

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**JANUARY 2002**



**For**

**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Region 2**

**and**

**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Kansas City District**

**TAMS Consultants, Inc.**

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

	Page
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	
Book 1 of 3.....	i
Book 2 of 3.....	v
Book 3 of 3.....	ix
List of Acronyms and Abbreviations.....	xxv
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>Executive Summary-1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION TO THE RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>Introduction-1</b>
<b><u>COMMENTS &amp; RESPONSES (BOOK 1 of 3)</u></b>	
<b>1. LEGAL AND POLICY ISSUES</b>	
1.1 ARARs and TBCs.....	1-1
1.2 Policy Issues.....	1-23
1.2.1 CERCLA Requirements and Issues .....	1-23
1.2.2 Applicability of the NAS Report .....	1-30
1.3 Public/Citizen Participation Process .....	1-35
1.3.1 Peer Review Process .....	1-51
<b>2. BACKGROUND AND REMEDIAL INVESTIGATION</b>	
2.1 Sources of PCBs to the Upper Hudson River .....	2-1
2.2 Validity of the Low Resolution Sediment Coring Report .....	2-31
2.3 Other Geochemistry Issues .....	2-44
2.4 Baseline Modeling Assumptions .....	2-53
2.4.1 HUDTOX.....	2-55
2.4.2 FISHRAND.....	2-56
2.4.3 Farley Model.....	2-62
2.5 PCB Transport to the Lower Hudson River.....	2-63
2.6 Long-Term Trends in PCB Concentrations .....	2-64
2.7 Adequacy of RI Data Collection to Support the FS.....	2-77
<b>3. BASELINE RISK ASSESSMENTS AND PRGS</b>	
3.1 Baseline Human Health Risk Assessment .....	3-1
3.1.1 PCB Toxicity .....	3-1
3.1.1.1 PCB Toxicity – Cancer .....	3-1
3.1.1.2 PCB Toxicity – Non-Cancer .....	3-9
3.1.2 Fish Consumption (Rate and Species Mix) .....	3-19
3.1.3 Exposed Population .....	3-24
3.1.4 Sensitive Populations and Additional Exposure Routes.....	3-27
3.2 Baseline Ecological Risk Assessment .....	3-30
3.2.1 Ecological Toxicity of PCBs .....	3-35
3.2.2 Field Studies.....	3-41

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<u>Book 1 of 3</u>	Page
3.2.3 Ecological Risk Assumptions .....	3-54
3.3 Preliminary Remediation Goals (PRGs)/Fish Concentration Targets .....	3-55
<b>4. REMEDIAL ACTION OBJECTIVES AND SELECTION OF TARGET AREAS</b>	
4.1 Attainment of RAOs .....	4-1
4.2 Determination of Target Areas and Volumes .....	4-1
4.2.1 PCB Mass vs. Surface Concentration .....	4-16
4.2.2 Cohesive vs. Non-Cohesive sediments .....	4-17
4.2.3 Minimum Target Area for Dredging (50,000 sq ft minimum) .....	4-19
4.3 Use of Mass per Unit Area (MPA) as a Criterion.....	4-21
4.4 Section-Specific Target Criteria .....	4-24
4.5 Habitat-Based Targeting .....	4-28
<b>5. TECHNOLOGY EVALUATION AND REMEDIAL ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT</b>	
5.1 Technology Evaluation .....	5-1
5.1.1 Capping/Aquablok™ .....	5-1
5.1.2 Treatment/Vitrification .....	5-2
5.1.3 Dredging Technologies .....	5-5
5.2 Remedial Alternative Development.....	5-11
5.3 Comparison of MNA vs. Active Sediment Remediation .....	5-17
<b>6. MODELING ASSUMPTIONS AND INTERPRETATION</b>	
6.1 Fate and Transport Modeling .....	6-1
6.1.1 External PCB Loads to the Model .....	6-4
6.1.2 Spatial Resolution of Modeling .....	6-7
6.1.3 Post-Remediation Sediment Residuals .....	6-10
6.1.4 Resuspension .....	6-12
6.2 Bioaccumulation Modeling.....	6-16
6.3 Lower Hudson River Modeling .....	6-20
6.4 Interpretation and Use of Model Results .....	6-25
6.4.1 Presentation of Model Results .....	6-26
6.4.2 Use of Upper Bound Estimates .....	6-26
6.4.3 Comparison of EPA and GE Models .....	6-29
<b>7. ALTERNATIVE-SPECIFIC RISK ESTIMATES</b>	
7.1 Alternative-Specific HHRA Issues .....	7-1
7.2 Alternative-Specific ERA Issues .....	7-9
<b>8. COMMUNITY IMPACTS</b>	
8.1 Transportation (Infrastructure).....	8-1
8.1.1 Rail.....	8-6
8.1.2 River.....	8-7
8.1.3 Road/Highway .....	8-8

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<u>Book 1 of 3</u>	Page
8.2 Noise .....	8-10
8.3 Lighting.....	8-16
8.3.1 Impact of Lighting on Livestock.....	8-16
8.3.2 Impact of Lighting on Community .....	8-19
8.3.3 Impact of Lighting on Agriculture and Ecological Resources.....	8-21
8.4 Air Emissions.....	8-24
8.4.1 Odor .....	8-24
8.4.2 Diesel .....	8-27
8.4.3 PCB Transport (Particulates; Volatilization).....	8-27
8.5 Socioeconomic Issues .....	8-29
8.5.1 Aesthetics and Tourism.....	8-29
8.5.2 Economics.....	8-36
8.5.3 Quality of Life.....	8-48
8.5.4 Historic and Cultural Resources .....	8-51
8.6 Siting of the Facilities .....	8-55
8.6.1 Site Selection Criteria .....	8-55
8.6.2 Implications of the Facilities.....	8-57
8.7 Facility Operation .....	8-57
8.7.1 Staging of Dredged Sediments.....	8-57
8.7.2 Processing .....	8-58
8.8 Remedy Health and Safety Issues.....	8-61
<b>9. IN-RIVER IMPACTS (SHORT- AND LONG-TERM)</b>	
9.1 Issues Related to SAV and other Ecological Resources.....	9-1
9.2 Effect on Water Quality .....	9-12
9.3 Habitat Replacement .....	9-27
9.4 Time to Recovery.....	9-41
9.5 Effect on Navigation Channel/Bathymetry.....	9-44
<b>10. IMPLEMENTABILITY OF REMEDIAL ALTERNATIVES</b>	
10.1 Dredging Schedule and Production Rates.....	10-1
10.2 Monitoring .....	10-7
10.3 Resuspension and Residual PCB Concentration.....	10-12
10.4 Backfilling and Shoreline Restoration .....	10-20
10.5 Dredged Materials Disposal.....	10-23
10.6 Safety Concerns .....	10-27
<b>11. SELECTION OF THE PREFERRED REMEDY</b>	
11.1 Overall Protection of Human Health and Environment .....	11-1
11.2 Cost .....	11-3
11.3 Long-term Effectiveness and Permanence.....	11-6
11.4 Comparison Issues .....	11-8
11.5 Benefits vs. Risks.....	11-12

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<u>Book 1 of 3</u>	Page
11.6 Other .....	11-17
<b>INDEX</b> .....	Index-1

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**WHITE PAPERS (BOOK 2 of 3)**

**CONTAMINANT RISKS AND GEOCHEMISTRY**

**PCB Carcinogenicity**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 362702)

**PCB Non-Cancer Health Effects**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 362704)

**Relationship Between Tri+ and Total PCBs**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 424694)

**Relationship Between PCB Concentration In Surface Sediments and Upstream Sources**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 255353)

**Sediment PCB Inventory Estimates**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 363334)

**Metals Contamination**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 253002)

**Dioxin Contamination**

(Master Comment/Response 860)

**Model Forecasts for Additional Simulations in the Upper Hudson River**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 363150)

**Application of the Depth of Scour Model (DOSM) in the Thompson Island Pool for Alternative Flooding Assumptions**

(Master Comment/Response 407426)

**Trends in PCB Concentrations in Fish in the Upper Hudson River**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 312627)

**Relative Reduction of Human Health and Ecological Risks in the Mid- and Lower Hudson River**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 313699)

**Resuspension of PCBs During Dredging**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 336740)

**Human Health and Ecological Risk Reduction Under Phased Implementation**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 363176)

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Book 2 of 3

**ENGINEERING FEASIBILITY**

**Example Sediment Processing/Transfer Facilities**  
(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 253216)

**Dredging Productivity and Schedule**  
(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 253090)

**Delays and Downtime**  
(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 313398)

**Post-Dredging PCB Residuals**  
(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 312663)

**Estimate of Dredged Material Exceeding TSCA Criteria**  
(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 424851)

**Rail Operations**  
(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 312991)

**Off-Site Disposal Of Processed Sediments**  
(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 253477)

**Additional Technology Evaluation**  
(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 255314)

**POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE SELECTED REMEDY**

**Potential Impacts to Water Resources**  
(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 312851)

**Coastal Zone Management**  
(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 253238)

**PCB Releases to Air**  
(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 253202)

**Air Quality Evaluation**  
(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 313846)

**Odor Evaluation**  
(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 255361)

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Book 2 of 3

**Noise Evaluation**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 312685)

**Project-Related Traffic**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 253245)

**River Traffic**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 337804)

**Socioeconomics**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 313617)

**INDEX**



**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

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**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY**  
**HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**FIGURES, TABLES and APPENDICES (BOOK 3 of 3)**

**RESPONSES**

**Section 2 BACKGROUND AND REMEDIAL INVESTIGATION**

Figure 573-1	Mass Fraction of PCB Homologue Groups in Water Column Samples from Transect 4 at Rogers Island During High Flow
Figure 573-2	Water Column Total PCB Annual Load at Fort Edward, TI Dam, and Schuylerville from GE Data (Ratio Estimator)
Figure 577-1	Net Annual Release to Total PCBs from Thompson Island Pool Sediments
Figure 617-1	PCB Load at Rt. 197 and Load Gain across the TIP (from GE data)
Figure 621-1	Cumulative Total PCB Load at River Mile 194.2 (Rogers Island) and River Mile 188.5 (TID-WEST), Estimated from GE Monitoring Data for April 1991-March 2000
Figure 621-2	Shift in PCB Homologue Pattern across the Thompson Island Pool, Summer 1996
Figure 621-3	Summer Water Column Concentration at TID West versus Monthly Average Flow at Fort Edward, 1996-1999
Figure 623-1	PCB Homologue Shift across the TIP, June-August 1997 GE Observations
Figure 623-2	Summer 1997 Water Column Relative PCB Congener Concentrations near the Thompson Island Dam, Compared to Aroclor 1242
Figure 623-3	Congener Pattern in TIP Sediment Compared to Aroclor 1242
Figure 623-4	MDPR versus Total PCB Concentration for GE 0-5 cm Sediment Concentrations in the Thompson Island Pool
Figure 623-5	Relative Percent Patterns in Water Column Gain at TIP-18C, Surface Sediment, and Surface Sediment Porewater
Figure 623-6	Sediment Congener Pattern Derived from Summer 1997 Gain at TIP-18C Attributed to Porewater Flux
Figure 623-7	Sediment Relative Concentrations Required to Support Observed Water Column Concentrations via Porewater Flux
Figure 623-8	Concentrations at TID-West Predicted as a Mixture of Porewater and Sediment Exchange
Figure 623-9	Concentration Gain at TIP-18C Predicted as a Mixture of Porewater and Sediment Exchange
Figure 623-10	Relative Concentration Gain at TID-West, 1991-1997
Figure 623-11	1991-1997 Composite Congener Concentrations in TIP Load Gain Predicted as a Mixture of Porewater and Surface Sediment
Figure 629-1	Concentration Trends in Brown Bullhead, Including 2000 Data
Figure 631-1	Ratio of Tri+ at Center Channel to TID-West, Plotted against Upstream Flow and Concentration
Figure 631-2	Monthly Total PCB Loads at Rt. 197 (Fort Edward) and Rt. 29 (Schuylerville) Estimated from GE Data

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY**  
**HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Book 3 of 3

Figure 633-1	Cumulative Frequency Distribution of Total PCB Concentration in Surface Sediments in the Thompson Island Pool, 1991 and 1998 GE Data
Figure 633-2	Cumulative Frequency Distribution of MDPR in Surface Sediments in the Thompson Island Pool, 1991 and 1998 GE Data
Figure 635-1	Annual Average PCB Tri+ Concentrations from USGS Monitoring at Waterford and Stillwater
Figure 641-1	Reproduction of Figure 3 from GE Comments, Appendix F.1
Figure 779-1	Total Organic Carbon in Sediment at RM 189 (TIP)
Figure 779-2	Brown Bullhead: Sediment Accumulation Factors
Figure 313787-1	Forecasts of White Perch Tri+ PCB Body Burdens from Farley Model
Figure 313787-2	Forecasts of White Perch Tri+ PCB Body Burdens from FISHRAND
Figure 313787-3	Forecasts of Largemouth Bass Tri+ PCB Body Burdens from FISHRAND
Figure 313787-4	Forecasts of Brown Bullhead Tri+ PCB Body Burdens from FISHRAND
Figure 313787-5	Forecasts of Yellow Perch Tri+ PCB Body Burdens from FISHRAND
Table 313787-1	Comparison of Tri+ PCB Concentrations-Water Column

