

Public Comments/Questions Summary Report

Grand Calumet River and Indiana Harbor Canal

December 2015



East Chicago Waterway Management District
East Chicago, Indiana
In Partnership with the
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Great Lakes National Program Office
Chicago, Illinois



East Chicago Waterway Management District/U.S. EPA Public Meeting June 25, 2015

The East Chicago Waterway Management District, with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Great Lakes National Program Office held a public meeting on June 25, 2015 at the East Chicago Public Library. The purpose of the meeting was to provide attendees with an overview of site activities and an explanation of the preferred cleanup alternatives proposed for the project. Twenty-two attendees consisting of residents and state and local agency representatives from the ECWMD, U.S. EPA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, and ECWMD/U.S. EPA's contractor Tetra Tech were at the meeting.



Fernando Treviño, ECWMD, welcomed attendees and introduced other ECWMD board members in attendance; Diana Mally, U.S. EPA Project Manager; and Jim Wescott, Tetra Tech Project Manager.



Diana Mally, U.S. EPA GLNPO, discussed the past project work done on the Grand Calumet River.



Attendees listen as Jim Wescott, Tetra Tech Project Manager, gives an explanation of the preferred cleanup options.

Below is a list of questions and comments made during the meeting.

Q. *What is the capping material made of?*

A. It is made of aggregate with a mixture of clay and/or activated carbon to absorb contaminants.

Q. *Were there practical experiments performed on the cap design?*

A. There is an abundance of field and lab testing done to make sure that the capping material will work on conditions similar to those on the Grand Calumet River. We have also been monitoring caps placed on other sections of the Grand Calumet River to verify the cap performs as expected.

Q. *What is the plan for repairing areas along the banks?*

A. The expectation is for no disturbance of the banks from the sediment removal operation that would require repair. The plan does envision spraying the banks for invasive species, such as phragmites, and then reseeding the area.

Q. *If containment is being done in the middle section of the Lake George canal, why can it not be done in the left section?*

A. The material has a very high water content in the left section, which means the sediment does not have the strength to support the weight of a cap on top. If we try to cap it, the sand would go right through the sediment. For this section, it needs to be sucked out and removed.

Q. *How much longer will you continue to work on the project?*

A. We will work on the project as long as there is funding. The money comes in pieces so we will work on the areas where the funding comes through.

- Q. *Is this project related to the USS Lead project where residential yards are being dug up?***
A. No, this is a completely separate project with different funding.
- Q. *What is the prognosis of the Indiana Harbor?***
A. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is dredging the harbor, but that is a separate project from this one. There is coordination going on between EPA and USACE, but USACE is responsible for that area. We do know that they are completing dredging activities until August, but they are working with a certain amount of funding also so they can only dredge so much with what money they have.
- Q. *Do access agreements count towards matching [funds]?***
A. Yes they do, especially if people are allowing us to stage equipment on their property.
- Q. *Is there a way to create some type of district where anyone who develops on or around that area can be taxed a certain portion or can provide funding for maintenance and upkeep of that area?***
A. The ECWMD already has a process in place for this and is allowed to assess user fees for certain areas along the waterways.
- Q. *Is there a recreational component to this project?***
A. There is not a direct component, but the ECWMD has been doing a lot of work with the City of East Chicago to assess the future use of the areas along the waterways and will incorporate those ideas into the design. We want input from the community with ideas for future use so that we can make those considerations during the design phase. For example, we cannot technically build a kayak or boat launch or build a bike path, but we can leave the areas unfinished to allow the city to construct these things for future use.
- Q. *How does the timing of this project compare to the unfinished section along the Grand Calumet River itself?***
A. The unfinished portion on the far west end of the Grand Calumet River at the Illinois and Indiana state line will be finished before we begin this project.
- Q. *What happens where you have these two finished portions of the Grand Calumet River and then you have a section in the middle that is unfinished? Won't the contamination just go over the cap as the water flows downstream?***
A. We put in a large sedimentation basin near Cline Avenue at the downstream end of the unfinished portion in Gary. It serves the same purpose as the one at Indiana Harbor where theoretically, it will capture any suspended sediments and contaminations and drop them out in the sedimentation basin as the water continues flowing west. After we clean up the Gary section of the river, we will come back and clean out this sedimentation basin.
- Q. *Why can't we just excavate and remove all the contaminated materials?***
A. Removing and disposing 100% of contaminated material would be very expensive and cost prohibitive. The combination of the design options recommended takes into consideration optimizing cost and effective remediation of the contaminated sediments.

- Q.** *One resident expressed concerned that the dredging and capping will only work for a certain time frame and wonders what will happen generations from now when the sediment starts leaking back into the water. What happens when people start using the waterways and you have canoers, kayakers, and people jumping into the water that will probably be stirring up the sediment?*
- A.** The capping consists of almost two feet of material including large stones on the top of the cap. It is meant to trap in the contamination and prevent it from leaking back into the waterway. The larger stone on top protects the cap from being washed away or dug into by people or other animals. The process is modeled to last 100 years from now, and during this time the cap will be monitored including periodic sampling to confirm the cap is functioning. After 100 years additional cap material may need to be placed to supplement the cap planned for this project. However, we are talking 100 years from now and the existing contaminants in the sediment will possibly become degraded over time so no additional cap material may be required.

In addition to comments and questions raised at the public meeting, ECWMD received the following comments:

Comment 1: Regarding the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal (IHSC) South Branch, which appears no longer in use, Option #4 seems the best with hydraulic dredging and sediments contained. The dredged areas could be filled in with soil, eliminating the continuing pollution of the Grand Calumet River. The following bridges would no longer be needed: Columbus Drive, East Chicago Avenue, 151st Street, and also three railroad trestles.

Response to Comment: The canal connects the Grand Calumet River to Lake Michigan. Severing this tie would have an adverse impact on stormwater and other discharges that now flow into Lake Michigan. With no outlet to Lake Michigan, water levels in the Grand Calumet River would rise and flood adjacent property. Eliminating the link between the lake and the river would also negatively impact wildlife such as salmon that travel between the river and lake. Finally, filling the canal would eliminate the possibility of a recreational water trail linking the river and lake.

Filling in the canal would also be very expensive and cost prohibitive. The combination of the design options recommended takes into consideration optimizing cost and effective remediation of the contaminated sediments.

Comment 2: This comment is regarding the Feasibility Study (FS) report for the Great Lakes Legacy Act (GLLA) project for the South Tank Farm (STF). Although the FS report does not include a sheet pile wall along the STF, as the property owner of the STF, ECWMD believes it would be beneficial to install a sheet pile wall along the STF for the following reasons:

- It will help maximize the removal of contamination on both sides of the bank,
- It will stabilize the bank, minimizing bank collapse,
- It will make the bank safer if the GLLA project uses the STF for staging during remediation,
- It will help contain contamination from migrating from STF into the canal,
- It has aesthetic value, and
- It increases the opportunities for future use of the STF.