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# EPA Determines Lower Neponset River is a Superfund Site

This is a move to protect Boston and Milton communities and provide a mechanism for cleanup

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**BOSTON (March 14, 2022)** – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has added the 3.7 mile stretch of the Lower Neponset River to the Superfund National Priorities List (NPL). This action will result in a transformation of the river, improving its ecological health and bringing big benefits to the communities that share the Neponset. After detailed review of the proposal, the Agency has determined that the Lower Neponset River site requires further detailed investigation and cleanup. Listing it as an NPL site under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), is the best way to ensure cleanup and public health protection for the Lower Neponset River and surrounding communities.

The Lower Neponset River site was referred to EPA by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 2015. For more than a decade, the surrounding communities have expressed concern about the potential contamination. In referring the site to EPA, Massachusetts agreed that listing the site on the NPL is the best option for investigation and cleanup. EPA's primary goal for the site is to protect the people who have been directly impacted by the industrial contamination in the river including those urban neighborhoods of Dorchester, Milton, Hyde Park, and Mattapan.

"Listing the Lower Neponset River Site on the Superfund NPL is a big step for the Boston and Milton neighborhoods. We now have a mechanism to clean up the river and protect the health of the communities around it, as well as increasing the overall use and enjoyment of this important resource" **said EPA Regional Administrator David W. Cash.** "We have to thank our local partners in the communities and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for their support and hard work to get the site listed, and we look forward to continued partnership as we embark on the next phase of the project. This is a win for families who value recreating on the river, a win for great blue herons, a win for fish, and a win for Massachusetts."

Cleaning up contaminated sites to protect public health and revitalize communities is part of the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to Building a Better America. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law passed last year invests \$3.5 billion in the Superfund Remedial Program and reinstates the Superfund chemical excise taxes, making it one of the largest investments in American history to address legacy pollution. This historic investment makes a dramatic difference in EPA's ability to tackle threats to human health and the environment, and EPA has already set action in motion to clear a backlog of 49 sites which had been awaiting funding to start remedial action and accelerate progress at sites across the country.

The NPL includes the nation's most serious uncontrolled or abandoned releases of contamination. The list serves as the basis for prioritizing EPA Superfund cleanup funding and enforcement actions. EPA determined that the Lower Neponset River site qualified for the NPL because this portion of the river contains sediment contaminated with elevated levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) that may pose a risk to human health and or the environment. The Lower Neponset River site is now eligible for federal Superfund resources and will be the subject of detailed environmental investigation and cleanup as warranted.

The Lower Neponset River site is identified as the 3.7-mile stretch of the Neponset River from the point where it merges with Mother Brook in Hyde Park, extending downstream to the Walter Baker Dam in Dorchester and Milton, Mass. The Lower Neponset River channel ranges from approximately 40 to 300 feet wide and comprises an estimated 40 acres within or bordering the City of Boston (Hyde Park, Mattapan, and Dorchester sections) and the Town of Milton, Mass.

The site is bordered by residential, commercial, industrial, and public parcels of land, including the Neponset River Greenway. Historically, numerous mills were established along this portion of the Neponset River in the neighborhoods of Dorchester, Milton, Hyde Park, and Mattapan, initially utilizing dams to generate power to turn mill grinding wheels and later to operate large industrial mills. These mills and other industrial facilities in the area may have contributed to the river contamination.

Further, thanks to Superfund cleanups, communities are now using previously blighted properties for a wide range of purposes, including retail businesses, office space, public parks, residences, warehouses, and solar power generation. As of 2020, EPA has collected economic data on 632 Superfund sites, finding 9,900 businesses in operation, 227,000 people employed, \$16.3 billion in employee-earned income, and \$63.3 billion in business-generated sales. The full list of updates to the Superfund National Priorities List will be released later this week.

### **What They Are Saying**

"For too long, the Lower Neponset River has been plagued by a legacy of contamination left behind from former industrial mills and dams," **said Senator Edward Markey**. "The communities of Milton, Dorchester, Mattapan, and Hyde Park deserve better, and the Environmental Protection Agency's decision to designate the Lower Neponset River as a Superfund site is an important step towards ensuring that the river receives the resources and attention it needs to be restored."

