United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

Legacy Act Grand Calumet River Cleanup gets Underway

West Branch Grand Calumet River/Grand Cal AOC

Hammond, Indiana December 2009

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and its state of Indiana partner agencies have begun work on a two- to three-year undertaking to dredge sediment from a heavily polluted one-mile stretch of the West Branch Grand Calumet River in Hammond. This is a very unique region as it is one of the most industrialized areas in the country as well as home to some of the most diverse native plant and animal communities in the Great Lakes Basin.

The $31.1 million project is being funded under the Great Lakes Legacy Act (GLLA). The Act provides federal money that along with local matching dollars are used to clean up polluted sediment (mud) along the U.S. shores and waterways of the Great Lakes. EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM), Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and Hammond Sanitary District are cooperating in the project. The West Branch Grand Cal work calls for the removal of about 82,000 cubic yards of polluted sediment followed by the placement of a cap over the dredged area. The sediment contains pollutants such as PCBs and PAHs (polychlorinated biphenyls and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons), heavy metals, and pesticides. The removal will be conducted between Columbia and Hohman avenues in Hammond

This stretch of the West Branch Grand Calumet River appears picturesque, but the river sediment is highly contaminated. A new Great Lakes Legacy Act project will remove 82,000 cubic yards of polluted sediment followed by capping of the river bottom.

About the Great Lakes Legacy Act

Although discharges of toxic substances into the Great Lakes have been reduced over the last 20 years, high concentrations of pollution remain in the bottom of some rivers and harbors. These contaminants pose potential health risks to people and wildlife, and states have issued fish advisories in many Great Lakes locations.

The tributaries and harbors identified as having pollution problems are known as "Areas of Concern," or AOCs. There are 40 remaining AOCs on the Great Lakes – 25 on the U.S. side, 10 in Canada and five shared between the two countries. The West Branch Grand Calumet River is part of the Grand Calumet River Area of Concern, which includes the Indiana Harbor and Ship Canal.

Since 2004 $120 million has been spent on sediment cleanup projects under the Legacy Act. EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office administers the Act.

For more information

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southwest of the Indiana Harbor and Ship Canal *(see aerial map below)*. This project is being coordinated with sewer improvements being made by the Hammond Sanitary District that also include some sediment cleanup along this stretch of the river.

Federal government and state share costs

GLLA will fund 65 percent or $21.5 million of the $31.1 million cost. The required non-federal share of 35 percent or $11.6 million will come from the Natural Resource Trustees (IDEM and IDNR).

The Grand Calumet River originates in the east end of Gary, Ind., and flows 13 miles through the cities of Gary, East Chicago and Hammond, Ind. Today, 90 percent of the river's flow starts as municipal and industrial discharges, cooling and process water and stormwater overflows. Although discharges of pollution have been reduced, a number of contaminants in the sediment continue to harm the river environment.

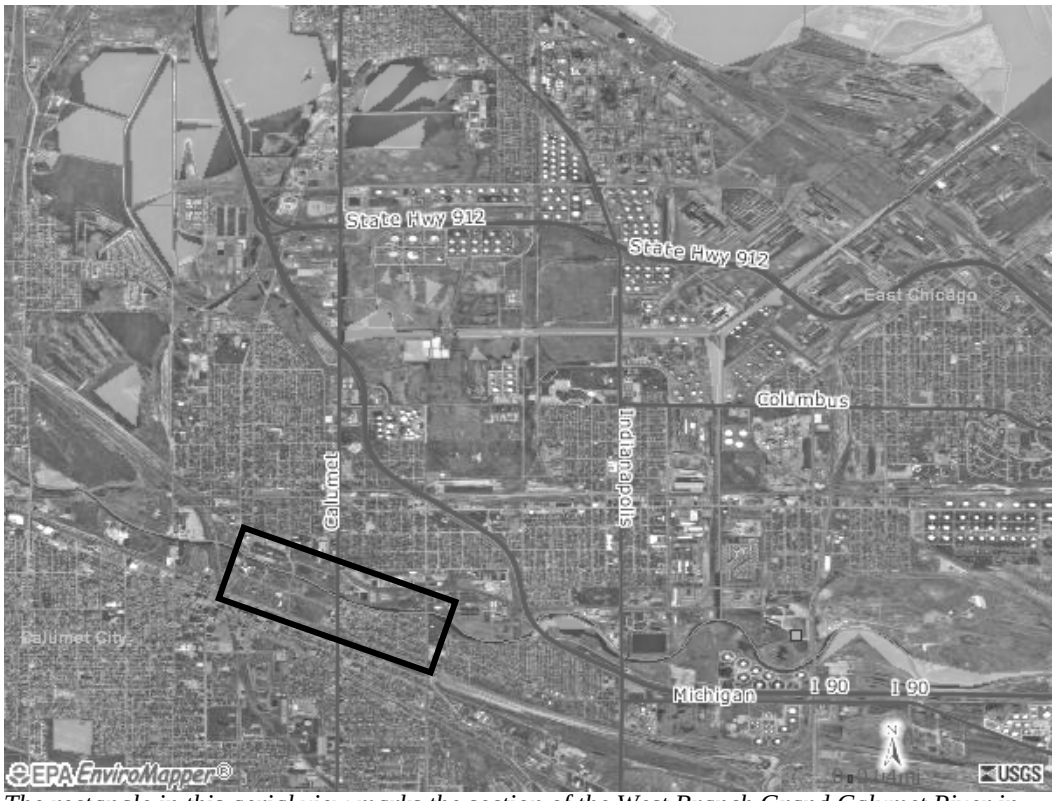
Upland restoration activities near the Grand Calumet River have been under way for many years, including protection and restoration of rare habitats such as dune and swale and native prairies. This project area is part of a larger Chicago/Northwest Indiana Corridor where a restoration plan is in place. The sediment cleanup will complement the habitat restoration efforts.

The Great Lakes Legacy Act

The Great Lakes Legacy Act was passed by Congress in 2002 as a tool to accelerate the pace of sediment cleanup within the Great Lakes Areas of Concern. One of the goals of the GLLA is to help restore "beneficial uses" to polluted areas in the Great Lakes AOCs. Beneficial use impairments include restrictions on dredging, loss of fish and wildlife habitat and limiting activities such as safe fish consumption. The Legacy Act was reauthorized in 2008 and includes new provisions that allow for habitat restoration in conjunction with a sediment remediation project and site characterization at 100 percent federal expense.

Sediment removal successes

Since 2004 six sediment cleanup projects have been completed under the Great Lakes Legacy Act. These projects have cleaned up more than 1 million cubic yards of contaminated sediment at a cost of almost $120 million. This funding has translated into the removal of nearly 1.6 million pounds of contaminants from Great Lakes waterways, reducing risks to human health and wildlife. Other GLLA projects include cleanups in Trenton, Muskegon and Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.; Superior and Milwaukee, Wis.; and Ashtabula, Ohio. The West Branch Grand Calumet River undertaking is the first GLLA sediment cleanup project in Indiana and is part of a larger ongoing effort to clean up contaminated sediment across Northwest Indiana.



The rectangle in this aerial view marks the section of the West Branch Grand Calumet River in Hammond that will undergo removal of contaminated sediment.