

Hudson's low water levels affect navigation

Problem also brings fish deaths in Stillwater

By ROBIN K. COOPER
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STILLWATER — The owner of the Troy Town Duck and Marina said driving tug boats up the Hudson River is getting more difficult every year.

Rob Goldman, part owner of the Troy recreational and commercial tug business, on Tuesday said navigation is difficult because of silt buildup and low water levels on the Hudson and Champlain Canal, especially between Locks 3 and 4 in Stillwater and Mechanicville.

"This is a political issue," Goldman said. "I've become irate about this."

Goldman said the two-mile pool from Stillwater to Mechanicville is shallow, often forcing boats to run aground.

The problem gets worse every year and Goldman said he blames the state Canal Corp.

"It's political, so the Canal Corporation skirts the issue," he said.

Goldman said he would like to see the Hudson dredged for navigational purposes, while the federal government decides what to do about dredging PCBs from the river.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is scheduled to unveil a final decision in August on dredging polychlorinated biphenyls from the Hudson. Goldman said the highly publicized PCB-dredging issue has caused the Canal Corp. to avoid the dredging issue altogether and boaters are suffering as a result.

"If the Canal Corporation thinks [navigation] is not a problem, they should take a boat out themselves," he said.

Representatives from the Canal Corp. could not

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he reached Tuesday for comment.

Stillwater resident and deputy town clerk Sue Cunningham of Hudson Avenue, who has lived on the Hudson for 40 years, said she has never seen the river as low as it was on Sunday.

The water was so low at one point that two neighborhood children walked across the entire width of the river near the Stillwater Blockhouse Museum and the water never went above their waists, she said.

"It's been low before, but never that low," Cunningham said. "I don't know what happened, but I'd like to."

The crossing took place approximately one-quarter mile north of Lock 4, where Goldman said navigation is the hardest.

Cunningham said her daughter and granddaughter scooped up several small fish in buckets, trying to save them from dying in the waterless riverbed.

Cunningham said the river was practically dry from 9 a.m. until about 3 p.m. when the level started to rise. By that time, dozens of small bullheads, bass and sunfish had died and fish eggs had been out of the water for hours, she said.

It was unclear Tuesday what caused Sunday's low-water level. Hudson River water levels are regulated by the Hudson River-Black River Regulating District. But chief engineer Rob Foltan said the district does not have jurisdiction over areas of the river where power plants may manipulate water levels.

The Stillwater Hydroelectric Project plant is located a few hundred feet north of the Block-

house and New York State Electric and Gas has a hydroelectric plant on the Stillwater-Mechanicville line. Representatives from those two companies could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

Despite heavy rains in June, Foltan said the Hudson water level has been low this year and it's decreasing constantly. The district pumps additional water into the river daily to help maintain levels at the required 1,760 cubic feet per second, he said.

The Water Commission of the Town of Waterford, located six miles north of Mechanicville and about nine miles north of Stillwater, uses the Hudson to provide drinking water to 12,000 users.

Bob Horton, the commission's general manager, said the river level has been low, but the water intake is in no danger of being affected.

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