



Fact Sheet: Buffalo River Restoration Moving Forward

First Update on Collaborative Restoration Efforts

September 2009

Introduction

A unique public-private partnership including the U.S. EPA’s Great Lakes National Program Office (GLNPO), Buffalo Niagara RIVERKEEPER® (BNR), Honeywell, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), and the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is developing plans to address a number of environmental problems affecting the Buffalo River. The environmental challenges include contaminated river sediments, poor water quality, a lack of public access, and insufficient fish and wildlife habitat. In the past, individual agencies implemented projects to address some of these problems. NYSDEC, for example, has cleaned up many contaminated sites that contributed to pollution in the river. Specific cleanup efforts, however, were not designed to address multiple environmental issues. The new partnership brings together resources and expertise to plan comprehensive cleanup of the Buffalo River. Its goal is to transform the river into a beneficial environmental, economic, and community resource.



*Aerial photo of upper Buffalo River looking west toward Lake Erie
– Photo courtesy of Patricia Manley*

Why Am I Receiving Information About the Buffalo River at This Time?

This fact sheet seeks to promote awareness about the river, inform the public about plans for a cleanup effort expected to begin in the fall of 2010, and describe how the public will be kept informed and involved.



The highlighted portion of the Buffalo River and City Ship Canal represents the Buffalo River Area of Concern

After decades of planning, research, and assessment, a milestone will be reached soon with the release of a draft report about contaminated sediments in the Buffalo River. The draft report, called the “Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study,” will summarize and evaluate a number of cleanup alternatives for contaminated sediments in a 6.2 mile stretch of the lower Buffalo River identified as an Area of Concern (AOC). An AOC is a degraded water body within the Great Lakes Basin.

The release of the “Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study” represents an excellent opportunity to conduct comprehensive education and outreach activities on *all* environmental

problems concerning the Buffalo River. The outreach efforts are intended to inform the public and encourage participation. Active citizen input and participation are critical to the process of restoring and rehabilitating this important community resource.

What's Next?

A series of fact sheets will be distributed in the upcoming months to explain various topics related to the Buffalo River: the natural history of the watershed, fish and wildlife, industrial history, environmental challenges, remedial efforts to date, the Great Lakes Legacy Act, and sediment cleanup. Stakeholder and public meetings, press events, presentations, and boat tours along the river are also being planned.

The "Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study" on sediment cleanup is expected to be released by the end of the year. A 45 day public comment period will follow its release. A public meeting will be held during the comment period to discuss findings and explain alternatives for addressing contaminated sediments. Information about this meeting and other upcoming events will be distributed through the media, mailings, and the web.

Background

Industrial, commercial and public use of the Buffalo River throughout the late 19th and 20th Centuries contributed to Buffalo's rise as a thriving urban center. During that time, there was limited scientific knowledge about the effect of these uses on the river's ecology. By the 1970s and 1980s, awareness had grown and the need to address the river's environmental health began to be understood. The 1987 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement between the United States and Canada listed the contaminated 6.2 mile stretch of the Buffalo River as an Area of Concern. Forty-three AOCs have been identified in the Great Lakes Basin: 26 located entirely within the United States; 12 located wholly within Canada; and five shared by both countries.

In 2002, the **Great Lakes Legacy Act** (GLLA) established funding for cleaning up contaminated sediments at AOCs. GLLA funds along with non-federal matching funds provided by Honeywell, BNR, and NYSDEC are making it possible to conduct studies on contaminated sediments in the Buffalo River. The process of cleaning up the river will continue to draw on local resources, but it will also bring outside resources into Western New York.

How Can I Obtain More Information?

The partners involved in cleaning up and restoring the Buffalo River developed a new website to serve as a clearinghouse for river-related information and information about the upcoming sediment cleanup. NYSDEC is hosting the new site, www.BuffaloRiverRestoration.org. Be sure to visit the site periodically for updates and the latest information.

A number of other websites with good information about the Buffalo River are also available:

- The USEPA has information on the Buffalo River Area of Concern at: <http://www.epa.gov/greatlakes/aoc/buffalo.html>.
- Buffalo Niagara RIVERKEEPER's website, www.bnriverkeeper.org, has an extensive database and is a clearinghouse for Buffalo River information including all Buffalo River Remedial Action Plan documents.
- Information about individual brownfield cleanup sites along the river may be found on NYSDEC's Region 9 remediation webpage, <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/37554.html>.

Who Should I Contact If I Have Questions About the Buffalo River?

The following individuals can be contacted about issues related to the Buffalo River AOC:

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