

Copyright © 2022 Newspapers.com. All Rights Reserved.

Science/Dredging questioned

From B-1

sor H.J. "Bud" Harris, chairman of natural and applied sciences at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, and John Kennedy of the Green Bay Metropolitan Sewerage District.

The RAP members worry that the federal Superfund process — needed as a hammer to force a cleanup — may be too rigid to allow for flexibility as the cleanup

On the other hand, they said the prospect of lawyers deciding the cleanup plan doesn't bode well when most of the seven paper mills responsible for the pollution are based outside Wisconsin meaning their executives "don't fish on the Fox River."

Johnson said the mills' move away from finding the best scientific remedy and toward finding the best legal remedy is evidenced by their absence in recent months at the RAP's technical committee meetings.

Last year's merger between Fort Howard Corp. and James River Corp. transferred Fort Howard's headquarters to Illinois and appears to have signaled a change in attitude toward the cleanup, he said. Lost in the move was the leadership role Fort Howard had taken in cleanup talks.

"They decided their science peo-ple are less important to this ple are less important to this issue than their PR people and their attorneys," Johnson said. "You'll find plenty of those float-ing around — that has character-ized the nature of the way the de-bate hea serve." bate has gone."

RAP defends itself The RAP members, their com-mittee under fire from environmentalists who say it failed to bring about a river cleanup plan and stave off federal involvement, also spoke in their own defense

The RAP committee — estab-lished in 1986 in response to the PCB problem in the Fox River and Green Bay — has done far more to move the cleanup forward than some acknowledge, they said.

For 10 years the RAP ordered or oversaw studies of PCB damage to the river and lower bay, among them the 1988-92 Green Bay Mass Balance Study and remediation studies at Little Lake Buttes des Morts

When the Fox River Coalition was formed in 1992 — represent-ing government, industry, com-munities, municipal treatment plants and environmentalists — RAP members served on a technical group that studied PCB hot spots on the river.

Much of that work is central to studies now being compiled by the state Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as they determine the extent of contami-nation and cleanup options as part of the Superfund process. But to date those documents

represent the RAP's only real in-volvement in the cleanup debate, despite the fact that Harris and some of the other committee members had years of experience studying the bay even before the RAP was created.

If tapped, Harris said the exper-tise of that group could play an important role at a time when both sides of the issue are pulling in opposite directions. As the EPA moves toward a Su-

erfund designation that would force paper mills responsible for the pollution to pay for the cleanup, the mills are moving to-ward a stance that favors leaving PCBs in the river. "Our concern is that there's a

lot of polarization, and it seems like we've moved into gridlock," Harris said. "In the process I think some of the science, if not ignored, it has not been taken into account.

Dredging debated The clearest example is the dicey debate about whether to dredge PCBs from the river. Although Harris said science

doesn't have all the answers and always contains elements of uncertainty, it does offer direction. Paper mills, however, have chosen to exploit what uncertainty

To attend meeting

A public informational meeting for a pilot dredging project on the Fox River's largest hot spot is scheduled for 7-9 tonight at the Brown County Library, 515 Pine St. The state Department of Nat-ural Resources will outline plans and take comments on plans to remove some of the pearly 3,000 remove some of the nearly 3,000 pounds of PCBs in the river sedipounds of PCBs in the river sedi-ment near Fort James Corp.'s West Mill. The \$7 million project will be funded by the Fox River Group, representing seven paper mills held responsible for an esti-mated 70,000 pounds of PCB contamination in the river be-tween I ake Winnebage and tween Lake Winnebago and Green Bay.

To comment

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposes to list the Fox River as a Superfund national priority cleanup site. The public has until Sept. 28 to submit written comments on the EPA's crite ria for proposing the river for Su-perfund designation. To submit comments, note the

site name — Wisconsin's Lower Fox River — and provide one original and three copies to: Docket coordinator, U.S. EPA Headquarters CERCLA Docket Office (5201G), 401 M Street S.W., Washington, D.C., 20560. Comments also may be e-

mailed in ASCII format to: superfund. docket@epamail.epa.gov.

there is about dredging and to use that as an argument that dredging must be avoided.

"Dredging will disturb things, but the point of the matter is that dredging will remove the mass of PCBs," Harris said.

"We're in one of those situations where you're damned if you leave it and you're damned if you don't. But there's enough evi-dence to show that if you ignore it that is not wident " ... that is not prudent.

Copyright © 2022 Newspapers.com. All Rights Reserved.