



## Region 5 Cleanup Sites

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### **Background**

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The Lower Fox River, located in northeastern Wisconsin, begins at the Menasha and Neenah channels leading from Lake Winnebago and flows northeast for 39 miles where it discharges into Green Bay and Lake Michigan. Approximately 270,000 people live in the communities along the river. The river has 12 dams and includes the highest concentration of pulp and paper mills in the world. During the 1950s and 1960s, these mills routinely used PCBs in their operations which ultimately contaminated the river.

PCBs do not degrade naturally, but instead concentrate in the environment and the food chain resulting in health hazards to humans, fish and wildlife. The Lower Fox River project involves the cleanup of sediment (mud) contaminated with PCBs, as well as the restoration of the natural resources damaged by these contaminants.

A number of federal, state and tribal agencies have joined efforts to address this important issue through regulatory avenues including Superfund, the Natural Resource Damage Assessment, and state spill authorities.

Dredging and capping of highly contaminated sediment in the area of the Lower Fox River just below the DePere Dam was completed in 2008. The area, or "hotspot," near the dam had PCBs as high as 3,000 parts per million. Although this area contained the highest levels of PCBs in the river, it represented only about two percent of all of the contaminated sediment that needs to be cleaned up, but nearly 10 percent of the total PCB "mass."

This cleanup, which involved the removal of about 130,000 cubic yards of PCB-contaminated sediment, was done under a federal agreement EPA and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources reached with two paper companies in April 2006. The companies, NCR Corp. and Sonoco--U.S. Mills, spent about \$30 million on this project.

Dredging of Little Lake Butte des Morts was completed in May 2009. Approximately 370,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment were removed. To accomplish this, two dredges operated mostly in the southern half of the lake because it had the highest levels of contamination. After PCB-contaminated sediment was dredged from the lake, it was put into large plastic tubes nearby. Once the water was squeezed out, it was cleaned on-site and returned to the river. Contaminated sediment was taken to a nearby landfill for proper disposal. Remaining areas with lower levels of PCBs were covered with gravel and sand caps. This occurred mostly in the northern portion of the lake.

Little Lake Butte des Morts was the first of five portions of the Lower Fox River site to be cleaned up.

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**What are PCBs?**

As a result of the recycling of PCB-containing carbonless copy paper, area mill operations discharged PCBs in waste streams, contaminating sediment in the Lower Fox River. The Lower Fox River is the largest source of PCBs to Lake Michigan in the basin. From 1957 to 1971, about 250,000 pounds of PCBs were released, contaminating 11 million tons of sediment. It is estimated that some 160,000 pounds of PCBs have already left the Fox River and entered Green Bay and Lake Michigan. On average, 300 to 500 additional pounds are flushed from the Lower Fox sediment each year. Floods would flush additional thousands of pounds into Green Bay. Once PCBs are released into the bay and Lake Michigan, they are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to recover.