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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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EPA Seeks Public Input on Proposed Permit Modifications to Enhance and Speed Up Cleanup of Housatonic River

BOSTON – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has issued proposed modifications to the 2016 cleanup plan for the “Rest of River” portion of the Housatonic River, which will result in faster and more comprehensive cleanup activity in the river and floodplain which will secure long-term, public health protections for Berkshire County residents.

“EPA is making good on our long-term commitment to addressing PCB contamination in the Housatonic River. Our overriding goal has always been protecting people’s health and the environment, and we are advancing that goal with the proposed modifications to the cleanup plan,” **said EPA New England Regional Administrator Dennis Deziel.** “The proposed changes to the cleanup will mean a more comprehensive and faster cleanup effort for the river and floodplain, with less disruption for local residents. EPA looks forward to the time when the Housatonic River and its floodplain are restored and people can safely enjoy their scenic and recreational aspects, whether they are visiting or living nearby.”

EPA will accept public comments for 45 days, beginning on July 14, 2020. The comment period is on the changes to the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) Permit Modification, which EPA issued in 2016 (“the 2016 Permit”). On August 26, EPA will also hold a public hearing on the changes contained in the proposed modifications to the cleanup plan to address the impacts of PCBs released into the Housatonic River from the GE-Pittsfield/Housatonic River site.

The “Draft Revised 2020 Permit”—EPA’s proposed revised cleanup plan—is being proposed to address issues raised as part of EPA’s Environmental Appeals Board (EAB) decision in 2018 on the appeals to the 2016 Permit, as well as a Settlement Agreement reached with stakeholders in February 2020. The proposed changes to the cleanup plan are among the topics presented to the public at three informational meetings in February and March 2020.

EPA’s proposed revised cleanup plan will achieve superior public health protections. The plan includes two primary sets of changes. First, regarding disposal of excavated materials, the Draft

Revised 2020 Permit calls for a two-pronged solution. Specifically, the most contaminated soils and sediments (those soils/sediments regulated as federal RCRA hazardous waste or as PCB wastes averaging greater than 50 milligrams per kilogram (mg/kg, or parts per million (ppm) - requiring disposal in a chemical waste landfill under the Toxic Substances Control Act) will be shipped out of state to appropriately licensed facilities for disposal. The remaining excavated soils and sediments with lower contaminant levels will be consolidated at a local Upland Disposal Facility that will be designed for safe, protective disposal. The proposed revised cleanup plan requires air sampling; groundwater monitoring; leachate collection; stormwater management; and inspection, monitoring, and maintenance requirements at the Upland Disposal Facility to ensure its protectiveness to the environment and nearby community.

Second, the Draft Revised 2020 Permit significantly improves the overall performance of the cleanup, including the following:

- Eliminate almost 100 acres of capping of river sediments (one-third of all capping in original plan) by removing more contaminated sediments in six different reaches of the river.
- Remove two dams downstream of Woods Pond (Columbia Mill Dam and Eagle Mill Dam).
- Following sampling, conduct a review of riverbank concentrations and erodibility in upper reaches to consider whether additional bank soil removal is appropriate.
- Broaden the approach to remediation of vernal pools by testing methods for excavation and restoration of vernal pools as well as use of innovative non-invasive methods of cleanup.
- Conduct additional floodplain remediation on specific residential properties to eliminate the need for use restrictions called for in the original plan.
- Conduct additional cleanup for heavily used areas of the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Canoe Meadows property.
- Clarify certain permit provisions regarding "Legally Permissible Future Projects or Work."
- Provide for a hydraulic dredging and/or hydraulic pumping approach with material from Reach 5C, Woods Pond and potentially in backwaters adjacent to Reach 5C and Woods Pond pumped directly to the Upland Disposal Facility, in order to further limit truck traffic as part of the remedy.
- Provide for an enhanced Quality of Life Compliance Plan, which specifies five separate areas to be addressed during remediation: noise, air, odor, light; recreational activities; road use and transport-related impacts; coordination with impacted residents/landowners; and community health and safety.
- Require GE to work cooperatively with Massachusetts, the City of Pittsfield, and Berkshire County towns to facilitate their enhancement of recreational activities in areas slated for remediation.

More information:

EPA's detailed proposed modifications to the 2016 RCRA permit for cleaning the Housatonic River

-- Draft Revised 2020 Permit: <https://semspub.epa.gov/src/document/01/647214>

-- Statement of Basis that outlines the changes and the rationale for the Draft Revised 2020 Permit: <https://semspub.epa.gov/src/document/01/647211>

-- Short Fact Sheet Summary of this action: <https://semspub.epa.gov/src/document/01/647215>

-- Overview of Housatonic River cleanup effort, and EPA's proposed permit modifications (Powerpoint Presentation): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADM5xUkRFDA>

Comments Accepted:

EPA is accepting written comments on the proposed modifications to the 2016 Permit from July 14, 2020 through August 28, 2020. Oral comments on the proposed modifications to the permit will be also be accepted during the August 26, 2020, virtual Public Hearing. Instructions about how to submit comments, as well as materials with the proposed changes and additional background materials, are available at <https://www.epa.gov/ge-housatonic>.

EPA is only seeking public comment on the proposed changes contained in the Draft Revised 2020 Permit compared to the 2016 Permit. All other cleanup requirements in the 2016 Permit remain unchanged. For convenience, the changes are in redline/strikeout format.

August 26 Public Hearing:

As a follow up to the three public informational meetings held in February and March in Lee, Great Barrington, and Pittsfield, EPA will host a formal Public Hearing to allow an opportunity to provide oral comments for the record. In order to adhere to guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and state and local restrictions on large gatherings, this hearing will be conducted virtually and can be accessed online or via telephone.

The virtual Public Hearing will be held Wednesday, August 26, 2020. EPA will provide a brief overview of the proposed permit changes, followed by an opportunity for the public to make comments for the record. These comments will be recorded, transcribed, and included in the site Administrative Record. Written responses to comments will be included as part of EPA's final permit decision. Details about how to participate in the virtual formal Public Hearing will be posted at the website listed above.

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