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Pair of \$30M plants will separate liquid from Hudson mud

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The Environmental Protection Agency has selected upstate sites to house a pair of \$30 million dewatering facilities that will process 4 million tons of PCB-contaminated mud to be dredged from a 40-mile stretch of the Hudson River.

The plants, each covering about 35 acres, will be built at opposite ends of the dredging-project area and are essential to completing the nation's largest environmental dredging project. The plants will be on 51 acres in Fort Edward along the Hudson River and Champlain Canal, and on 94-acres in Bethlehem.

Deemed essential by the EPA, the plants are opposed by local officials. "Our home, our heritage, our quality of life is being invaded and potentially could be destroyed by the largest environmental dredge project in recorded history," Fort Edward Town Supervisor Merrilyn Pulver said.

She termed the project an "environmental injustice" and said it would have negative affects on all aspects of town life.

The plants will separate millions of gallons of water from the dredged river muck. The dried mud will be packaged and loaded onto barges or rail cars and hauled away for disposal. The water will be treated and, after the PCBs are removed, returned to the river.

The sites were selected from seven potential locations the EPA has been examining the past two years. They are a key ingredient in a plan to remove the remnants of 1.3 million pounds of polychlorinated byphenyls, or PCBs, which are suspected carcinogens.

The PCBs were legally dumped into the river by General Electric Co. plants in Fort Edward and Hudson Falls between 1940 and 1977, when the compound was banned.

The PCBs have continued to wash down the river, turning its lower 200 miles into the nation's largest Superfund site and eliminating the river's thriving commercial fishing

industry.

EPA spokesman Leo Rosales said Fort Edward was selected because "the majority of the contamination, perhaps 60 percent, is within a mile-and-a-half of that site." The Bethlehem site is several miles below where the actual dredging would occur, Rosales said, "but what makes it a great site is that it has a deep water port and barges there can load three or four times as much material than the traditional, upriver barges."

GE spokesman Mark Behan called the sites "the most suitable" of those evaluated.

Last spring, the EPA tentatively narrowed its search to three sites, but a close examination of a 325-acre tract in Schaghticoke unearthed remnants of a Woodlands Indian village estimated to be at least 1,500 years old. John Vetter, the agency's archaeologist and chairman of the anthropology department at Adelphi University, said researchers found crude stone tools possibly used for scraping hides and shaping wood, sharpened stones and evidence of several fireplaces. He said tests to be completed in January should give a more precise estimate of the American Indian settlement's age.

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