
Legacy Act Funds Will Spur Sediment Removal Project

St. Marys River/Former MGP Project

Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan

February 2010

About the Great Lakes Legacy Act

Although discharges of toxic substances into the Great Lakes have been reduced over the last 20 years, significant concentrations of pollution remain in the bottom of some rivers and harbors. These contaminants pose potential health risks to people and wildlife, and states have issued fish advisories in many Great Lakes locations.

The tributaries and harbors identified as having pollution problems are known as “Areas of Concern,” or AOCs. There are 40 remaining AOCs on the Great Lakes – 25 on the U.S. side, 10 in Canada and five shared between the two countries. The MGP facility sediment removal project is part of the St. Marys River AOC, which extends from Whitefish Bay downstream through the St. Joseph Channel to Humburg Point on the Ontario side, and to the straits of Detour on the Michigan side.

For more information

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Work is set to begin this spring on a \$4 million project to remove about 26,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment from the St. Marys River near the MCM Marine facility. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Consumers Energy Co. agreed recently to the project.

This will be the second cleanup project in the St. Marys River Area of Concern to be done under the Great Lakes Legacy Act. About 41,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment were removed from Tannery Bay in 2007. The Act provides federal money that along with local matching dollars are used to clean up polluted sediment along the U.S. shores and waterways of the Great Lakes.

This is the last known area of significant contamination on the U.S. side of the St. Marys River AOC.

Consumers Energy is providing the non-federal matching funds required by the Legacy Act. This will be about \$1.6 million, or 40 percent of the total project cost. Legacy Act funds will total about \$2.4 million, or 60 percent. Other key project partners include U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment, the city of Sault Ste. Marie, and the Binational Public Advisory Council.



This is a view from the river of the existing MCM Marine facility. Phase I of the project will be performed in the bay areas to the right of the MCM Marine docks, extending west to the Soo Warehouse facility. Photo courtesy of MCM Marine.

The sediment is contaminated with polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, better known as PAHs. The site is located on the south side of the St. Marys River. The location is adjacent to a former manufactured gas plant, which operated from the early 1900s through the 1940s.

The first phase of the project is expected to begin in the spring, as weather allows. Consumers Energy will take the lead on digging up about 6,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment from the western bays at the MCM Marine facility on the south side of the river.

Details on implementation of the second phase will be available after completion of two important studies. Consumers Energy will conduct what EPA calls a feasibility study to determine the best way to approach the second phase. EPA will then develop what's known as a remedial design, or a detailed plan to clean up about 20,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment from a deeper area of the river just north of the Phase One work area.

EPA expects Phase Two work to be completed in the fall, or possibly in the spring of 2011. Dredged sediment will be stabilized on the MCM Marine site.

After water is removed and treated, the sediment will be disposed of properly in a local permitted landfill.

The Great Lakes Legacy Act

The Great Lakes Legacy Act was passed by Congress in 2002, and reauthorized in 2008, as a tool to accelerate the pace of sediment cleanup within the Great Lakes Areas of Concern. The U.S.-Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement identified contaminated sediment as a major obstacle to restoring beneficial uses in the AOCs.

Sediment removal successes

Since 2004, six sediment cleanup projects have been completed under the Great Lakes Legacy Act. These projects have cleaned up 960,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment at a cost of almost \$120 million. This funding has translated into the removal of more than 1.6 million pounds of contaminants from Great Lakes waterways, reducing risks to human health and wildlife. Other GLLA projects include cleanups in Trenton, Muskegon and Sault Ste. Marie (Tannery Bay), Mich.; Superior, Wis.; Ashtabula, Ohio; and Milwaukee, Wis.



A 1929 photo shows a cylindrical “gas holder” that was part of the manufactured gas plant on the St. Marys River. The building in the foreground is not part of the plant. Photo courtesy of Consumers Energy Co.