**Section 3      BASELINE RISK ASSESSMENTS AND PRGS**

Figure 811-1	Risk Functions for Female Eagle Exposed to PCBs
Figure 811-2	Risk Functions for Female Mink Exposed to PCBs
Figure 811-3	Risk Functions for Female Otter Exposed to PCBs
Table 811-1	Summary of Measured PCB Concentrations in Liver of Mink and Otter Caught within 5 Miles of the Hudson River as Compared to TRVs
Table 811-2	Summary of Distributions and Distribution Parameters Used in Joint Probability Analysis

**Section 4      REMEDIAL ACTION OBJECTIVES AND SELECTION OF TARGET AREAS**

Figure 597-1	Correlations Among PCB Metrics for 1984 NYSDEC Sediment Survey
Figure 597-2	Correlations Among PCB Metrics for USEPA Low Resolution Sediment Coring Survey
Figure 597-3	Correlation of Surface Concentration and MPA for GE 1991 Composite Samples
Figure 597-4	Assessment of the Capture Efficiency for the Expanded Hotspot Remediation Tri+ PCB Concentration and MPA Histograms for 1984 NYSDEC Data Within and Outside of Remedial Area
Figure 597-5	Assessment of the Capture Efficiency for the Expanded Hotspot Remediation Total PCB Concentration and MPA Histograms for 1984 NYSDEC Data Within and Outside of Remedial Area
Figure 313219-1	Methodology for Volume Estimation

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Book 3 of 3

**Section 5      TECHNOLOGY EVALUATION AND REMEDIAL ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT**

Figure 405965-1    Total PCB Content in Sediment vs. River Mile

**Section 6      MODELING ASSUMPTIONS AND INTERPRETATION**

Table 799-1	Mid Hudson River Species-Weighted Fish Fillet Average PCB Concentration (in mg/kg)
Table 799-2	Human Health Based Target Levels – Year Reached Comparison of Feasibility Study Alternatives – Mid-Hudson River
Table 799-3	Long-term Fish Ingestion Non-Cancer Hazards Reasonable Maximum Exposure and Central Tendency Mid-Hudson River-Adult Angler
Table 799-4	Long-Term Fish Ingestion Cancer Risks Reasonable Maximum Exposure and Central Tendency Mid-Hudson River – Adult Angler
Table 799-5	PCB Toxicity Quotients-Ecological Receptors 2011 on (25-Year Average) Mid to Lower Hudson River
Table 799-6	PCB Risk Reduction – Ecological Receptors (25-Year Average) Mid to Lower Hudson

**Section 7      ALTERNATIVE-SPECIFIC RISK ESTIMATES**

Table 797-1	Extended Dredging Fish Ingestion Non-cancer Health Hazards Reasonable Maximum Exposure and Central Tendency-Extended Dredging Upper Hudson River Fish-Adult Angler
Table 797-2	Extended Dredging Fish Ingestion Cancer Risks Reasonable Maximum Exposure and Central Tendency Upper Hudson River Fish-Adult Angler

**Section 9      IN-RIVER IMPACTS (SHORT- AND LONG-TERM)**

Figure 803-1      Average Monthly TSS Concentrations (mg/L)

**Section 11     SELECTION OF THE PREFERRED REMEDY**

Table 337780-1	Annual Tri+ PCB Loads at the Thompson Island, Northumberland, and Federal Dams for Selected Years
Table 337780-2	Cumulative Tri+ and Total PCB Loads at the Thompson Island, Northumberland, and Federal Dams (2004-2067)

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Book 3 of 3

**WHITE PAPERS**

**CONTAMINANT RISKS AND GEOCHEMISTRY**

**Relationship Between Tri + and Total PCBs**

- Figure 424694-1 Relationship Between Ratio of Total PCBs to Tri+ and Tri+ Concentration in HR, LRC and GE Cores
- Figure 424694-2 Estimation of Relationship Between the Ratio of Total PCBs to Tri+ and Tri+ Concentration
- Table 424694-1 Total PCB to Tri+ for Upper Hudson Water Column Samples
- Table 424694-2 Total PCB to Tri+ Ratios for the Sediments of the Upper Hudson
- Table 424694-3 Homologue Fractions in 1993 Phase 2 Fish Results

**Relationship Between PCB Concentrations in Surface Sediments and Upstream Sources**

- Figure 255353-1 PCB Concentration in High Resolution Sediment Cores in the Upper Hudson
- Figure 255353-2 Expanded Scale PCB Concentration in High Resolution Sediment Cores in the Upper Hudson

**Sediment PCB Inventory Estimates**

- Table 363334-1 PCB Mass Estimates using 1984 Thiessen Polygons, 1994 Phase 2 LRC and GE 1991 Composite Samples
- Table 363334-2 Mean Length-Weighted Average Concentration Estimates using 1984 Thiessen Polygons, 1994 LRC and GE 1991 Composite Samples
- Table 363334-3 REM/0/0/3 in Section 1, In Situ Mass
- Table 363334-4 REM 0/0/3 in Section 1, In Situ Average Concentration
- Table 363334-5 Average Surface Concentration Estimates of Cohesive Sediments, in REM 3/10/Select
- Table 363334-6 Dredge Material Average Concentration Estimates

**Metals Contamination**

- Figure 253002-1 Metals and Total PCBs in Two Dated Cores in Thompson Island Pool
- Figure 253002-2 Metal Concentrations in Fish
- Table 253002-1 Summary of Metal Levels in 1977 NYSDOH Sediment Samples (Tofflemire & Quinn, 1979)(mg/kg)
- Table 253002-2 Summary of Metal Levels in Upper Hudson 1984 Cores (as reported by Brown *et al.*, 1988) (mg/kg)

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY**  
**HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Book 3 of 3

Table 253002-3	Summary of Metal Levels in 1986 and 1987 Hot Spot 3, 8, and 20 Cores (as reported by Brown <i>et al.</i> , 1988) (mg/kg)
Table 253002-4	Metal and PCB Concentrations in Bopp Sediment Cores (mg/kg)
Table 253002-4a	Comparison of Surface Concentrations Between 1991 (RM 188.6) and 1993 (RM 203.3) data (mg/kg)
Table 253002-5	1983 and 1991 Thompson Island Pool Cores (as reported by McNulty, 1997) (mg/kg)
Table 253002-6	Comparison of Metals Concentrations to Background Levels in 1993 Samples (mg/kg)
Table 253002-7	Selected Physical Parameters and Mean Metal Concentrations (1993 Data)
Table 253002-8	1993 Ecological Risk Assessment Sediment Samples (0-5 cm) (mg/kg)
Table 253002-9	Results of Toxicity Characteristic Leaching Procedure (TCLP) on 1984 and 1986 Sediment Samples
Table 253002-10	NYSDEC 1998 Fish Data-Selected Metals (ppm)
Table 253002-11	Summary of All Sediment Data Sets (1977-1993) (mg/kg)
Table 253002-12	Summary of Lower Interval 1983 Core and Baseline Sample

**Dioxin Contamination**

Table 860-1	Dioxins/Furans Concentration in the Bopp 1991 Core (RM 188.6) with Respect to TEQ Levels and Landfill Requirements (data provided by Bill Ports of NYSDEC)
Table 860-2	Results of TCDD, TCDF, and PCB Analyses of Sediments Collected in 1983 from the Upper Hudson Rover (Brown <i>et al.</i> , 1988)
Table 860-3	Results of 1987 TCDD, TCDF and PCB Analysis of HS 20 (Sample 1 & 2), HS 8 (Samples 3 & 4), and HS 3 (Samples 5 & 6) (Brown <i>et al.</i> , 1988)
Table 860-4	Hudson River Fish Dioxin/Furan Data

**Model Forecasts for Additional Simulations in the Upper Hudson River**

Figure 363150-1	Comparison Between Upper Hudson River Remediation Forecasts for Thompson Island Pool Cohesive Surficial Sediments
Figure 363150-2	Comparison Between Upper Hudson River Remediation Forecasts for Thompson Island Pool Non-Cohesive Surficial Sediments
Figure 363150-3	Comparison Between Upper Hudson River Remediation Forecasts for Schuylerville Cohesive Surficial Sediments
Figure 363150-4	Comparison Between Upper Hudson River Remediation Forecasts for Schuylerville Non-Cohesive Surficial Sediments
Figure 363150-5	Comparison Between Upper Hudson River Remediation Forecasts for Stillwater Cohesive Surficial Sediments
Figure 363150-6	Comparison Between Upper Hudson River Remediation Forecasts for Stillwater Non-Cohesive Surficial Sediments

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY**  
**HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Book 3 of 3

Figure 363150-7	Comparison Between Upper Hudson River Remediation Forecasts for Waterford Cohesive Surficial Sediments
Figure 363150-8	Comparison Between Upper Hudson River Remediation Forecasts for Waterford Non-Cohesive Surficial Sediments
Figure 363150-9	Comparison Between Upper Hudson River Remediation Forecasts for Federal Dam Non-Cohesive Surficial Sediments
Figure 363150-10	Comparison Between Upper Hudson River Remediation Forecasts for Thompson Island Dam Annual Average Tri+ PCB Water Column Concentration
Figure 363150-11	Comparison Between Upper Hudson River Remediation Forecasts for Schuylerville Annual Average Tri+ PCB Water Column Concentration
Figure 363150-12	Comparison Between Upper Hudson River Remediation Forecasts for Stillwater Annual Average Tri+ PCB Water Column Concentration
Figure 363150-13	Comparison Between Upper Hudson River Remediation Forecasts for Waterford Annual Average Tri+ PCB Water Column Concentration
Figure 363150-14	Comparison Between Upper Hudson River Remediation Forecasts for Federal Dam Annual Average Tri+ PCB Water Column Concentration
Figure 363150-15	Predicted Fish Body Burdens 2004 - 2010
Figure 363150-16	Predicted Fish Body Burdens 2004 - 2067
Figure 363150-17	Predicted Fish Body Burdens for White Perch
Figure 363150-18	Comparison of Predicted Species-Weighted Fish Body Burdens Across Different Assumptions of the Selected Remedy 2004 - 2064
Figure 363150-19	Comparison of Predicted Species-Weighted Fish Body Burdens Across Different Scenarios 2004 - 2064
Figure 363150-20	Comparison of Predicted Species-Weighted Fish Body Burdens Across Different Scenarios 2004 – 2010 (2015 for RM 154)
Table 363150-1	Comparison of HUDTOX Modeling Scenarios Conducted to Evaluate Alternative Selected Remedy (REM-3/10/Select) Assumptions
Table 363150-2	REM-3/10/Select Remedial Scenario Dredging Sequence Information Used to Develop HUDTOX Inputs for 5-Year and 6-Year Implementation Periods
Table 363150-3	Dredging-Induced Daily Tri+ PCB Load for REM-3/10/Select and a Five-Year Implementation Schedule (Run R14RS) Input to HUDTOX Water Column Segments
Table 363150-4	Dredging-Induced Daily Tri+ PCB Load for REM-3/10/Select and a Six-Year Implementation Schedules (Runs R20RS @0.13% and R20RX @2.5%) Input to HUDTOX Water Column Segments
Table 363150-5	Tri+ PCB Load Over Thompson Island Dam
Table 363150-6	Tri+ PCB Load Over Northumberland Dam
Table 363150-7	Tri+ PCB Load Over Federal Dam

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Book 3 of 3

**Application of the Depth of Scour Model (DOSM) in the Thompson Island Pool for Alternative Flooding Assumptions**

Table 407426-1	Summary of Hydrodynamic Model Predictions for RBMR (47,330 cfs) and Estimated Upper Limit (61,835 cfs) 100-Year Peak Flows
Table 407426-2	Poolwide Thompson Island Pool Average Surficial Sediment Concentrations
Table 407426-3	Shear Stresses at High-Resolution Core Locations
Table 407426-4	Erosion Depth Comparison at High-Resolution Core Locations
Table 407426-5	Thompson Island Pool Expected Values of Solids Erosion and Mean Depth of Scour
Table 407426-6	Thompson Island Pool (TIP) Expected Values of Tri+ PCB Erosion in Comparison to PCB Inventory Estimates
Table 407426-7	Thompson Island Pool (TIP) Expected Values of Total PCB Erosion in Comparison to PCB Inventory Estimates

**Trends in PCB Concentrations in Fish in the Upper Hudson River**

Figure 312627-1	Lipid-based Tri+ PCB Concentrations in Fish, Thompson Island Pool (RM 189) (Revised)
Figure 312627-2	Lipid-based Tri+ PCB Concentrations in Fish, Stillwater Reach (Revised)
Table 312627-1	Half-Life Comparison of Model and Data Lipid-Based Annual Average PCB Concentrations in Fish

**Relative Reduction of Human Health and Ecological Risks in the Mid- and Lower Hudson River**

Table 313699-1	Mid-Hudson River Species-Weighted Fish Fillet Average PCB Concentrations (mg/kg)
Table 313699-2	Long-Term Fish Ingestion Cancer Risks Mid-Hudson River – Adult Angler
Table 313699-3	Long-Term Fish Ingestion Non-Cancer Hazard Indices Mid-Hudson River – Adult Angler
Table 313699-4	Modeled Times (Years) of Compliance with Human Health Risk-Based Concentrations Mid-Hudson River
Table 313699-5	Lower Hudson River Whole Fish Largemouth Bass Average PCB Concentrations (mg/kg)
Table 313699-6	Lower Hudson River Whole Fish Spottail Shiner Average PCB Concentrations (mg/kg)
Table 313699-7	Average (25-year) PCB Toxicity Quotients – Ecological Receptors
Table 313699-8	Modeled Times of Compliance with Ecological RGs and Risk-Based Concentrations



