEC has extended the public comment period from 30 to 60 days, with comments accepted through Sept. 12, 1997. DEC also is planning two public meetings on the plan. They will be held Wednesday, July 30, and Thursday, Aug. 28, at 7 p.m. in Room 208, Yokum Hall at the State University of New York College at Plattsburgh.

(MORE)

The Cumberland Bay sludge bed is composed of wood pulp, wood chip debris and related processing wastes from wood products industries in and around Plattsburgh. The wastes either settled or were directly discharged into this area of the bay for several decades until 1973 when the city's sewage treatment plant began treating wastes from local industries.

Sampling conducted in 1992, 1993 and 1994 identified PCB and other contamination in the sludge.

The contamination has adversely impacted aquatic life in the bay and threatens to further degrade water quality. Several species of fish in Lake Champlain have elevated levels of PCBs and there is a State Department of Health advisory in effect for the consumption of fish from the bay. There also is a ban on commercial fishing for yellow perch in Cumberland Bay.

As an interim measure, DEC annually cleans up PCB-contaminated wood chips that wash up on public beaches in the bay. More than 300 tons of debris have been removed.

The estimated cost of the proposed remedial plan is \$18.3 million. Negotiations to finance the cleanup are under way with parties who may have caused the contamination. Removal of the sludge bed will take two construction seasons.

DEC also examined two other cleanup alternatives: sludge bed removal with the construction of a confined disposal facility for the contaminated material in the lake; and sludge bed removal with construction of a disposal facility for the contaminated material on the shoreline.

DEC selected the off-site disposal option because it is the most permanent and effective method for restoring the environment and natural resources of Cumberland Bay and Lake Champlain. There would be no long-term operation and maintenance costs and all contaminated materials would be removed, restoring unrestricted future recreational or commercial use.

Dredging will remove most, if not all, of the sludge bed, vastly improving the environmental condition of the lake. This type of action has been successful at other sites across the state and nation.

The dewatered sludge would be taken to an existing permitted hazardous waste disposal facility. Other non-hazardous sludge could be taken to a solid waste landfill at the landfill owner's request.

The two other alternatives, constructing a permanent hazardous waste storage facility in the lake or on the shoreline, are less costly but do not comply with Department policy or State Environmental Law in that they would result in an unacceptable loss of natural resources of the state. Specifically, in-lake or shoreline disposal represents an unacceptable loss of aquatic habitat and lake bottom.

DEC will consider public comments in its proposal before issuing a final cleanup plan.

This is the second round of public meetings on the sludge bed problem. A draft feasibility study evaluating the different remedial alternatives was released in 1996 for public review.

The proposed remedial action plan can be reviewed at:

- * Plattsburgh Public Library, Oak and Brinkerhoff streets, Plattsburgh;
- * DEC Region 5 headquarters, Route 86, Ray Brook, Essex County; and
- * DEC Central Office, Room 228, 50 Wolf Road, Colonie, Albany County.