New Bedford Harbor Superfund Site

New Bedford, Fairhaven, Acushnet, Dartmouth

United States Environmental Protection Agency

U.S. EPA | HAZARDOUS WASTE PROGRAM AT EPA NEW ENGLAND

THE SUPERFUND PROGRAM protects human health and the environment by investigating and cleaning up often-abandoned hazardous waste sites and engaging communities throughout the process. Many of these sites are complex and need long-term cleanup actions. Those responsible for contamination are held liable for cleanup costs. EPA strives to return previously contaminated land and groundwater to productive use.

BACKGROUND

In September 1998, EPA released a decision document summarizing the cleanup plan for the upper and lower harbor at the New Bedford Habor Superfund Site called a Record of Decision. Since that time, EPA has gathered additional information and refined the cleanup approach for the upper and lower harbor through six additional decision documents called Explanation of Significant Differences (ESDs). This type of decision document involves a change to a component of a remedy that does not fundamentally alter the overall cleanup approach.

EXPLANATION OF SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES

The draft ESD7 describes three proposed modifications to the upper and lower harbor (Operable Unit 1) remedy:

1. Finalizing the remedy for the 10 interim sediment cap areas (Figure 1).

2. Proposing a change in the polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) cleanup level (from 50 to 25 parts per million or ppm) for the intertidal shoreline adjacent to the proposed New Bedford River Walk to address the change to recreational land use along the proposed River Walk (Figure 2).

3. Clarifying that the remedy's Institutional Controls requirements include preventing human contact risk with contaminated sediments in areas within the Site where the remedy left PCB concentrations in sediments that were not cleaned up to standards that allow for unrestricted use/unrestricted exposure. The controls will limit activities within the intertidal and subtidal zones within certain areas of the harbor where sediments still pose limited health risks from human contact. Institutional controls may also be required in areas that were inaccessible during the dredging period (i.e. underneath shoreline rip rap) if it is determined that contamination remains in place exceeding the remedy's cleanup standards at a later date.

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The draft ESD7 assesses three proposed alternatives for addressing the first modification, regarding the sediment cap areas:

1. Incorporating sediment caps as permanent elements of the upper and lower harbor remedy, combined with long-term monitoring and maintenance, and implementation of institutional controls to protect these caps over the long-term. (EPA's Proposed Alternative)

2. Removal of the interim sediment caps and proceeding with the originally planned dredging and off-Site disposal remedy for these areas (using sheet piling and backfilling to protect abutting shoreline structures and avoid deep side slopes as well as different/heavier equipment to deal with the extensive amounts of debris where present).

3. Removal of the interim sediment caps and adding select microorganisms to breakdown PCBs in sediment (in-situ bioaugmentation) at the ten sediment cap areas, combined with long-term monitoring and maintenance, and implementation of institutional controls at these areas.

The other two modifications have already been implemented but public comment is being solicited on formally incorporating the changes into the remedy. These include:

- The intertidal zone shoreline along the proposed New Bedford River Walk from Coggeshall Street to Wood Street has already been cleaned to the more protective 25 ppm PCB recreation-based standard rather than the Site-wide remote wetland standard of 50 ppm PCBs.

- EPA has already implemented institutional controls which include notification by municipalities of proposed shoreline development projects within the upper and lower harbor areas to ensure there is no human exposure to contaminated sediments where cleanup levels limit the potential land uses of the area by the public. The Coast Guard has designated the Outer Harbor Pilot Sediment cap area as a Regulated Navigation Area (RNA). The RNA restricts persons and vessels from disturbing the sediment cap, which includes, but is not limited to anchoring, dragging, trawling, and spudding within the area. The Outer Harbor Pilot Sediment cap is also identified on navigational charts.