**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY**  
**HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Book 3 of 3

**Resuspension of PCBs During Dredging**

- Figure 336740-1 Fraction of Total Constituent Loss in Dissolved Form ( $K_d=10^5$  L/kg)
- Figure 336740-2 Typical Silt Curtin Response to Current
- Figure 336740-3 Frequency Distribution of Resuspension Rates for Cutterhead Dredging Operations
- Figure 336740-4 Location of SMU 56/57 and Sample-Collection Sites
- Figure 336740-5 Dissolved-Phase PCB Congener Distribution for the Upstream and Downstream Sites, Fox River, Wis.
- Figure 336740-6 Mean Dissolved and Particulate Effluent PCB Congener Concentrations on the Fox River, Wis.
- Figure 336740-7 PCB Concentrations at the Upstream and Downstream Transects Before and During Dredging Operations, Fox River, Wis.
- Figure 336740-8 Daily Mean Total Suspended Solids Concentrations for Upstream and Downstream Transects, Fox River, Wis.
- Figure 336740-9 Daily Water-Column PCB Load in the Deposit Area During the Dredging Operation on the Fox River, Wis.
- Figure 336740-10 New Bedford Harbor Monitoring Stations
- Figure 336740-11 General Electric Company-Hudson River Project Post-Construction Remnant Deposit Monitoring Program – Pump House Sediment Removal Interim Remedial Measures Site Map
- Figure 336740-12 Homologue Distribution from Hudson Falls IRM Monitoring Activities
- Figure 336740-13 Resuspension Rate for Open Clamshell Bucket Dredges with Water Depth
- Table 336740-1 Estimation of the Rate of Downstream Transport due to Resuspension
- Table 336740-2 Characteristics of Cutterhead Field Studies Used to Estimate Resuspension Rates
- Table 336740-3 Summary of PCB Concentration (ppm)<sup>1</sup> in Sediment After Dredging
- Table 336740-4 Cumulative PCB Mass Transport (kg)
- Table 336740-5 Summary of Estimated Resuspension Losses from Clamshell (open) Bucket Operations

**Human Health and Ecological Risk Reduction Under Phased Implementation**

- Table 363176-1 Selected Remedy (REM-3/10/Select) Upper Hudson Species-Weighted Fish Fillet Average PCB Concentration (mg/kg)
- Table 363176-2 Selected Remedy (REM-3/10/Select) Scenarios Post-Remediation PCB Concentrations in Fish-Upper Hudson River
- Table 363176-3 Selected Remedy (REM-3/10/Select) Scenarios – Long-Term Fish Ingestion Reasonable Maximum Exposure and Central Tendency Cancer Risks Upper Hudson River Fish – Adult Angler
- Table 363176-4 Selected Remedy (REM-3/10/Select) Scenarios – Long-Term Fish Ingestion Reasonable Maximum Exposure and Central Tendency PCB Non-Cancer Hazard Indices Upper Hudson River Fish – Adult Angler

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY**  
**HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Book 3 of 3

Table 363176-5	Modeled Times (Years) of Compliance with Human Health Risk-Based Concentrations Selected Remedy (REM-3/10/Select) Scenarios
Table 363176-6	Largemouth Bass Whole Body Average PCB Concentrations (mg/kg)
Table 363176-7	Spottail Shiner Whole Body Average PCB Concentrations (mg/kg)
Table 363176-8	Selected Remedy (REM-3/10/Select) Scenarios Average PCB Toxicity Quotients Ecological Receptors (25-Year Time Frame)
Table 363176-9	Modeled Times of Compliance with Ecological Risk-Based Concentrations Selected Remedy (REM-3/10/Select) Scenarios

**ENGINEERING FEASIBILITY**

**Example Sediment Processing/Transfer Facilities**

Figure 253216-1	Example Northern Sediment Processing and Transfer Facility Site - Existing Conditions
Figure 253216-2	Example Southern Sediment Processing and Transfer Facility Site – Existing Conditions
Figure 253216-3	Example Northern Sediment Processing and Transfer Facility - Layout for Mechanical Dredging
Figure 253216-4	Example Southern Sediment Processing and Transfer Facility - Layout for Mechanical Dredging
Figure 253216-5	Example Northern Sediment Processing and Transfer Facility - Layout for Hydraulic Dredging

**Dredging Productivity and Schedule**

Table 253090-1	“Other Projects” (Hydraulic) Referenced in Comments
----------------	---

**Delays and Downtime**

Table 313398-1	Analysis of Daily Temperature Information
Table 313398-2	Analysis of River Flow Delays

**Estimate of Dredged Material Exceeding TSCA Criteria**

Figure 424851-1	Cumulative Percentage of Sediment Volume Removal based on Total PCB Concentration with TI Pool
Table 424851-1	Percentage of Material Exceeding TSCA Criterion of 32 mg/kg

**Additional Technology Evaluation**

Table 255314-1	List of Process Options for Bioremediation
----------------	--

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Book 3 of 3

**POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE SELECTED REMEDY**

**Potential Impacts to Water Resources**

- Figure 312851-1 Typical Total Nitrogen and Total PCB Profiles in the Upper Hudson River High Resolution Core Samples
- Figure 312851-2 Hudson River PCBs Site Existing Discharge Locations to the Upper Hudson
- Table 312851-1 Model-Based Estimates of TSS from Resuspension for the Hudson River
- Table 312851-2 Estimated Total Nitrogen Increase in the Water Column during Dredging
- Table 312851-3 Estimate Total Phosphorous Increase in the Water Column during Dredging
- Table 312851-4 Estimated Flux of Metals to the Water Column, Based on the Resuspension Model at 10 Meters Downstream of the Dredge Head
- Table 312851-5 Estimated Concentrations for Metals in the Water Column
- Table 312851-6 Estimated Flux of PAHs to Water Column, Based on the Resuspension Model at 10 Meters Downstream of the Dredge Head
- Table 312851-7 Estimated Concentrations for PAHs in the Water Column at the Waterford Intake
- Table 312851-8 Estimated Dissolved Oxygen Impacts Due to Dredging

**Coastal Zone Management**

- Figure 253238-1 Project site relative to the New York State-designated coastal zone
- Figure 253238-2 Average Monthly TSS concentrations for Schuylerville, Stillwater and Waterford New York plotted against the estimated project-related fully mixed TSS concentration for hydraulic and mechanical dredging (0.50 mg/L and 1.1 mg/L) for River Sections 2 and 3
- Table 253238-1 Freshwater, Brackish Water, and Salt Water Habitats

**PCB Releases to Air**

- Table 253202-1 Estimated Transfer Area of the Components for Mechanical Dredging at the Sediment Processing/Transfer Facility
- Table 253202-2 Estimated Transfer Area of the Components for Hydraulic Dredging at the Sediment Processing/Transfer Facility
- Table 253202-3 ISCST3 Model Options
- Table 253202-4 Calculated PCB Loss from the Sediment Treatment/Transfer Facilities
- Table 253202-5 Predicted PCB Levels at the Modeled Receptor Locations and Associated Standards
- Table 253202-6 Predicted PCB Levels at the Modeling Receptor Locations Near Dredging Site and the Ambient Standard
- Table 253202-7 Outside Facility Boundary Cancer Risks to Residents

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY**  
**HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Book 3 of 3

Table 253202-8	Outside Facility Boundary Non-Cancer Hazards to Residents
Table 253202-9	Inside Facility Boundary Cancer Risks to Adult Workers
Table 253202-10	Inside Facility Boundary Non-Cancer Hazards to Adult Workers

**Air Quality Evaluation**

Table 313846-1	National and New York Ambient Air Quality Standards
Table 313846-2	Diesel Equipment Emission Rates
Table 313846-3	Truck Emission Rate
Table 313846-4	Sediment Handling Emission Rate
Table 313846-5	ISCST3 Model Options
Table 313846-6	Worst-Case Total Impact from Mechanical Dredging at NTF
Table 313846-7	Worst-Case Total Impact from Hydraulic Dredging at NTF
Table 313846-8	Worst-Case Total Impact Along the Hudson River from a Stationary Booster Near Glenn Falls Area
Table 313846-9	Worst-Case Total Impact Along the Hudson River from a Stationary Booster Near Albany Area
Table 313846-10	Calculated Metals Concentrations Associated with Airborne Suspended Particles

**Odor Evaluation**

Table 255361-1	Calculated H <sub>2</sub> S Levels and Relevant Standards
Table 255361-2	Calculated NH <sub>3</sub> Levels and Relevant Standards

**Noise Evaluation**

Table 312685-1	FHWA Noise Abatement Criteria
Table 312685-2	Typical Peak Noise Emission Levels for Construction Equipment
Table 312685-3	Long-term Noise Levels from Sediment Processing and Transfer Facilities
Table 312685-4	Long-term Noise Levels from Stationary Booster
Table 312685-5	Predicted Short-term L <sub>eq</sub> (1) (dBA) Noise Levels from Mechanical Dredging Process (worst-case ten weeks)
Table 312685-6	Predicted Short-term L <sub>eq</sub> (1) (dBA) Noise Levels from Hydraulic Dredging Process (worst-case nine weeks)

**Project-Related Traffic**

Table 253245-1	Fuel Deliveries Required Per Week
Table 253245-2	Truck Deliveries for the Northern Transfer Facility
Table 253245-3	Estimate of Traffic from Northern Transfer Facility

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Book 3 of 3

**River Traffic**

Table 337804-1	Recent Trends in Bulk Commodity Traffic on the Upper Hudson River
Table 337804-2	Projected Mechanical Dredging Equipment Requirements
Table 337804-3	Projected Hydraulic Dredging Equipment Requirements
Table 337804-4	1999 Champlain Canal Traffic Data
Table 337804-5	Available Lockages for 2001 Operating Season on the Hudson River (per lock)
Table 337804-6	Available Lockages Assuming 24 Hours of Operation
Table 337804-7	Daily Lockages at Lock 5-Schuylerville-Based on Peak Month (July 1999)
Table 337804-8	Daily Lockages at Lock 6-Fort Miller-Based on Peak Month (July 1999)
Table 337804-9	Estimated Lock Traffic at Lock 5 and 6 During Mechanical Dredging Removal Operations Occurring in River Section 1 and River Section 2
Table 337804-10	Daily Lockages (July 1999) vs. Daily Proposed Project Lockages, Lock 6 – Mechanical Dredging
Table 337804-11	Daily Lockages (July 1999) vs. Daily Proposed Project Lockages, Lock 5 – Mechanical Dredging
Table 337804-12	Daily Lockages (July 1999) vs. Daily Proposed Project Lockages, Lock 6 – Hydraulic Dredging

**Socioeconomics**

Figure 313617-1	Unemployment Rates
Figure 313617-2	Unemployed
Figure 313617-3	Construction Employment 1989-1998
Table 313617-1	Input Expenditures
Table 313617-2	Output Impacts – Five-County Region
Table 313617-3	Earning Impacts – Five-County Region
Table 313617-4	Employment Impacts – Five-County Region
Table 313617-5	Tourism Employment and Wages 1988-1999
Table 313617-6	Studies on Property Value Impacts

NO FIGURES OR TABLES

**Rail Operations**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 312991)

**PCB Carcinogenicity**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 362702)

**PCB Non-Cancer Health Effects**

(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 362704)

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Book 3 of 3

**Off-Site Disposal Of Processed Sediments**  
(MASTER COMMENT/RESPONSE 253477)

**Post Dredging PCB Residuals**  
(Master Comment/Response 312663)

**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A - HUDSON RIVER PCBs SUPERFUND SITE NEW YORK  
PRELIMINARY WETLANDS ASSESSMENT**

**APPENDIX B - HUDSON RIVER PCBs SUPERFUND SITE NEW YORK  
PRELIMINARY FLOODPLAINS ASSESSMENT**

**APPENDIX C - STAGE 1A CULTURAL RESOURCES SURVEY**

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	C-1
1. INTRODUCTION .....	C-2
1.1 Site Description.....	C-2
1.2 Site History .....	C-3
1.3 Goals of Remedial Action.....	C-3
1.4 General Objectives and Organization of Document .....	C-4
2. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK .....	C-5
2.1 Applicable Statutes and Regulations .....	C-5
2.2 Survey Methods .....	C-8
3. REMEDIAL ACTION ALTERNATIVES.....	C-13
3.1 Description of Alternatives .....	C-13
3.2 General Removal Information .....	C-15
3.3 Selected Remedy.....	C-18
4. ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING .....	C-21
4.1 Physiology.....	C-21
4.2 Glacial History .....	C-22
4.3 Hydrology .....	C-24
4.4 Sediments.....	C-25
5. PREHISTORIC AND HISTORIC BACKGROUND .....	C-27
5.1 Prehistoric Period.....	C-27
5.2 Pre-Industrial Era, ca. 1609-1815 .....	C-34
5.3 19 <sup>th</sup> Century, ca. 1820-1900 .....	C-43

