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N.J. channel mud will patch Pa. mines

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JERSEY CITY — Polluted silt that now clogs a New Jersey shipping lane is heading to Pennsylvania's Susquehanna River valley — on a mission.

The mud is being scooped from a Hudson River channel, dried and mixed with industrial ash, then loaded onto rail cars — some 5,000 of them eventually.

After a trip 240 miles west to Moshannon State Forest in Clearfield County, Pa., bulldozers spread the dark, clay-like mixture over the scarred hillsides of an abandoned strip mine. After it is steamrolled, a soil made of other industrial by-products — paper and nontoxic tannery sludge — is spread on it, and grasses planted.

Besides restoring the natural landscape, the coating may reduce the amount of acid and metals flowing from the Bark Camp coal mine into a stream. The test project is believed to be the first of its kind in the nation.

Several miles of the waterway, the Bark Camp Run, were left lifeless from the acid runoff, but seem to be recovering since

capping began in 1994, with some fish reappearing.

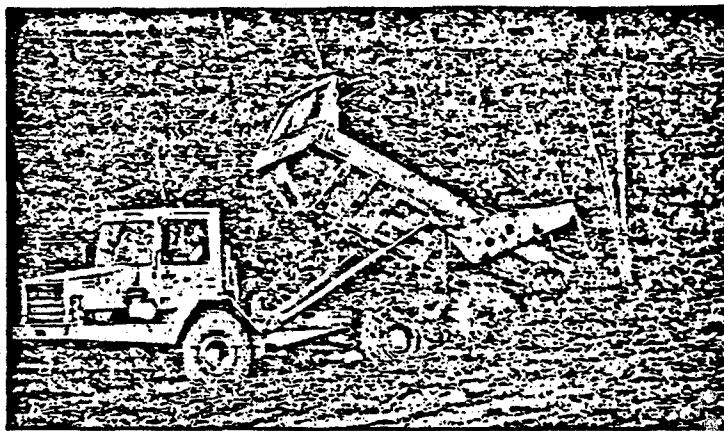
Dredge spoils from Perth Amboy's marina and Port Newark became part of the mix in 1998. Now, muck taken in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty is part of the patch.

The project has won support from a New Jersey environmentalist and officials in both states. Others question the long-term safety of the dredge-ash combination.

"It just doesn't sound very clean to me. Usually the by-products of industrial processes contain toxic elements," said Beth McConnell, the clean-air and energy advocate for the Pennsylvania Public Interest Research Group.

"It seems like a lot of testing needs to be done, and safeguards have to be in place, to make sure we're just not dumping this on Pennsylvania," McConnell said.

Beverly Braverman, of the Mountain Watershed Association in Melcroft, Pa., was skeptical about the plan. "You know, you can't even eat the fish that swim in a lot of these harbors, so who wants this



The Associated Press

Manufactured fill being added to an abandoned strip-mine site near Penfield, Pa. The fill is a mixture of river dredge, industrial ash and lime kiln dust that will set and become similar to a weak cement. The area will be covered with dirt and planted with ground cover.

sludge spread on their fields?"

At the Citizens Coal Council in Denver, staff director Carolyn Johnson questioned how long the cap would remain impervious and shield the mined surfaces from water.

"A lot of this is like moving trouble around. You move it from one place, and shove it on another," Johnson said.

Proponents say the dredge-ash material, some of which has been in place three years, has not leached contaminants.

The design offers a possible solution to a grim problem that afflicts Pennsylvania to a greater degree than any other coal-producing state.

Some 3,000 miles of Pennsylvania waterways are tainted by acidic drainage from mines, more than any other state. It is Pennsylvania's biggest water quality problem, according to the Pennsylvania Environmental Network.

Pennsylvania estimates it would cost \$15 billion to solve all the problems associated with abandoned mines, including underground fires and collapses, as well as fouled water.

Part of the attraction of capping is that the dredge spoils and the industrial ash would face costly burial in a landfill if not put to productive use.