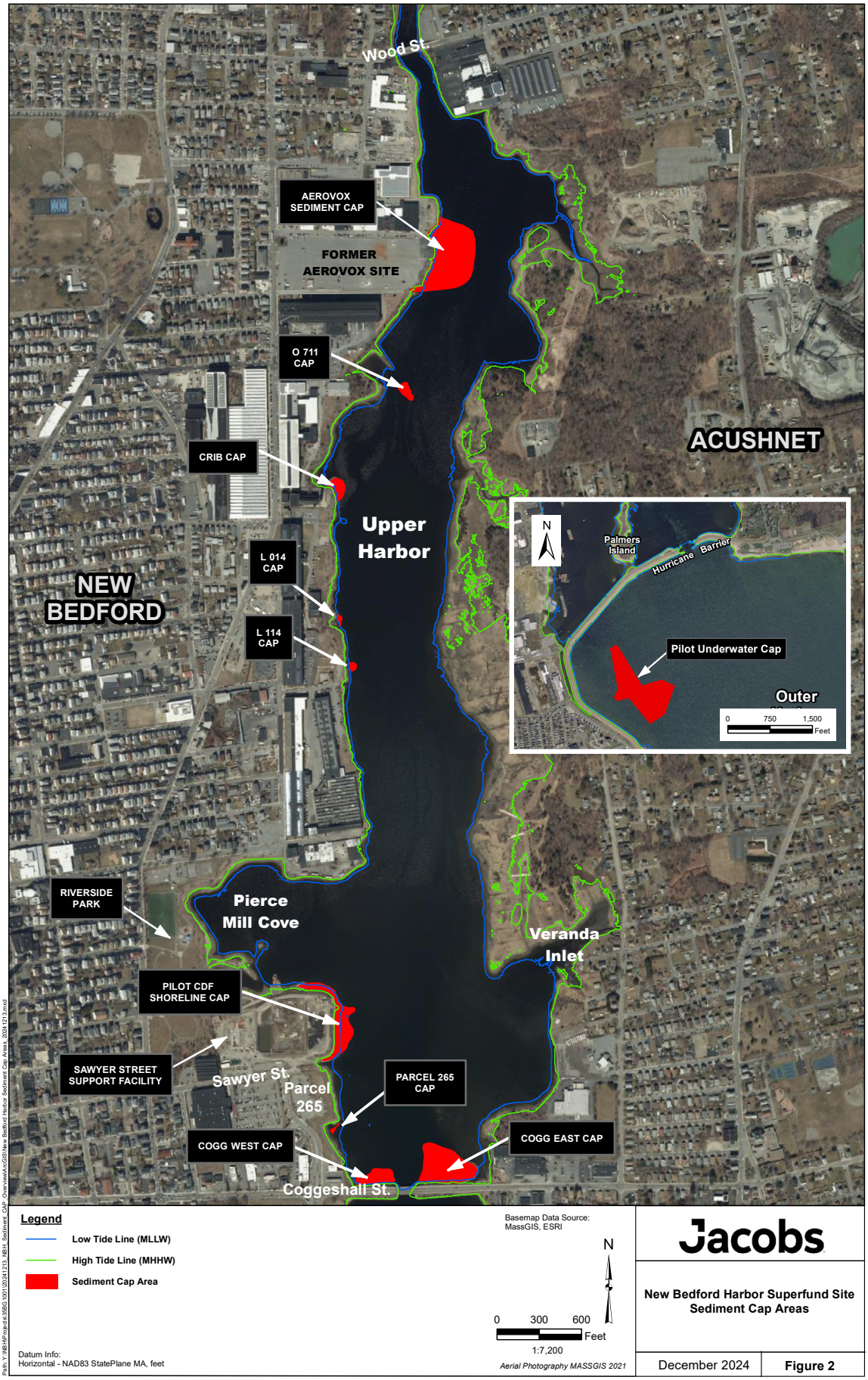

Figure 1: Satellite image of the upper harbor of New Bedford Habor Superfund Site showing the 10 sediment cap areas in red.