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<u>Book 3 of 3</u>	Page
5.4 20th Century, ca. 1900-1945 .....	C-55
5.5 20 <sup>th</sup> Century, 1945-Present .....	C-61
6. RESULTS OF SURVEY .....	C-67
6.1 National Register-Listed Resources.....	C-67
6.2 National Register-Eligible Resources .....	C-68
6.3 Unevaluated Resources .....	C-69
6.4 Previous Studies.....	C-71
6.5 Other Resources .....	C-79
7. POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF SELECTED REMEDY .....	C-81
7.1 Effects to Known National Register-Listed and Eligible Resources .....	C-83
7.2 Effects to Archaeological Resources .....	C-87
7.3 Effects to Other Resources.....	C-88
8. FUTURE STEPS .....	C-89
8.1 Identification and Evaluation Efforts.....	C-89
8.2 Mitigation of Adverse Effects.....	C-90
8.3. Coordination .....	C-91
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	C-93

**APPENDIX C TABLES & FIGURES**

Figure C.1-1	Overview of Upper Hudson River Glen Falls to Federal Dam
Figure C.2-1	Upper Hudson River APE
Figure C.3-1 A & B	Alternative REM-3/10/Select Removal Areas and Depths
Figure C.3-1 C & D	Alternative REM-3/10/Select Removal Areas and Depths
Figure C.3-1 E & F	Alternative REM-3/10/Select Removal Areas and Depths
Figure C.3-1 G	Alternative REM-3/10/Select Removal Areas and Depths
Figure C.3-1 H	Alternative REM-3/10/Select Removal Areas and Depths
Figure C.3-1 I & J	Alternative REM-3/10/Select Removal Areas and Depths
Figure C.3-1 K & L	Alternative REM-3/10/Select Removal Areas and Depths
Figure C.4-1	Land Form Regions for New York State
Figure C.4-2	Land Form Categories for New York State
Figure C.4-3	Hydrography on Upper Hudson River
Figure C.4-4	Underlying Rock Formation for New York State
Figure C.5-1	New Netherlands and New England, 1635
Figure C.5-2	New Netherland, 1621
Figure C.5-3	Major Land Grants and Patents of Colonial New York
Figure C.5-4	New York Counties, Colonial Era, 1776
Figure C.5-5	Northern Campaigns of the Revolutionary War

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Book 3 of 3

Figure C.5-6	Confluence of Hudson and Mohawk Valleys, 1843
Figure C.5-7	Canals of New York in 1855
Figure C.5-8	Upper Hudson River & Surrounding Region, 1880
Figure C.5-9	West Shore and New York Central Railroad
Figure C.5-10	Delaware and Hudson Railroad
Figure C.5-11	Upper Hudson River, 1921
Figure C.5-12	New York State Barge Canal System, 1925
Figure C.5-13	Hudson River Valley Electric Railway, 1906
Figure C.6-1 A	Architectural & Archaeological Resources in Upper Hudson River APE
Figure C.6-1 B	Architectural & Archaeological Resources in Upper Hudson River APE
Figure C.6-1 C	Architectural & Archaeological Resources in Upper Hudson River APE
Figure C.6-1 D	Architectural & Archaeological Resources in Upper Hudson River APE
Table C-1a	National Register-Listed Resources in Albany County
Table C-1b	National Register-Listed Resources in Rensselaer County
Table C-1c	National Register-Listed Resources in Saratoga County
Table C-1d	National Register-Listed Resources in Warren County
Table C-1e	National Register-Listed Resources in Washington County
Table C-2	Previously-Identified Archaeological Sites in Area of Potential Effect
Table C-3	Prior Archaeological Surveys

**APPENDIX D - COMPENDIUM OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

**APPENDIX D COMPACT DISKS**

Database of Public Comments .....	Compact Disk D1
Public Comment Documents .....	Compact Disks D2 – D6



**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACGIH	American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists
ACHP	Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
AGC	Annual Guideline Concentration
AOC	Administrative Order on Consent
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
APEG	Alkaline (Alkali Metal Hydroxide) Polyethylene Glycol
ARAR	Applicable or Relevant and Appropriate Requirement
ARCC	Adirondack Regional Chambers of Commerce
ARCS	Assessment and Remediation of Contaminated Sediments Program
ATSDR	Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry
AWQC	Ambient Water Quality Criterion
BAT	Best Achievable Technology
BBL	Blasland, Bouck, and Lee
BCD	Base-Catalyzed Decomposition
BMR	Baseline Modeling Report
CADD	Computer-Aided Drafting and Design
CDF	Confined Disposal Facility
CDI	Chronic Daily Intake
CERCLA	Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
cfs	cubic feet per second
CIP	Community Interaction Program
CLU-IN	Hazardous Waste Clean-up Information (EPA web site)
COC	Chemical(s) of Concern
COPC	Chemical(s) of Potential Concern
CSF	Cancer Slope Factor
CSM	Conceptual Site Model
CT	Central Tendency
CWA	Clean Water Act
CZM	Coastal Zone Management
DEIR	Data Evaluation and Interpretation Report
DMR	Discharge Monitoring Report
DNAPL	Dense Non-Aqueous Phase Liquid
DOC	Dissolved Organic Carbon
DOSM	Depth of Scour Model
DOT	Department of Transportation
DRE	Destruction and Removal Efficiency
ECD	Electron Capture Detector
ECL	Environmental Conservation Law (New York)
EE/CA	Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis
EEC	Extreme Effect Concentration
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EO	Executive Order
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EPC	Exposure Point Concentration
ERA	Ecological Risk Assessment
ESA	Endangered Species Act
ETWG	Engineering/Technology Work Group
FAIR	Farmers Against Irresponsible Remediation

## LIST OF ACRONYMS and ABBREVIATIONS (*cont'd*)

FDA	Food and Drug Administration
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FR	Federal Register
FRTR	Federal Remediation Technologies Roundtable
FS	Feasibility Study
FSSOW	Feasibility Study Scope of Work
FWIA	Fish & Wildlife Impact Analysis
g/m <sup>2</sup>	Grams per meter squared
GAC	Granular Activated Carbon
GC	Gas Chromatography
GCL	Geosynthetic Clay Liner
GE	General Electric Company
GIS	Geographic Information System
GLNPO	(EPA's) Great Lakes National Program Office
GRA	General Response Action
HDPE	High Density Polyethylene
HHRA	Human Health Risk Assessment
HHRASOW	Human Health Risk Assessment Scope of Work
HI	Hazard Index
HMTA	Hazardous Materials Transportation Act
hp	Horsepower
HQ	Hazard Quotient
HROC	Hudson River PCB Oversight Committee
HSI	Habitat Suitability Index
HTTD	High Temperature Thermal Desorption
HUDTOX	Upper Hudson River Toxic Chemical Model
IBI	Index of Biotic Integrity
IRIS	Integrated Risk Information System
ITT	Innovative Treatment Technologies (database)
kg	Kilogram
KPEG	Potassium polyethylene glycol
LOAEL	Lowest Observed Adverse Effect Level
LRC, LRCR	Low Resolution Sediment Coring Report
LTI	LimnoTech, Inc.
LTTD	Low Temperature Thermal Desorption
LWA	Length-Weighted Average
MANOVA	Multivariate Analysis of Variance
M&E	Metcalf and Eddy
MBI	Macroinvertebrate Biotic Index
MCA	Menzie-Cura and Associates
MCACES	Cost Estimating Software (USACE)
MCL	Maximum Contaminant Level
MCLG	Maximum Contaminant Level Goal
MDEQ	Michigan Department of Environmental Quality
MDPR	Molar Dechlorination Product Ratio
MEC	Mid-Range Effects Concentration
mg/kg	Milligrams per Kilogram (generally equivalent to parts per million, or ppm)
mg/L	Milligrams per Liter (generally equivalent to ppm)
MNA	Monitored Natural Attenuation
MPA	Mass per Unit Area

## LIST OF ACRONYMS and ABBREVIATIONS (*cont'd*)

MS	Mass Spectroscopy
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NAICS	North American Industry Coding System
NAS	National Academy of Sciences
NCP	National Oil Spill and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
ng/L	Nanograms per Liter, parts per trillion
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NiMo	Niagara Mohawk Power Company
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NOAEL	No Observed Adverse Effect Level
NPL	National Priorities List
NRC	National Research Council
NTCRA	Non-Time Critical Removal Action
NYCRR	New York Code of Rules and Regulations
NYSDEC	New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
NYSDOH	New York State Department of Health
NYSDEL	New York State Department of Labor
NYSOT	New York State Department of Transportation
NYSDES	New York State Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
O&M	Operation and Maintenance
OPRHP	Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
OSWER	Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response (EPA)
OU	Operable Unit
PCB	Polychlorinated Biphenyl
PCRDMP	Post-Construction Remnant Deposit Monitoring Plan
PEL	Probable Effects Level
PMCR	Preliminary Modeling Calibration Report
ppm	part(s) per million (mg/kg or mg/L)
PRG	Preliminary Remediation Goal
PSG	Project Sponsor Group
PVC	Polyvinyl Chloride
RAMP	Remedial Action Master Plan
RAO	Remedial Action Objective
RBC	Risk-Based Concentration
RBMR	Revised Baseline Modeling Report
REACH IT	Remediation and Characterization Innovative Technologies (EPA database)
RfD	Reference Dose
RI/FS	Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study
RI	Remedial Investigation
RIMS	Remediation Information Management System
RM	River Mile
RME	Reasonable Maximum Exposure
ROD	Record of Decision
SARA	Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986
SAV	Submerged Aquatic Vegetation
SEC	Sediment Effect Concentration
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
SITE	Superfund Innovative Technology Evaluation Program
SPDES	State Pollution Discharge Elimination System

## LIST OF ACRONYMS and ABBREVIATIONS (*cont'd*)

SQRT	Screening Quick Reference Tables
STC	Scientific and Technical Committee
T&E	Threatened and Endangered
TAG	Technical Assistance Grant
TAGM	Technical Assistance Guidance Memorandum (NYSDEC)
TBC	To-be-considered
TCDD	2,3,7,8-Tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin
TCP	2,4,6-Trichlorophenol
TEC	Threshold Effect Concentration
TEF	Toxicity Equivalency Factor
TEQ	(Dioxin-like) Toxic Equivalent Quotient
TI	Thompson Island
TID	Thompson Island Dam
TIN	Triangulated Irregular Network
TIP	Thompson Island Pool
TLV	Threshold Limit Value
TOC	Total Organic Carbon
TOGS	Technical and Operational Guidance Series (NYSDEC)
TOPS	Trace Organics Platform Sampler
TQ	Toxicity Quotient
TR	Target Risk
TRV	Toxicity Reference Value
TSCA	Toxic Substances Control Act
TWA	Time-Weighted Average
UCL	Upper Confidence Limit
UET	Upper Effects Threshold
µg/kg	Micrograms per Kilogram, (generally equivalent to parts per billion, or ppb)
µg/L	Micrograms per Liter, (generally equivalent to parts per billion, or ppb)
USACE	United States Army Corps of Engineers
USBEA	United States Bureau of Economic Analysis
USBLS	United States Bureau of Labor Statistics
USC	United States Code
USDOC	United States Department of Commerce
USDOD	United States Department of Defense
USDOE	United States Department of Energy
USDOI	United States Department of Interior
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	United States Geological Survey
VISITT	Vendor Information System for Innovative Treatment Technologies (EPA Program)
VLDPE	Very Low Density Polyethylene
WHO	World Health Organization

# **Hudson River PCBs Site Record of Decision Responsiveness Summary**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since its inception in 1990, EPA's Reassessment Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS) has had the benefit of an extensive public-involvement program. Even before the initiation of the formal public comment period on the Proposed Plan for the Hudson River PCBs Superfund Site and the supporting analysis and information, there had been over 65 meetings/forums with the public, involving many issues, people, and places. It was through this extensive effort that EPA determined that local landfilling of dredged materials would not be an option in the event that a dredging remedy were selected.

EPA opened the formal public comment period with the release of the Hudson River PCBs Superfund Site Proposed Plan on December 12, 2000. The Proposed Plan presented EPA's preferred remedy and the rationale for its selection. The preferred remedy consisted of removal (targeted dredging) of 2.65 million cubic yards of contaminated sediments containing over 150,000 pounds of PCBs from the Upper Hudson River using environmental dredging techniques that would minimize adverse environmental impacts, including the resuspension of sediments. The comment period, originally scheduled to close on February 16, 2001, was extended to April 17, 2001. During the comment period, EPA chaired 11 public meetings that were attended by thousands of individuals, several hundred of whom provided oral comment. By the close of the comment period, EPA had received 73,215 discrete submissions of comments, of which nearly half were e-mails. As multiple individuals signed some submissions, the number of commenters is recorded as over 90,000 individuals.

The results of this public involvement program and EPA's response to the concerns raised are clearly evident in the Record of Decision (ROD), which is being released at this time. Some of the more notable examples of decisions that reflect public comment on the Proposed Plan include:

- A commitment to develop (with input from the affected public) a comprehensive public involvement program to be employed throughout the design and construction phases of the project.
- A commitment to develop, during the design phase (with input from State and federal agencies, as well as the public), performance standards for key project aspects, including sediment resuspension and dredging production rates.
- A commitment to perform the construction in a phased manner whereby a first phase of construction (one construction season) will precede the full-scale, five-year construction period.

- A commitment to include in the first phase, in addition to project shakedown, the field verification of various project assumptions.
- A commitment to move dredged materials and backfill within the Upper Hudson River area by barge or rail to ensure that disruption of traffic patterns in neighboring communities does not occur.

