



The Hudson River Trustee Agencies
Assessing and Restoring Your Natural Resources

September 16, 2002

NOAA-02 R432

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TRUSTEES RELEASE PLAN TO ASSESS HUDSON RIVER RESOURCE INJURIES

Natural Resource Damage Assessment Plan to Determine Damages,
Identify Restoration Strategies

Trustees from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Department of Interior, and New York State who are responsible for assessing the impacts of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) on the Hudson River, today released a comprehensive plan for studying the river environment, including fish and wildlife, surface waters and geological resources.

The Hudson River Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) Plan describes the broad range of studies completed, under way, or to be undertaken as part of an assessment of potential PCB-related injuries to living resources such as birds, fish, mammals, amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates; surface water and river sediments; geological resources including flood plain soils; groundwater; and air. The assessment will be used to help the trustees evaluate and determine actions, including projects to restore resources, to mitigate damages to these resources.

The trustees include representatives of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the U.S. Department of the Interior/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Park Service (NPS). The trustees act on behalf of the public to assess and restore natural resources injured by hazardous substances.

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“For decades, the New York public has not had full use of the Hudson River natural resources,” retired Navy Vice Admiral Conrad Lautenbacher, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere, and NOAA administrator. “The damage assessment plan is a roadmap for renewing the Hudson River and eliminating the contaminants. NOAA is working with other co-trustees to ensure that this great resource is accessible again.”

“As we continue our efforts to restore the Hudson River, we must ensure that we clearly understand how the river environment has been impacted by the release of PCBs and how we can best address these impacts,” DEC Commissioner Erin M. Crotty said. “Through the NRDA process, we are undertaking a range of scientific studies that will provide us with valuable information on the nature and extent of damages to our natural resource that will help us move forward with a strategy for restoring the historic Hudson River and its ecosystems.”

According to Dr. Mamie Parker, regional director for USFWS, the NRDA plan represents an “important milestone in the Hudson River’s trip back from PCB contamination.”

“We believe this plan points the way toward a thorough assessment of PCB contamination to our resources,” Parker said.

The public will have the opportunities to provide comments on the plan in a series of public availability sessions in October. The trustees will review the comments and may incorporate them into the plan, which will continue to be developed and potentially revised as the damage assessment progresses.

The NRDA Plan for the Hudson River is the third step in the damage assessment process. The first step, a pre-assessment screen of Hudson River PCB contamination, was completed in 1997. The second step, a request for ideas on potential restoration projects, began in 2000 and is ongoing, with trustees continuing to accept proposals.

At the conclusion of the assessment, the trustee agencies will prepare a report that includes the NRDA Plan, public comments, responses to those comments, and additional study plans that were developed during the process, as well as other information relevant to the assessment.

Under the federal Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA, or Superfund), parties that have released hazardous substances to the river and caused injury to natural resources can be held responsible for the costs of restoring the environment. Following an evaluation of the PCB contamination of the Hudson River, the trustees will determine whether to pursue legal action against polluters under the Superfund law. All funds recovered must be designated to the restoration of the river’s ecosystem.

The trustees have produced the following documents about the effects of PCB contamination in the Hudson River:

- “Injuries to Hudson River Fishery Resources” (June 2001);
- “Hudson River Fish Health Assessment” (fall 2001);
- “Progress Report on Hudson River Mammals: Polychlorinated Biphenyl (PCB) Levels in Mink, Otter, and Muskrat and Trapping Results for Mink, the Upper Hudson River Drainage, 1998-2000” (winter 2002);
- “Hudson River Natural Resources Damage Assessment, Floodplain Soil and Biota Screening Sampling Report, February 2002”;
- “Preliminary Investigations of Bird Injuries” (winter 2002); and
- “Preliminary Investigation of Snapping Turtles” (June 2002).

The Hudson River Natural Resource Damage Assessment Plan is available at various libraries and other repositories throughout New York State and can be viewed at the following websites:

<http://www.darp.noaa.gov/neregion/hudsonr.htm>
<http://www.dec.state.ny.us/website/hudson/index.html>
<http://contaminants.fws.gov/restorationplans/HudsonRiver.gfm>

NOAA acts as a trustee on behalf of the public to restore coastal and marine resources injured by hazardous substances.

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