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## **SIERRA CLUB WELCOMES FOX RIVER CLEANUP DECISION**

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Green Bay, WI – Sierra Club welcomes the final Fox River cleanup decision released today by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). “This decision has been a long time coming,” notes Penny Bernard Schaber, Appleton resident and Chair of Sierra Club’s John Muir Chapter. “The agencies have made the right call for the river. Though the road to remediation has been rocky, and there are still pieces of this decision that could be strengthened, the light at the end of the tunnel began shining today.”

The Record of Decision, or ROD, is the final step in assigning responsibility for PCB pollution in the river and picking the best steps for cleaning it up. The ROD requires seven mills along the Fox River to dredge all sediments with concentrations of more than one part per million PCBs. The sediments will then be trucked or piped to dewatering stations and then either treated or landfilled.

“Today’s landmark decision sets a precedent for cleanup at other sites,” notes Jennifer Feyerherm, Toxics Specialist for the Sierra Club’s Great Lakes Program. The United States and Canada have identified the Fox River as one of 42 Areas of Concern around the Great Lakes. Sediments at these sites are laden with poisons that do not break down and build up in our bodies. “Now we have the blueprint for the most comprehensive cleanup we have seen in the Great Lakes basin. Removing these sediments will eliminate the largest water-borne source of PCBs to Lake Michigan. We hope success here will set the stage for cleaning up the rest of the Areas of Concern.”

While generally pleased with today’s decision, Bernard Schaber recognizes two of its limitations. Dredging is the only solution that permanently removes the poisons from the river. Unfortunately, this decision – like one earlier this year for the first two stretches of river – contains a loophole that opens the door for capping. “Spreading sand over the poisons in the riverbed and hoping that wind, waves, currents and floods will leave the riverbed undisturbed is unrealistic. We urge the agencies to stick to the method prescribed by years of research and remove the poisons, once and for all.”

Also, though agencies have made the right decision for the river, Sierra Club remains skeptical of the choice for Green Bay. Currents in the Bay move sediments around, depositing pockets of PCBs. Areas of eastern Green Bay have not been adequately sampled, leaving the possibility of unseen hotspots. Cleaning up the PCBs in the river and leaving hotspots in the Bay will leave our communities at risk.

The next challenge is deciding what to do with the contaminated sediments once they are out of the river. Sierra Club has long supported permanent destruction for persistent chemicals like PCBs. Feyerherm explains: “Given the options we have for Fox River sediment, the vitrification process is the only one that will permanently destroy the PCBs and not leave their dangers for future generations. If we vitrify as many of the Fox River sediments as possible, we destroy a toxic legacy that would otherwise plague our children and grandchildren. Even if it costs a little more now, it will really save us in the long run.”

Overall, Lori Weyers of Sierra Club’s Fox Valley Group is pleased with the decision. “When I was a child growing up a half-mile from the Fox, it was a given that you didn’t swim in or eat fish from the river. The Fox River ROD has the potential for repairing and restoring an amazing resource that’s right in our backyards. I’m both impatient and hopeful for the day I can go out and catch a walleye or bass on the Fox and get to eat it, too.”

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