The aforementioned are some of the more significant aspects of the decision or ROD that have been aimed at responding to concerns raised throughout the public comment period. Other quality-of-life factors, such as noise, odor, maintenance of navigation, water supply protection, construction lighting, air quality, aesthetics, maintenance of recreational opportunities, and impacts on farm activities, also have been taken into account within the selected remedy and are addressed in detail within this Responsiveness Summary (RS). What follows in this Executive Summary is an abbreviated discussion of some of these issues. For each, a more detailed discussion can be found within the main body of the RS.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION**

A number of comments dealt with the necessity of developing and implementing a comprehensive and detailed public involvement plan for the remedial design and implementation phases of the Hudson River PCBs Site cleanup.

Since the beginning of the Reassessment, EPA has been committed to a public process that is fully open to any interested party. The original community interaction plan (CIP) was designed to be flexible so that it could be modified in response to changes dictated by the project or requested by the participants. Since 1990, EPA has modified not only the CIP but also certain aspects of the RI/FS itself, as well as the selected remedy, based on public input.

EPA continues to be committed to involving the public, this time throughout the project's design (including development of performance standards and the sediment processing/transfer facility siting process) and construction phases. In the near future, EPA will involve the community in the development of a project-tailored public process that allows for incorporation of public involvement throughout the design and construction phases of the project and fully considers input received.

## **RESUSPENSION**

Many comments addressed the potential for PCB release to the water column during remedial dredging operations. Concerns over the extent and impact of releases caused by resuspension of contaminated sediments on public health and the environment have been raised. In reviewing these concerns, EPA agrees that such releases must be carefully balanced with impacts associated with ongoing PCB releases to the water column from the sediments and existing impacts to the aquatic biota. After a thorough review of available dredging equipment, EPA concludes that conventional hydraulic cutterhead dredges and enclosed environmental bucket dredges are best suited to the selected remedial dredging activity. Data from projects using these dredges were used as the basis for estimating water quality impacts that would result during dredging operations. These data show loss rates adjacent to the dredge head of 0.35 percent (by mass of fine sediments) for a conventional

hydraulic cutterhead dredge and 0.3 percent (by mass of fine sediments) for an environmental bucket dredge.

During the first year of project design, with input from State and federal agencies as well as the public, EPA will develop the details of performance standards and performance monitoring that will be utilized during the first phase of project construction to field verify and modify, as appropriate, project operations.

## **PROJECT SEQUENCE AND SCHEDULE**

Many commenters questioned the viability of EPA's schedule for accomplishing the selected remedy. EPA will begin the initial steps toward implementation once the ROD is signed. These pre-remediation activities, including project design, are scheduled for completion by Spring 2005, and many of these activities will be performed simultaneously. They include the following:

- Development of performance standards.
- Additional sediment sampling and analysis.
- Evaluation and selection of dredging technologies.
- Selection of contractor(s).
- Sediment processing/transfer facility siting and construction.
- Finalization of agreements with landfills, rail companies, backfill material suppliers, and energy providers.
- Mobilization (*e.g.*, assembling of equipment, planning the materials-handling operation, and arranging for sediment transportation and disposal).

Dredging operations will commence during the 2005 canal season.

Some commenters requested that EPA consider smaller, more focused projects, or perform a demonstration dredging project, to determine the feasibility of the selected remedy. EPA did, in fact, consider the possibilities of a short-term demonstration project and smaller-scale remedial efforts in the Upper Hudson River. Modeling indicated that smaller-scale efforts would not substantially reduce the PCB concentrations in fish.

In the Proposed Plan for this project, EPA proposed a five-year schedule for the work, beginning in the year 2004. However, given the concerns expressed by commenters, the Agency has decided to implement the project using a phased approach. Performing dredging operations in this manner provides the opportunity to evaluate overall project performance more intensively at the beginning and, as appropriate, refine the operations, which are now planned over a six-year period.

The selected remedy will be conducted in two phases over the six-year schedule. The first phase of dredging, to begin in 2005, will be implemented during the first construction season. The dredging during that year will be implemented initially at less than full-scale operation, and will include an extensive monitoring program based on performance standards that will address (but may not be limited to):



- Resuspension rates during dredging.
- Production rates.
- Residuals after dredging.
- Community impacts (*e.g.*, noise, air, odor, navigation).

Data gathered during this first phase will enable EPA to determine if adjustments are needed to operations in the succeeding phase of dredging or if performance standards need to be reevaluated. The current schedule assumes that, after the phased-in operations of 2005, dredging operations will proceed at full scale in the years 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009, with completion of remaining work in 2010.

Similarly, commenters questioned the plausibility of achieving targeted dredging rates with the dredging equipment selected. EPA considered available technologies in combination with a series of Site-specific factors such as sediment characteristics, river geometry, in-river transportation systems, and environmental constraints in arriving at likely production rates. EPA concludes that the production rates generated by examination of these factors are considered practical and attainable.

Commenters also compared EPA's productivity estimates to lower rates actually attained at other Superfund sites. EPA believes that project scale and Site-specific conditions render such comparisons technically invalid.

## **QUALITY OF LIFE FACTORS**

With regard to concerns expressed about the potential for negative impacts to the quality of life of people residing near or utilizing the river in the vicinity of the remediation, EPA has made every effort to fully assess and address such issues. They are summarized below in the categories of traffic, noise, construction lighting, air quality, odor, aesthetics, and recreation.

While there may be short-term impacts with respect to some of these issues, the project will follow strict guidelines to minimize and mitigate potential impacts to the maximum extent practicable.

It is EPA's belief that any temporary impacts are manageable and far outweighed by the long-term benefits of the remediation on human health and the environment.

### **Traffic**

Commenters raised concerns about the ability of the existing infrastructure to accommodate project-related increases in vehicular and truck traffic, and the potential disruption to regional roadways that could result from these increases. In response to these concerns, EPA has determined that dredged materials will be taken from the Site by barge and/or rail, rather than by truck. Likewise, material used for project backfill will be transported within the Upper Hudson River area by barge and/or rail. While the location(s) of the sediment processing/transfer facilities have not yet been determined, for purposes of the FS and Responsiveness Summary, northern and southern facility sites were assumed.

Impacts from vehicle and truck traffic caused by both worker commutation and construction of dredged-material processing facilities were the key elements of concern remaining, once trucking of dredged material and backfill was eliminated. At the southern sediment processing/transfer facility site, impacts will be easily manageable, because much of that locale is currently highly industrialized and experiences much greater activity than would be generated by project operations.

For the northern facility, estimates of the project-related road traffic were evaluated in the context of current traffic volumes and road capacities. During peak traffic conditions, it was concluded that employee traffic generated by the project will not be disruptive to the area's local communities, because the volume increase on nearby roadways will be minor (*i.e.*, less than 10 percent). Given that this increase in road usage is relatively small, it is unlikely that there will be an escalation in road hazards or a need for increased road maintenance as a result of implementing the selected remedy.

## **Noise**

The short-term noise associated with construction of the sediment processing/transfer facilities and hydraulic and mechanical dredging operations will not exceed the New York State Department of Transportation- (NYSDOT) established construction impact guidelines.

With respect to noise associated with operation of the sediment processing/transfer facilities, such noise levels will comply with applicable federal and State criteria, including the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Noise Abatement Criteria (NAC). While the long-term noise associated with stationary booster pump operations under the hydraulic dredging option could, if not mitigated, exceed FHWA NAC in areas within an 800-ft radius of the booster, a series of mitigation measures (*e.g.*, noise attenuation shrouds, optimizing locations of the booster stations to avoid populated areas to the extent practicable, or use of electric pumps) can be implemented as appropriate to mitigate the impact.

## **Construction Lighting**

Artificial lighting systems will be used to illuminate nighttime dredging and in-river transport operations, as well as land-based sediment processing/transfer facility operations. EPA has examined the types of artificial lighting that will likely be used in support of the project. Positioning of lights, brightness, and direction are key factors in minimizing the potential for off-site impacts.

While nighttime lighting requirements for the proposed work will conform to established industry safety standards, it will not be necessary to use high-mast lighting systems at dredging sites or at the sediment processing/transfer facilities. The lighting required for in-river transport will conform to the Coast Guard and New York Navigation Law standards for commercial towboats and barges and is not expected to be disruptive. Lighting at the land-based sediment processing/transfer facilities will meet OSHA standards for construction. Lighting will be directed toward work areas and away from neighboring properties. In addition, the use of low-mast lights will limit off-site glare.

## **Odor**

The two potential sources of odor from the project are the construction equipment and the dredged material from the river itself.

Nuisance odors from construction equipment are not anticipated to be a significant problem, because such equipment is used routinely on most construction projects with few complaints. Although sulfur in a reduced form is present in the river sediments, concentrations are sufficiently low so as to preclude the generation of noticeable and persistent odors from hydrogen sulfide in dredged material. Further, no significant ammonia-related odor will be generated during dredging operations. Should any odor be encountered, strategies will be implemented to mitigate adverse effects.

## **Air Quality**

The total concentration of pollutants from the dredging and sediment processing/transfer facility operations will not exceed the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) established by EPA to protect public health. It is not anticipated that the project will have a significant air quality impact.

The cancer risks associated with inhalation of volatilized PCBs in air by residents living near the river or near the sediment processing/transfer facilities are projected to be about an order of magnitude *below* the most stringent acceptable level. With respect to workers at the Site, the estimated cancer risk is within the acceptable risk range. Air monitoring, engineering controls, appropriate personal-protection equipment for workers, and standard safety procedures will be used to protect the on-site workers and nearby communities.

With the public involved, EPA will develop and implement a comprehensive community health and safety plan, including air monitoring, to address any potential risk associated with dredging and processing of the PCB-contaminated sediment.

## **Aesthetics**

Potential aesthetic and visual impacts from the dredging will apply to only a small portion of the 40 miles of river and, where they do occur, will be very temporary. Such potential impacts from the sediment processing/transfer facilities will be limited by the siting of these facilities in industrial or commercial regions and apply only to areas of close proximity; these impacts will be minimized, to the extent practicable, by careful siting and design of these sites. For travelers on the river or moving along adjacent roadways, project-generated visual intrusion will be short-term and limited to within several hundred feet of the work area.

## **Recreation**

Because of the relatively small area of the river that will be affected by dredging at any given time, the recreational experience on the river will remain substantially unaffected in areas not immediately adjacent to the dredging operation. In fact, it is expected that the project will improve recreational conditions. Few adverse impacts are anticipated for recreational boaters during implementation of

the selected remedy. A significant portion of the dredging is oriented to navigational dredging that, when completed, will provide an expanded and safer capacity for recreational use of the river.

The risk of swimming in the Hudson River, as discussed in the baseline Human Health Risk Assessment (HHRA), is considered to be within the acceptable range. It is anticipated that during the remediation project, PCB concentrations in the river will remain at or near current levels. Therefore, during the project, as now, the risk of swimming in the river will remain within the acceptable range.

It is anticipated that the impact on recreational fishing will be minimal during the remediation. Anglers will be able to find alternate sites to fish where the dredging and backfill operations are not proximate; impacts to fish habitat will be temporary and will affect only limited areas and certain species; and minor, temporary resuspension of PCBs during dredging should not affect catch-and-release fishing. In fact, the PCB remediation offers long-term prospects of renewed and enhanced recreational fishing.

## **SEDIMENT PROCESSING/TRANSFER FACILITY SITING AND DESIGN**

EPA has not yet determined the location(s) of sediment processing/transfer facilities necessary to implement the selected remedy. For purposes of the FS, example locations were identified from an initial list of candidate sites based on screening-level field observations that considered potential facility locations from an engineering perspective. In the FS, it was necessary to assume the locations of sediment processing/transfer facilities in order to develop conceptual engineering plans, analyze equipment requirements, and develop cost estimates for the remedial alternatives. For this purpose, two example locations were identified: one at the northern end of the project area in the vicinity of the Old Moreau Dredge Spoil Area site and another at the southern end of the project area near the Port of Albany. Each of these example locations fulfills many of the desired engineering characteristics for such a facility to support the remedial work, and is representative of reasonable assumptions with regard to distance from the dredging work and cost. Other locations, both within the Upper Hudson River area and farther downstream, are possible.

The example facility locations presented in the FS have also been used in this Responsiveness Summary in order to clarify material presented in the FS and Proposed Plan and in connection with additional noise, odor, and other analyses that were performed in order to respond to public comments. EPA will not determine the actual facility location(s) until after EPA performs additional analyses and holds a public comment period on proposed locations and considers public input in the final siting decision. Thus, all information provided in this Responsiveness Summary relative to potential impacts of the sediment processing/transfer facilities on communities, residents, agriculture, the environment, and businesses should likewise be considered representative and illustrative. Further specific assessment of and, as necessary, mitigation of, potential impacts will be addressed during design.

The general engineering characteristics that can be useful in identifying a potential site include a waterfront location so that barges and other floating equipment may be accessed; an existing heavy-duty bulkhead; fairly level topography to keep transfer operations, material processing, and rail facilities at approximately the same elevation; an industrial or commercial site, to avoid impacting residential, recreational, and institutional land uses; access to areas for storage of project-related

equipment; roadway access for both construction equipment and employees that avoids densely populated residential communities; two-lane roadways to accommodate truck traffic, or direct connection to such routes; and rail access to facilitate hauling and reduce overall transportation costs.

Already-developed industrial areas are preferable for consideration in siting these facilities. It is not anticipated that residences will be affected by processing/transfer of dredged material at these sites.

Potential impacts from the facilities on surroundings will be mitigated by attention to facility design and layout; lighting; screening and buffering of the facility; and minimization of truck traffic, among other considerations. Although it is expected that these facilities will be land-based, water-based facilities will also be evaluated.