G CONDITIONS PLAN - OVERALL

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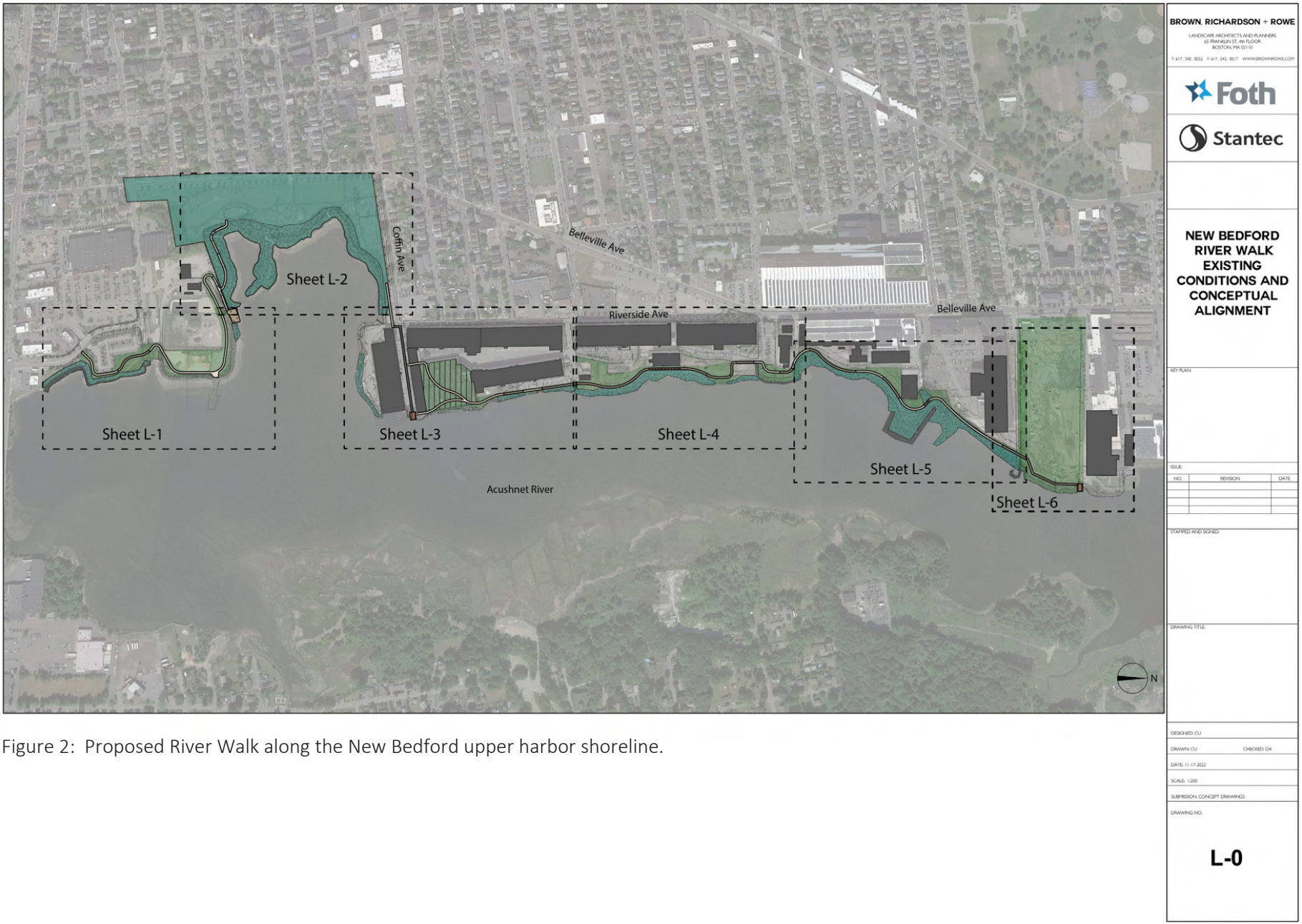

Figure 2: Proposed River Walk along the New Bedford upper harbor shoreline.