

OPINION

Contact Opinion page editor Warren Bluhm at (920) 431-83

OUR VIEW

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ISSUE: Fox River cleanup

Another shade of green for the area

It's appropriate that local businesses will benefit financially from the massive PCB cleanup that's finally under way on the Fox River.

After all, local residents and the local economy have paid the greatest price from decades of toxic pollution.

Officials from Tetra Tech, the Pasadena, Calif. firm managing the 10-year, \$600 million cleanup of PCB-contaminated sediments, told the Green Bay Press-Gazette last week that so far, \$200 million in contracts have been awarded to local, state and regional companies.

The PCB remediation will include removing the polychlorinated biphenyl sediment from hot spots on the lower Fox, treating it in a massive processing plant under construction north of the Georgia Pacific paper mill in Green Bay, and hauling the material to a landfill in Calumet County.

Dredging of almost 4 million cubic yards of PCB-contaminated sediment is scheduled to begin in May south of the De Pere dam. Gradually, the cleanup will move north of the dam to the bay. It will be the largest PCB river remediation in history.

While the paper mills responsible for discharging the PCBs haven't reached agreement on financial accountability, the present estimate of the cleanup is in the \$600 million range.

There are a couple of essential matters that need to be stressed — the PCB cleanup, while necessary, won't return the Fox River to a pristine state. This cleanup doesn't address the problem of nonpoint pollution. It's wrong to think this will solve all that ails the Fox River.

Nor should the jobs and economic boost created by this remediation project be seen as a windfall for the community. Although many local and regional companies will benefit from the contracts to get this work done, the economic loss posed by more than 50 years of toxic contamination most certainly exceeds \$600 million.

Just consider the lost worth to a commercial and sport fishery in which the fish were edible and not a human health risk. It's also fair to ponder what businesses might have flourished if authorities hadn't been compelled to issue a fish consumption advisory decades ago?

Looking in the rearview mirror is an interesting, but thoroughly academic exercise.

It's good that this cleanup is under way and will create local jobs for a local economy that is under stress. However, the boost to the economy should not obscure the price exacted by decades of environmental neglect.