## **PCB TRENDS IN FISH AND WATER COLUMN**

While it is true that levels of PCB contamination in all Upper Hudson River media have declined relative to the early 1980s, most of the decline was prior to 1985. In recent years there has been limited improvement and, in fact, PCB levels have remained relatively consistent. The conditions in the river were extremely poor in the late 1970s, largely due to events such as the breaching of the Fort Edward Dam. After the resulting massive influx of PCBs, EPA has documented that PCB levels in the river declined until 1985, which was approximately the time the Agency issued its original plan for the river – no action – in the hope that levels would continue to decline.

Since that time, however, the rate of improvement has leveled off, and substantial further improvement via natural attenuation does not appear to be occurring. For this reason, EPA has concluded that active remediation is needed to restore the Hudson River to a healthy ecosystem. To support this conclusion, further information on PCB concentrations in specific media is presented below.

- **Water column concentrations:** In general, PCB concentrations in the water column declined between 1991 and 1995 due to source control but, due to the continued, unabated input of PCBs from the sediment, little change has occurred over the past five years.
- **Sediment concentrations:** While sediment PCB concentrations have slowly declined on average, the response is very heterogeneous and does not solve the contamination problem. Even though concentrations have declined in some areas, high concentrations remain at or near the surface in many of the *hot spots*. The stability of PCBs that are currently buried in sediment cannot be assured, and it is the position of both EPA and an independent peer-review panel that the sediments of the Upper Hudson River do not represent a secure location for the long-term storage of PCBs.

Examination of PCB stability in sediment is complicated by the fact that modeling cannot accurately compensate for the variety of conditions within a river reach. For example, while the Thompson Island Pool is considered to be net depositional, specific highly contaminated areas are clearly not consistently depositional. Further, the presence of deposition does not ensure the stability and sequestration of the PCBs contained within the contaminated sediments. Evidence from multiple sources indicates that PCBs are not being safely buried to

a degree sufficient to remove them from interaction with the Hudson River.

- Fish concentrations: Despite the leakage of unweathered PCB oil from the vicinity of the GE Hudson Falls facility having been largely controlled, PCB concentrations in fish tissue have shown little decline in recent years (up to the year 2000). Sampling studies and modeling of such concentrations indicate continuing exposure through sediment food-chain pathways.

## **BENEFITS OF PROJECT**

EPA's decision to pursue the selected remedy balanced short-term impacts against long-term benefits. In doing so, the Agency examined three active remediation alternatives and two more-passive options: the No Action and the Monitored Natural Attenuation (MNA) Alternatives.

Under the "overall protection of human health and the environment" criterion (40 CFR § 300.430[e][9][iii][A]), EPA evaluated the degree to which the remedial alternatives provide adequate protection of human health and the environment from unacceptable risks posed by PCBs at the Site, and compared the relative protection afforded by each alternative.

Based on the comparative analysis of alternatives, EPA determined that active remediation of contaminated sediments is necessary in order to significantly reduce the human health and environmental risks at the Site. Unlike the selected remedy, the alternatives that do not require removal of PCB-contaminated sediments are not sufficiently protective. Similarly, EPA's analysis of the more extensive remedy (REM-0/0/3) found the differential in protection from that afforded by the selected remedy was insufficient to justify the greater cost of REM-0/0/3. There may be short-term impacts as a result of implementation of the selected remedy, including potential transportation, noise, odor, and lighting impacts, as well as potential impacts from construction and operation of the sediment processing/transfer facilities. However, these temporary impacts are expected to be manageable through appropriate controls. Consequently, EPA has determined that the potential short-term impacts of the selected remedy, which can be minimized, are substantially outweighed by the remedy's benefits to human health and the environment.

## **Projected PCB Trends in Fish**

Because PCBs bioaccumulate in fatty tissue, PCB levels in fish of the Hudson River has been a critical factor in this project and a critical issue for the public. Commenters frequently asked how many years would be required to attain the preliminary remediation goal (PRG) for human health, which is 0.05 ppm (mg/kg) PCBs in fish or other target levels. Commenters also observed that, and at times questioned why, this goal is 40 times stricter than the US Food and Drug Administration's commercial fish limit of 2.0 ppm. Others asked when the fish would be 'edible.'

## **Attainment of Target Levels**

The time it takes to achieve the Remediation Goal of 0.5 mg/kg PCBs in fish fillet and other risk-based PCB concentrations in fish (i.e., 0.4 mg/kg and 0.2 mg/kg) is species- and location-specific. Some fish will achieve these concentrations sooner than others, based on feeding and habitat preferences. The modeling projects that the selected remedy will attain the PCB concentration of 0.4

mg/kg in fish fillet, which is protective of the average adult who consumes one Hudson River fish meal every two months, in River Sections 1 and 2 within 20 years after the start of active remediation and earlier for River Section 3. The modeling also projects that the target PCB concentration of 0.2 mg/kg in fish fillet, which is protective of an adult who consumes one fish meal from the Hudson River per month, is expected to be attained in River Section 2 within 35 years of the start of active remediation. These time periods are significantly shorter than the time periods projected for attaining these targets under the No Action and the MNA Alternatives. Moreover, the actual time differentials may be greater than those calculated by EPA's models, as evidenced by the trend analysis of recent PCB concentrations in fish tissue.

The selected remedy is projected to meet the Remediation Goal for human consumption of fish, 0.05 mg/kg, in River Section 3 within 41 years of completion of active remediation. As a result, the remediation goal of 0.05 mg/kg, or one fish meal per week for an adult, also is expected to be attained in the majority of the Lower Hudson River within this time frame, due to the lower initial concentration of PCBs in the Lower Hudson compared to the Upper Hudson. Because of the continuing Tri+ PCB load of 2 ng/L assumed after implementation of the source control action in the vicinity of the GE Hudson Falls plant, the PCB concentration in fish averaged over the Upper Hudson is expected to be reduced to a range of 0.09 to 0.14 mg/kg within the 70-year modeled time period, which is slightly above the PRG of 0.05 mg/kg. However, the protectiveness of the selected remedy is further enhanced through continuation of institutional controls, such as the fish consumption advisories and fishing restrictions. In the ROD, EPA has adopted the 0.05 mg/kg concentration in species-weighted fish fillet as a final Remediation Goal for the Site.

If upstream source control is more successful than currently projected (*i.e.*, less than 0.025 kg/day), then the time frames identified above would be shorter and the Remediation Goal of 0.05 mg/kg may be met within the modeling time period in River Sections 1 and 2.

### **FDA Limit/Establishment of Target Level**

The FDA tolerance level of 2.0 ppm is based on a "market basket" of commercially caught fish obtained from supermarkets. The "market basket" concept assumes that fish purchased from a market come from varied sources, rather than from a sole source, such as fish taken from the Hudson River. The 2.0 ppm tolerance level in commercially marketed fish is an average PCB concentration, and assumes that consumers are buying a variety of different species from a variety of different locations.

The Remediation Goal of 0.05 mg/kg PCBs in fish fillet represents an average PCB concentration in fish and takes into account the specific expected reasonable maximum exposure (RME) consumption rate of anglers who consume fish caught only from the Hudson River. These consumption rates reflect the habits reported by anglers in New York State and what would be expected in the absence of fish consumption advisories. It should also be noted that the Remediation Goal of 0.05 mg/kg is consistent with the Great Lakes Sport Fish Advisory level, which is used by the eight states bordering the Great Lakes.

### **Downstream Transport**

PCBs are transported from the Upper Hudson River to the Lower Hudson River (*i.e.*, south of the

Federal Dam at Troy). The mass of PCBs transported over the Federal Dam to the Lower Hudson declined from about 3,000 to 4,000 kg/year Tri+ PCBs (6,610 to 8,820 lbs/year) in the late 1970s to about 150 to 500 kg/year Tri+ PCBs (331 to 1,100 lbs/year) by the late 1980s or early 1990s. The most recent estimate of Tri+ PCBs, based on 1998 GE data from a monitoring station at Schuylerville, is 214 kg/year (472 lbs/year); the estimated (modeled) average for the 1990s is about 290 kg/yr (639 lbs/year) over Federal Dam, with a modeled daily average Tri+ PCB water column concentration of 30 ng/L. It is projected that the selected remedy will reduce downstream transport by approximately 40 percent.

## **GE SOURCE CONTROL ACTIVITIES**

Over a 30-year period, GE discharged a significant amount of PCBs into the river from its Hudson Falls and Fort Edward plants. At the Hudson Falls plant location, leakage of PCB-bearing oils through bedrock to the river continues to be a source of PCB contamination.

The selected remedy accounts for the fact that some source control measures are already in place near the GE Hudson Falls plant. Additionally, pursuant to a Consent Order with the NYSDEC, additional source-control work is to be carried out by GE near its Hudson Falls plant because PCBs continue to leak from that facility into the Upper Hudson River. Therefore, the selected remedy also assumes reasonable further reduction in PCBs entering the river through bedrock at Bakers Falls near the Hudson Falls plant, as a result of the implementation of these additional source control measures.

Through detailed monitoring, EPA found that PCB levels in the water column (and consequently, PCB mass load) increase more than threefold as the water passes through the Thompson Island Pool. The PCB source available in this location is the contaminated sediments that lie on the pool's bottom.

## **Concerns about Identification of Additional Sources**

As reflected in the Phase 1 Report, EPA recognized the importance of upstream sources of PCBs from the outset of the Reassessment. From an analysis of sampling data gathered by GE's monitoring program in accordance with an EPA Consent Order, EPA has established that the GE facilities are the only significant external source of PCBs to the Upper Hudson River. Modeling efforts, including use of the HUDTOX and FISHRAND models, indicate that control of upstream sources is critical. However, recognition of these upstream sources does not in any way negate the findings of recent EPA reports noting that the sediments continue to release large amounts of PCBs.

As described in the FS, control of the upstream source is an important adjunct to the active remediation of the contaminated river sediment. The anticipated controls at GE's Hudson Falls facility and remediation in the vicinity of the Fort Edward 004 outfall should reduce that input within the next few years. EPA acknowledges the importance of further remediation of upstream sources and will work with NYSDEC and GE to control these sources to the extent practicable. However, given existing PCB sediment loads, complete control of these upstream sources is not necessary prior to sediment removal.



## **WHY A MORE AGGRESSIVE REMEDY WAS NOT SELECTED**

EPA's analysis found that:

- The incremental increase in water column loading from the sediments decreases as the water moves downstream from the Thompson Island Pool. This suggests that there is less sediment involved in PCB release in the downstream river sections relative to the Thompson Island Pool.
- The model forecasts showed little improvement in recovery of the river for REM-0/0/3 as compared to the selected remedy. This analysis suggests that little benefit comes from the additional dredging.
- As described in the FS and in this Responsiveness Summary, the targeted areas include more than 85 percent of the areas with PCB concentrations greater than 10 ppm and more than 75 percent of the areas with PCB concentrations greater than 3.2 ppm. Going beyond this one would encounter problems such as greater access limitations and shallow underlying bedrock, which greatly increase costs while yielding little additional public health or environmental benefit.

After considering all these factors, EPA decided upon the selected remedy as an appropriate balance among these issues, reconciling the desire to remove contamination with the uncertainties associated with each river section. Note, however, that the final areas and boundaries will be refined during remedial design.

## **RAIL TRANSPORT**

EPA is committed to avoiding large increases in the volume of heavy truck traffic in communities of the Upper Hudson River valley. The selected remedy provides for rail transport or barge transport. The necessity for rail access at sediment processing/transfer facility sites has been incorporated into the facility-planning process.

In studying rail transport of the processed materials, EPA estimated the rail movement that will occur in order to implement the selected remedy in the context of the capacity and current operation of the regional rail line operated by the Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR).

Increased train volumes are not expected to impact passenger or non-project-related freight service in the region. There are currently six passenger trains and up to 14 freight trains per day (through and local) operating along the Fort Edward/Albany rail corridor. This level of activity does not approach the capacity of the line. After speaking with representatives of the CPR, it has been determined that the current Fort Edward/Albany rail line, dominated by freight service, has additional capacity available on the line.

With regard to rail-yard requirements for the northern processing/transfer facility, it would be necessary to store 16 gondola cars on-site. There would be daily pickups of these gondolas by the railroad. It is expected that existing rail yards in the project vicinity can be used to store rail cars and

assemble larger trainloads for movement to remote landfill sites; CPR has indicated that their existing rail yard facilities can accommodate gondola cars generated by the project, as well as the daily transport and assembly of these railcars into unit trains.

No new rail yards are expected to have to be constructed in the region to support the proposed activities. The availability of rail cars/gondolas in the region has also been assessed, with the determination that the number of gondolas required for the project can be obtained by leasing them on the open market; therefore, CPR will not necessarily provide them. It has also been determined that current rail car leasing costs are low due to market demand; many are actually being scrapped at this time. The shipping of three commodities, specifically Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA)-regulated materials, non-TSCA materials and backfill, adds moderately to the project's complexity, but will be manageable.

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY

By the conclusion of the public comment period on April 17, 2001, EPA received nearly 73,000 separate, individual statements providing comment on its December 2000 Proposed Plan for the Hudson River PCBs Site. This number includes several thousand replicate statements, which are identical pieces submitted by multiple individuals, or petitions signed by multiple individuals, but does not include carbon copies or duplicates of the same message sent to multiple recipients within EPA or to other agencies. Of these 73,000 statements, approximately 35,000 were in the form of e-mails directed to EPA's project team. The remainder was received in the form of letters (some typed, but many handwritten), post cards, form letters, multi-page documents and technical reports, videotaped statements, and petitions on various media. A number of the technical reports contain appendices covering specific issues in depth. The largest body of comment was received from General Electric Company and occupies 19 volumes.

