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DEC chief reiterates stance on dredging  
Albany -- Letter follows meeting between EPA, upriver residents

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Environmental Conservation Commissioner Erin M. Crotty sent a letter to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency this week that "expressed concern to the EPA," while still reiterating the state's commitment to restore the Hudson River to full health, according to DEC officials.

The letter came days after upriver residents opposed to dredging met with top EPA officials in Washington to discuss the cleanup plan.

No other details were available, according to Jennifer Post, a DEC spokeswoman, because the letter is bound by a confidentiality agreement.

But environmentalists, who said that they had spoken personally with the commissioner, said the letter addressed the possible inclusion of performance standards into a final dredging decision.

The timing of the standards -- targets for the amount of sediment that could be stirred up and the rate at which dredging would have to occur -- has been the topic of discussions in meetings the EPA has had with GE, environmental groups, and upriver citizens opposed to dredging over the last month.

"Crotty indicated that it was her position, articulated in the letter, that the (final dredging order) is not the place for performance standards," said Ned Sullivan, executive director of Poughkeepsie-based Scenic Hudson. Sullivan said that Crotty cited four reasons why criteria to measure the impacts of dredging could not be decided upon before the project is actually designed.

While the final decision on dredging is expected sometime next month, dredging won't actually start until after three years of design.

Environmentalists want the scientific criteria decided upon during the design phase. GE, which discharged millions of pounds of PCBs into the river and could be held liable for the cleanup, wants the standards hammered out now.

Advocates hope that the state weighing in now will have the same effect it did this summer, when amid rumors of a scaled-back dredging plan, Gov. George E. Pataki placed a call to EPA Administrator Christie Whitman. After that telephone call, Whitman endorsed the \$460 million plan unveiled by the Clinton administration in December, but added the condition that the project be monitored.