"The additional federal funding is wonderful news for the communities of Boston and Milton to clean up the Lower Neponset River, which has been polluted by harmful chemicals and industrial contamination. We owe it to families and the surrounding communities to improve the safety of the river and protect its environment and wildlife -- we have to come together to invest in responsible clean-up and environmental justice," **said Senator Elizabeth Warren**.

"Environmental justice is intrinsically linked to racial, health and economic justice," **said U.S. Representative Ayanna Pressley**. "I'm thrilled the EPA is designating the lower Neponset River in my district as a Superfund site. This long-overdue action will help protect the health and safety of Milton, Dorchester, Hyde Park and Mattapan residents and will affirm their right to live in communities free of environmental hazards and other toxic chemicals. I'm grateful to Administrator Cash, Senator Warren, Congressman Lynch, Mayor Wu, and our local community partners for helping to make this possible and look forward to seeing this important cleanup move forward."

"I am very grateful to the EPA's Boston Regional Office for adding the Lower Neponset River to the Superfund National Priorities List," **said U.S. Representative Stephen Lynch**. "The Neponset River is a beautiful waterway which courses through my District from Quincy, Milton and Boston to Dedham, Norwood and Walpole. All of those communities will be aided by this decision. Our waterways are meant to be enjoyed by residents and wildlife, not pose a threat to public health and the environment due to legacy pollutants. I look forward to seeing the results of the EPA cleanup and I thank my federal colleagues Senator Warren, Senator Markey and Congresswoman Pressley for their support to ensure the Superfund Remedial Program received \$3.5 billion of funding in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law."

"For years, public officials and the citizens of the communities along the Lower Neponset River have advocated for cleanup, and the ecological, recreational and economic improvement it will bring," **said Commissioner Martin Suuberg of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection**. "The addition of the Lower Neponset to the National Priorities List is an important commitment of federal resources to make it happen. MassDEP is committed to continuing its work with EPA and these communities to ensure the cleanup is conducted expeditiously and in a collaborative manner."

"Having been part of neighborhood meetings about this area and Neponset River cleanup efforts over the years, I know how much this natural treasure means to our communities. This designation will open up full federal partnership to invest the resources in restoring a healthy ecosystem that is especially needed in our work to become a Green New Deal city," **said Boston Mayor Michelle Wu**. "For far too long,

environmental justice communities like Mattapan have been bearing the brunt of climate change and environmental hazards, and I look forward to working closely with the Environmental Protection Agency on improving this beautiful resource in Boston."

"The Town of Milton enthusiastically endorses the EPA's designation of the Lower Neponset River as a Superfund site," **said Town of Milton Select Board Chair Kathleen Conlon**. "The cleaning up of the river will restore a healthy natural habitat for wildlife and increase recreational opportunities for the public. The Milton Select Board thanks the EPA for its commitment to restoring this historic waterway."

"We are extremely excited to see EPA investing its resources and expertise in the cleanup and restoration of the Lower Neponset River," **said Executive Director of the Neponset River Watershed Association Ian Cooke**. "The Neponset River Watershed Association, local neighborhood groups, Milton and Boston and the state have been working toward restoring the health of this stretch of the river and turning it into a nationally recognized recreational resource for many years. We look forward to working with EPA to advance this work and make the Neponset into the River our communities need and deserve."

## **Background**

EPA proposes sites to the NPL based on a scientific evaluation of factors associated with potential risks to people and the environment that warrant further investigation, consistent with the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, commonly referred to as Superfund, and the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan.

Superfund cleanups provide health and economic benefits to communities. The program is credited for significant reductions in both birth defects and blood-lead levels among children living near sites, and research has shown that residential property values by increase up to 24 percent within three miles of sites after cleanup.

## **More Information:**

Lower Neponset River site website at: <https://www.epa.gov/superfund/lowerneponset>  
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