Given these circumstances, three basic steps have been followed in preparing a Responsiveness Summary that is responsive to all significant public comments received during the public comment period: (1) all comment documents were reviewed and catalogued, (2) the material was organized for content, all significant comments were identified, and each such comment was either individually adopted as a "master comment," or was combined with other significant comments (addressing similar issues) which were then collectively distilled into a single master comment, and (3) a response was prepared for each master comment.

A quality assurance program was implemented to verify that the full body of significant comment is accurately represented in the master comments, the responses are technically sound and the entire summary is internally consistent. The process by which these three steps and the attendant quality assurance processes were accomplished is summarized as follows.

Each of the comment letters and other documents was reviewed, and individual significant comments within each comment document were delimited (*i.e.*, identified). A single comment document may contain as few as one or as many as several hundred delimited comments. Each of the unique comment source documents was assigned a bar-coded identification number which was affixed to the document<sup>1</sup> and was then scanned as an image into an electronic file compatible with *Adobe Acrobat Reader*<sup>TM</sup> software (*i.e.*, "pdf" format), effectively creating an electronic "photocopy." Approximately 18,000 unique significant comments were delimited from the source documents.<sup>2</sup> Because of the large number of comments to manage, each of the delimited comments was also assigned representative keywords (or key phrases) and entered into an electronic database for sorting and processing.

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<sup>1</sup> Only a single example of each set of perfectly identical submittals (*i.e.*, replicates – for example, postcards provided to its members by an organization) was bar-coded for entry to the database. However, a record was compiled of the names and, where supplied, addresses of all commenters. Such mailings were individually bar-coded in those instances where additional comment was added to the text by the commenter. True duplicates (*i.e.*, multiple copies of the same document sent by the same individual, sometimes transmitted to multiple recipients) were bar-coded only once and the identity of the commenter recorded only once.

<sup>2</sup> While some documents yielded multiple delimited comments, others were replicates of other identical documents which together yielded a single comment. This total represents the number of "unique" significant comments.

Some comments were received electronically or could readily be scanned (via optical character recognition, or OCR) for entry into the database. Many delimited significant comments, however, required manual entry. Quality assurance reviews were conducted to ensure that all comments were entered in the database. There is a high degree of confidence that all significant comments were identified and captured.

Due to the large volume of comments received, it is not possible to present these documents as physical (hard copy) attachments to the Responsiveness Summary, as has customarily been done for previous Hudson River PCBs Site Responsiveness Summary reports. Each comment is, however, provided in electronic format on a set of CDs in Appendix D, along with tables identifying authors and showing the relationships between authors, delimited significant comments and master comments. For copies of the Responsiveness Summary provided entirely on CD, the comments are included as separate files.

Similar or related delimited comments were combined into master comments in various topical areas capturing the significant issues raised by each of the source comments.<sup>3</sup> A total of 274 master comments were synthesized from the roughly 18,000 comments initially delimited. These master comments were then reviewed for accuracy and thoroughness to ensure that they represent each of the associated delimited comments. In addition, a review was conducted to verify that all delimited comments were associated with at least one master comment. Because of the several threads of thought sometimes inextricably combined, an individual delimited comment may be, on occasion, associated with multiple master comments. This process has provided a means for all significant comments to be included and to receive due consideration in preparing the Responsiveness Summary.

Master comments have been organized according to topical areas for presentation in this volume (Book 1) of the Responsiveness Summary, as shown in the Table of Contents. A response has been prepared for (and is presented immediately following) each of the master comments, drawing from material presented in the Proposed Plan, the FS, or other previous project reports, other literature, remedial projects and individuals, and EPA policy, as well as additional technical analyses performed specifically to address comments or questions raised during the public comment period.<sup>4</sup> Methodologies used and results obtained from additional technical analyses are presented as “white papers” in a separate volume (designated as Book 2 of this document). These papers cover a variety of topical areas, providing more in-depth analysis and supporting detail concerning topics addressed in various comments. Many responses draw upon these white papers and may utilize the conclusions or quantitative results of various modeling efforts (for noise or air emissions, for example) or extended series of calculations, without encumbering the text with voluminous detail. Each of the responses and white papers has been reviewed for technical quality by senior professionals within the project team.

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<sup>3</sup> Master comments were assigned a three- or six-digit identification number by the database program sequentially upon creation; these numbers are used to identify the master comments, the associated responses, and any companion tables and figures throughout the Responsiveness Summary, regardless of the final order of presentation in the document. White papers are similarly identified.

<sup>4</sup> Additional technical analyses were performed for several reasons, including refinement or clarification of work performed in the FS, gathering and evaluating additional data from outside sources and other projects to clarify or support conclusions or statements made in the FS, and providing information not ordinarily presented in an FS but which is appropriate to address public comment germane to the community acceptance criterion of the remedy selection analysis.

While some smaller tables have been embedded in the text of a response or white paper, most larger tables and figures have been placed in a separate volume dedicated to that purpose (designated as Book 3 of this document). This allows the reader (if using the printed version of the document) to view the associated tables and figures alongside the text, without having to turn back and forth in the document. Book 3 also contains Appendices to the Responsiveness Summary. These include a Preliminary Wetlands Assessment (Appendix A), a Preliminary Floodplains Assessment (Appendix B), and a Stage 1A Cultural Resources Survey (Appendix C). These Appendices provide additional information relating to potential impacts of the selected remedy on wetlands, floodplains, and cultural resources. The Appendices also are pertinent to issues addressed in Book 1 of the Responsiveness Summary. Appendix D is described below.

Significant effort has been made to make this document as user-friendly as practicable, while covering the full body of significant comment. It is anticipated that many readers will want to find where their particular comment or concern is addressed. An important tool in this search is the Index at the end of this volume. The Index allows a reader to identify master comments and responses of interest, based on keywords or key phrases. While an attempt has been made to cover a comprehensive range of subjects and as much detail as practicable in the Index, it is not intended to be exhaustive. Despite the topical arrangement of the document, and provision of the Index, some readers may need to resort to the comment database to identify the code associated with a comment of interest, and then track this code through a table of associations between delimited significant public comments and master comments provided on CD# D1 in Appendix D in Book 3 of the Responsiveness Summary. While neither the Index nor the table of associations is a perfect tool, together they provide a reliable means of finding the responses to particular comments. Appendix D, Compendium of Public Comments, provides a compilation of the public comments in electronic database form. Appendix D consists of a set of instructions to the database as well as a set of six CDs, which contain the database of authors and comments (Disk D1) and scanned images of the public comments (Disk D2 to D6).

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**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**INDEX**

Keywords	Master Comment (Report Section)
Adverse Impacts.....	421 (11.5), 505 (8.5.1), 713 (1.3)
Energy Use.....	649 (8)
Equipment Failure.....	661 (10.6)
Agriculture .....	717 (8.7.2), 729 (8.4.2)
Air Quality Impacts .....	423734 (8.4)
Processing and Transfer Facility.....	313846 (w.p.)
Alternative Technologies .....	253189 (5.1.2)
ARARs .....	381 (1.1), 387 (1.1), 395 (1.1), 399 (1.1), 401 (1.1), 407 (1.1), 447 (3.3), 503 (1.1), 313682 (1.1), 365240 (1.2.1), 407625 (1.1)
CERCLA.....	397 (1.1)
Coastal Zone Management (CZM) .....	358807 (1.1)
Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (FWCA) .....	358802 (1.1)
Fish Population .....	403 (1.1)
Legal Issues.....	383 (1.1)
Lighting.....	391 (1.1)
Odor .....	393 (1.1)
Source Control	
Water Quality	
Wetlands .....	491 (11.4)
Wetlands .....	365246 (1.1)
Assumptions	
Resuspension	
Residual Concentrations	
PCB Transport to Lower	
Hudson River .....	591 (6.1.4)
Backfill .....	653 (10.4)
Dredging	
Habitat Replacement.....	313373 (9.3)
Habitat Replacement.....	313336 (9.3)
Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV)	
Wetlands .....	313365 (9.3)
Barge Operations	
Canal Corporation	
Navigation	
Socioeconomic Impacts .....	337804 (w.p.)
Baseline Ecological Risk Assessment (BERA)	
Assumptions	
Risk Benefit	
PCB Exposure.....	793 (3.2.3)
Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA)-analysis	
Peer Review .....	811 (3.2)



**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**INDEX**

Human Health Risk Assessment (HHRA)	
Support of Dredging	
Source Control .....	813 (3.2.1)
Remedial Alternatives	
Wetlands	
Biota.....	815 (3.2.2)
Benthic Habitat	
Epifaunal.....	525 (9.3)
Bioaccumulation	
Recovery Time	
Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA)-analysis	
FISHRAND.....	785 (6.2)
Bioavailability	
PCB Concentrations in Sediment	
PCB Burial	
Benthic Habitat .....	637 (2.3)
Biodegradation	
Bioaccumulation	
PCB Toxicity .....	253430 (2.3)
Dechlorination	
Bioremediation.....	255314 (w.p.)
Biota	
Hydraulic Dredging	
Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV)	
Water Quality.....	366264 (9.1)
Bioturbation	
Fate and Transport	
PCB Burial .....	253424 (2.3)
Canal System	
Socioeconomic Impacts	
Transportation.....	312942 (8.1.2)
Capping .....	423258 (5.1.1)
Long Term Effectiveness and Permanence.....	337788 (11.1)
Natural Attenuation	
Erosion .....	651 (5.1.1)
Remedial Alternatives.....	313835 (5.2)
CERCLA	
National Contingency Plan (NCP).....	475 (1.2.1)
Remedy Selection .....	493 (11.2)
Coastal Zone Management (CZM) .....	253238 (w.p.)
Lower Hudson.....	413 (1.2.1)
Community Acceptance	
Public Participation	
Record of Decision (2001 ROD) .....	423154 (1.2.1)
Support of Dredging.....	445 (1.3)

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**INDEX**

Consensus Based Guidelines	
Adverse Impacts.....	795 (3.3)
Cost Effective .....	483 (11.2)
Disposal.....	253477 (w.p.)
Effectiveness of Implementability Cost .....	369325 (5.3)
Other Sites.....	364022 (11.2)
Legal Issues.....	365920 (11.2)
Definition of Onsite	
CERCLA.....	721 (1.2.1)
Dioxins and Furans .....	860 (w.p.)
Disposal.....	405890 (10.5), 424851 (w.p.)
Dredging.....	511 (9.3), 733 (8.5.3), 743 (8.6.2)
Adverse Impacts.....	709 (8.1)
Dredging Technology.....	405943 (10.2)
Remedy Selection .....	657 (5.1.3)
Habitat Replacement	
Backfill.....	513 (9.3)
Processing and Transfer Facility	
Treatment .....	745 (8.6.1)
Residual Concentrations .....	579 (10.3)
Dredging Technology	
Alternative Technologies .....	423845 (5.1.3)
Hydraulic Dredging	
Resuspension	
Sedimentation .....	366262 (5.1.3)
Manufacture of Commercial Products	
Remedial Alternatives.....	364760 (5.1.3)
Drinking Water Supply .....	253421 (9.2)
PCB Concentrations in Water	
PCB Transport to Lower Hudson River.....	365942 (9.2)
PCB Discharge.....	422386 (2.1)
Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA)-analysis	
Human Health Risk Assessment (HHRA)	
Risk Benefit	
Remedial Alternatives.....	363176 (w.p.)
Peer Review .....	465 (1.3.1)
Risk Benefit	
Biota.....	817 (7.2)
Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA)-impacts	
Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA)-analysis	
Flood .....	809 (3.2.2)
Effectiveness of Implementability Cost	
Remedial Alternatives.....	313983 (5.2)
Endangered Species Act (ESA)	
ARARs.....	358464 (1.1)

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**INDEX**

EPA's Contaminated Sediment Management Strategy	
Remedial Alternatives.....	313990 (6.4.1)
Safety Impacts.....	555 (8.8)
Equipment Selection	
Dredging Technology.....	659 (10.1)
Fate and Transport	
Phase 1	
Phase 2 .....	575 (2.3)
Fate and Transport (Models)	
PCB Concentrations in Water	
PCB Concentrations in Sediment	
PCB Concentrations in Fish.....	363150 (w.p.)
Field Studies	
Biota	
Animal Studies (ecological)	
Fish Population .....	819 (3.2.2)
Fish Concentration Trend Analysis	
PCB Concentrations in Fish.....	312627 (w.p.)
Fish Consumption	
Human Health Risk Assessment (HHRA)	
Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA)-analysis	
Support of Dredging.....	313320 (11.1)
Risk Benefit .....	553 (7.1)
Fish Habitat	
Benthic Habitat .....	253458 (9.1)
Flood.....	422186 (10.1)
Sediment Transport Model	
Erosion	
PCB Release.....	364582 (6.1), 407426 (w.p.)
Fort Edward	
PCB Discharge	
Hudson Falls	
Remnant Deposits .....	617 (2.1)
GE's Model	
HUDTOX	
FISHRAND	
Peer Review .....	843 (6.4.3)
Sub-Reach Scale	
Remedial Alternatives.....	847 (6.1.2)
Habitat Replacement .....	313187 (9.3), 517 (9.3), 529 (9.3)
Dredging.....	759 (9.3)
Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV).....	535 (9.3)
Historic Sites.....	362961 (8.5.4)
Hot Spot .....	359303 (4.4)
Habitat	

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**INDEX**

Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV)	
Fish Habitat.....	593 (4.5)
HUDTOX	
Non Cohesive Sediment	
Cohesive Sediment.....	833 (2.4.1)
Sediment Transport Model	
Erosion .....	363193 (2.4)
Human Health Risk Assessment (HHRA)	
Fish Consumption	
Institutional Controls	
Fishing.....	543 (3.1.3)
Connelly Study.....	569 (3.1.2)
PCB Concentrations in Fish.....	549 (7.1)
PCB Exposure	
PCB Concentrations in Water.....	567 (3.1.4)
PCB Toxicity	
Animal Studies (toxicity)	
Weight-of-Evidence .....	362704 (w.p.), 541 (3.1.1.2), 571 (3.1.1.1)
Sediment Removal .....	313280 (4.2)
Hydraulic Dredging	
Mechanical Dredging.....	362590 (10.1)
Legal Issues.....	362908 (1.2.1), 364004 (11.6), 423426 (1.2), 424247 (1.2.1)
ARARs.....	385 (1.1)
Disposal.....	665 (10.5), 424920 (1.2.1), 424926 (1.2.1)
Processing and Transfer Facility.....	424915 (1.2.1)
Lighting	
Adverse Impacts.....	358825 (8.3.2)
Biota	
Animal Studies (ecological)	
Dredging.....	805 (8.3.3)
Dredging	
Adverse Impacts.....	645 (8.3.1)
Long Term Effectiveness and Permanence	
Institutional Controls .....	359565 (11.6)
Long Term Monitoring .....	362628 (11.6)
Long Term Trends	
Mathematical Model	
PCB Concentrations in Fish	
Bounding Calculation .....	609 (6.4.2)
Low Resolution Coring Report (LRCR)	

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY**  
**HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**INDEX**

PCB Burial	
Data Evaluation and Interpretation	
Report (DEIR)	
Bed Stability (Instability) .....	577 (2.2)
PCB Concentrations in Sediment	
Fate and Transport	
PCB Burial .....	607 (6.4.3)
Lower Hudson .....	405965 (5.2), 423847 (2.5)
Fate and Transport (Models)	
PCB Concentrations in Fish	
FISHRAND.....	313699 (w.p.)
PCB Concentrations in Water	
PCB Concentrations in Fish	
PCB Transport to Lower	
Hudson River .....	313787 (2.4.3)
Preliminary Remedial Goal (PRG)	
Recovery Time .....	313765 (1.1)
Risk Benefit	
Remedial Alternatives	
Natural Resource.....	799 (6.3)
Superfund (NPL) site .....	415 (1.2.1)
Mass Removal of PCBs .....	313214 (4.2.1)
Mass-Per-Unit-Area (MPA)	
PCB Concentrations in Sediment.....	597 (4.3)
Mathematical Model	
Recovery Time .....	589 (6.4)
Metals	
Dioxins and Furans .....	407876 (6.1.3)
Disposal.....	253002 (w.p.)
Monitored Natural Attenuation	
Monitoring Program.....	253427 (10.2)
Monitoring Program	
PCB Concentrations in Fish	
Long Term Monitoring	
Field Studies.....	313297 (3.3)
Resuspension	
Drinking Water Supply .....	362637 (9.2)
More Harm Than Good	
Long Term Effectiveness and Permanence	
Short Term Risks and Impacts .....	485 (11.5)
National Academy of Sciences (NAS) .....	411 (1.2.2)
Record of Decision (2001 ROD) .....	409 (1.2.2)
Natural Attenuation	
Biodegradation .....	313261 (7.2)
PCB Concentrations in Fish	

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY**  
**HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**INDEX**

Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA)-analysis.	629 (2.6)
PCB Concentrations in Sediment	
PCB Mass	
Sedimentation .....	633 (2.6)
PCB Toxicity	
Dechlorination.....	639 (2.3)
Source Control	
Recovery Time	
Risk Benefit .....	405926 (11.4)
Navigation	
Canal System.....	705 (8.1)
Downtime.....	313398 (w.p.)
Navigational Dredging	
Dredging.....	757 (9.5)
New York State.....	459 (2)
No Action	
Effectiveness of Implementability Cost .....	313970 (10.2)
Noise	
Adverse Impacts	
Dredging.....	767 (8.2)
Dredging	
Adverse Impacts.....	358188 (8.2)
Environmental Impact Study (EIS).....	312685 (w.p.)
Regulatory Analysis .....	699 (8.2)
Non Cohesive Sediment	
PCB Concentrations in Sediment	
PCB Inventory	
Backfill.....	313266 (4.2.2)
Odor	
Natural Resource	
Air Quality Impacts.....	255361 (w.p.)
Opposition to Dredging.....	313388 (1.3)
PCB Burial	
PCB Concentrations in Sediment	
Sedimentation	
Thompson Island Pool (TIP).....	619 (2.1)
PCB Concentrations in Fish	
Assumptions	
PCB Transport to Lower Hudson River	
Source Control .....	823 (6.1)
Remedial Goals (Fish)	
Preliminary Remedial Goal (PRG) .....	547 (7.1)
PCB Concentrations in Sediment	
PCB Burial	
Low Resolution Coring Report (LRCR)	

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**INDEX**

PCB Loss .....	641 (2.2)
Tri+ PCBs .....	424694 (w.p.)
PCB Concentrations in Water	
Natural Attenuation.....	631 (2.6)
PCB Concentrations in Fish	
Natural Attenuation.....	635 (2.6)
PCB Concentrations in Sediment.....	255353 (w.p.)
PCB Inventory.....	363334 (w.p.)
PCB Loss	
Sediment Sampling	
Thompson Island Pool (TIP)	
PCB Inventory.....	625 (2.2)
PCB Mass	
PCB Inventory.....	369451 (4.2)
PCB Source	
Flood	
HUDTOX.....	821 (6.1.1)
Historic Sites.....	313444 (2.1)
Hudson Falls	
Source Control	
Remnant Deposits .....	573 (2.1)
HUDTOX.....	825 (6.1.1)
PCB Transport to Lower Hudson River.....	835 (6.1.1)
PCB Release	
Phase 1 .....	643 (2.1)
PCB Toxicity	
Animal Studies (toxicity)	
Biota.....	359281 (3.2.1)
Human Health Risk Assessment (HHRA)	
Animal Studies (toxicity)	
Weight-of-Evidence .....	362702 (w.p.)
PCB Transport to Lower Hudson River.....	337780 (11.4)
Peer Review	
Scientific Method.....	467 (1.3.1)
Preliminary Remediation Goal (PRG)	
Biota	
PCB Concentrations in Fish.....	313300 (3.3)
PCB Transport to Lower Hudson River	
Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA)-analysis	
Lower Hudson.....	831 (7.1)
Remedial Alternatives.....	362555 (3.3)
Remedial Goals (Fish) .....	551 (7.1), 561 (7.1)
FDA Standard	
Human Health Risk	
Assessment (HHRA).....	545 (3.3)

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**INDEX**

Processing and Transfer Facility .....	313704 (5.1.2)
Legal Issues	
ARARs.....	487 (11.6), 313749 (1.3)
Treatment .....	741 (8.7.1)
Adverse Impacts.....	253216 (w.p.)
Production Rates	
Downtime	
Schedule.....	671 (10.1)
Project Size	
Remedial Alternatives.....	601 (11.3)
Public Participation .....	313333 (1.3), 429 (1.3), 433 (1.3), 471 (1.3)
Community Acceptance.....	427 (1.3), 437 (1.3), 441 (1.3)
Processing and Transfer Facility.....	313728 (1.3), 431 (1.3)
Railroad.....	312991 (w.p.)
Record of Decision (1984 ROD)	
Legal Issues.....	377 (1.3)
Recovery Time	
Adaptive Management.....	422647 (9.4)
FISHRAND	
PCB Concentrations in Fish	
Bioaccumulation .....	779 (2.4.2)
Regulatory Analysis	
Freshwater Ecosystem.....	497 (1.1)
Odor	
Legal Issues.....	647 (8.4.1)
Reliability.....	366358 (5.1.3)
Remedial Action Objective (RAO)	
Remediation Goals (Fish)	
Schedule	
FDA Tolerance Level.....	853 (4.1)
Risk Benefit .....	453 (4.5)
Remedial Alternatives .....	313459 (5.2), 314017 (5.2)
Remedy Selection	
Cost Effective.....	595 (4.4)
Short Term Risks and Impacts	
Long Term Effectiveness and Permanence....	313723 (1.1)
Surface Concentration	
Mass-Per-Unit-Area (MPA)	
Sediment Texture .....	599 (4.2.3)
Remediation Goals (Fish)	
Fish Consumption.....	559 (7.1)
Legal Issues	
FDA Tolerance Level.....	375 (1.1)
Remedial Sequence.....	669 (10.1)



**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**INDEX**

Remedy Selection	
HUDTOX	
Bounding Calculation	
PCB Concentrations in Fish.....	451 (6)
Monitored Natural Attenuation	
No Action.....	337854 (11.1)
Remedial Alternatives.....	255302 (5.2)
Source Control .....	362912 (5.3)
Residual Concentrations	
Backfill	
PCB Concentrations in Sediment.....	312663 (w.p.)
Capping	
PCB Source	
HUDTOX.....	837 (6.1.3)
Resuspension.....	583 (10.3)
Resuspension .....	336740 (w.p.)
Biota	
Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV)	
Dredging.....	803 (9.2)
HUDTOX	
Fish Concentration Trend Analysis.....	363207 (6.1.4)
PCB Transport to Lower Hudson River	
PCB Release.....	424977 (10.3)
Uncertainty Factors (UFs).....	407907 (6.1.4)
Water Quality	
PCB Burial .....	587 (9.2)
RI/FS (Reassessment RI/FS).....	313799 (2.7)
Risk Benefit	
Capping	
Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA)-analysis	364780 (7.2)
Dredging	
PCB Concentrations in Fish.....	797 (7.1)
Human Health Risk Assessment (HHRA)	
Remedial Alternatives.....	841 (7.1)
Source Control	
More Harm Than Good	
Fish Consumption .....	565 (7.1)
Schedule	
Production Rates .....	253090 (w.p.)
Scientific Method	
Phase 2	
Data Evaluation and Interpretation	
Report (DEIR).....	627 (2.7)
Sediment Removal .....	313219 (4.2), 313224 (4.2)
Sediment Sampling .....	362631 (10.2)

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**INDEX**

HUDTOX	
FISHRAND.....	849 (6.1)
PCB Concentrations in Sediment.....	605 (4.2)
Remedial Alternatives	
Confirmation Sampling.....	313391 (4.2)
Residual Concentrations	
Confirmation Sampling	
Monitoring Program.....	362634 (10.2)
Shoreline Stabilization.....	655 (10.4)
Short Term Risks and Impacts	
Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA)-analysis	
Dredging	
Long Term Effectiveness and	
Permanence.....	337860 (11.1)
Habitat	
Biota	
Dredging.....	807 (9.1)
Socioeconomic Impacts .....	313617 (w.p.), 313952 (8.5.2),
	499 (8.5.2), 689 (8.5.2), 691 (8.5.2)
Railroad	
Transportation.....	312982 (8.1.1)
Source Control	
Monitored Natural Attenuation.....	405888 (5.3)
PCB Concentrations in Fish	
Uncertainty Factors (UFs)	
Ecological Risk	
Assessment (ERA)-analysis.....	789 (6.2)
Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) .....	313194 (9.3), 313331 (9.1)
Habitat .....	509 (9.1), 537 (9.1)
Biota.....	507 (9.1)
Habitat Replacement.....	533 (9.3)
Monitoring Program.....	523 (9.3)
Sub-Reach Scale	
Residual Concentrations	
Ecological Risk	
Assessment (ERA)-analysis	
Fate and Transport (Models).....	787 (6.1.2)
Support of Dredging	
Fishing	
PCB Exposure.....	422786 (8.5.3)
Resources	
Fish Population	
Habitat.....	801 (3.2)

**RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY  
HUDSON RIVER PCBs SITE RECORD OF DECISION**

**INDEX**

Thompson Island Pool (TIP)	
PCB Source	
PCB Concentrations in Water	
PCB Release.....	621 (2.1)
PCB Release	
PCB Fingerprinting.....	623 (2.1)
Traffic-Vehicular/Truck .....	253245 (w.p.)
Socioeconomic Impacts	
Transportation.....	663 (8.1.3)
Treatment .....	313803 (5.2)
Hydraulic Dredging.....	423609 (8.7.2)
Processing and Transfer Facility	
Water Quality.....	364871 (8.7.2)
Thermal Treatment	
Sediment Stabilization .....	313758 (5.1.2)
Turbidity Barrier	
Dredging Technology.....	667 (10.3)
Unilateral Administrative Order (UAO).....	481 (11.6)
US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)	
Field Studies	
Biota.....	253462 (3.2.2)
Volatilization .....	253186 (8.4.3), 253191 (8.4.3)
Air Quality Impacts	
Human Health Risk Assessment (HHRA)	
Regulatory Analysis .....	253202 (w.p.)
Water Quality	
ARARs.....	495 (1.1)
Dredging	
Downstream Transport.....	735 (9.2)
Metals.....	312851 (w.p.)
Wetlands .....	531 (9.3)
Biota	
Habitat Replacement	
Habitat.....	527 (9.3)
Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species	
US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) .....	359545 (9.1)