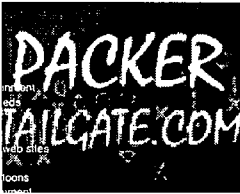


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Contractor: Dredging needed more time

At the core of the dispute is the condition of the river sediment: sandy or claylike?

By Jeff Decker
News-Chronicle

Two officials with the state Department of Natural Resources disagreed Thursday with a contractor's assertion that the dredging of a key PCB hot spot in the Fox River last fall would have taken more than six months to do properly.

"We worked 113 days," said Phil Martin, vice president of Four Seasons Contractors, the company that performed most of the dredging of contaminated sediment in the river near the Fort James Corp. west mill, 1919 S. Broadway.

"With the way conditions turned out to be, it would have taken 190 days to complete the job."

Martin said head contractor Montgomery Watson Constructors had predicted the dredged material from the river bottom would be sandy, but it turned out to be more like clay.

Bob Paulson, the DNR's technical lead for the project, said he examined several initial core soil samples and wouldn't call any of it "sandy."

"The very bottom of the river is made of clay, but they never got that deep to hit that stuff," he said. "I don't believe that these conditions were any different than Montgomery Watson projected." Paulson said the dredged material was just like "mud."

Asked whether it would have taken 190 days to properly complete the project, Paulson said,

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properly complete the project, Paulson said, "Bull."

The dredging project, which was a demonstration to see how feasible dredging the Fox would be, ended unfinished, driven out by the cold of December and leaving a much more contaminated river downstream. "They were going to be out of the river by Thanksgiving, they told us," Paulson said.

Gary Kincaid, who was on site overseeing the water's decontamination for the DNR, said there are were several varieties of sediment to be dredged, but very little clay.

"How it had been characterized before the project is how it was," he said. "Not long into the project, (Four Seasons was) making the claim that conditions had changed. As far as I know, they haven't proven that. "That will probably have to come out in a hearing or a court." Neither DNR official could say how the disagreement affected the dredging. They did say that several loads of new equipment were brought in throughout the project.

Of the 80,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment that was slotted for removal, only 30,000 was actually dredged out.

"They tried three or four different dredgings and several dredging methods," Paulson said.

Martin said he is frustrated over how his company's partners could deny what is obvious to him.

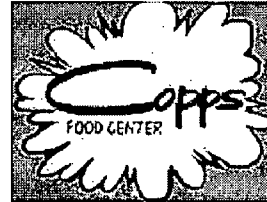
"They could see the difference, they could see the change," he said. The contract between the two companies provides for adjusting payment to meet changing conditions and work load.

Montgomery Watson Constructors President Mark Swatek said these kinds of contract disputes are common.

"We have not seen any information that gives any justification for any change in condition," he said.

Swatek said his company is looking forward to a chance to settle the differences, but he declined a request to allow his on-site contractors to comment to the News-Chronicle.

None of the parties involved agree on why the project left things so incomplete, and only Four



Seasons believes that Aug. 30 was a late date to start.

The dredging, dewatering, and water treatment were each plagued with problems, and the truckloads of new equipment never seemed to get the project back on schedule.

Martin said that one indicator the burden was unexpected is the amount of chemicals used: 1,250 tons of lime was projected for the project, for example, but he claimed 2,900 tons was actually used because the sediment was so much more dense.

Paulson said it's important to remember just how polluted the whole river is. "I have yet to see any sample come back from the surface that had no PCBs in it," he said. "They just don't exist."

Fort James is independently financing the second project to complete dredging of the area and has hired Severson Environmental Services of Niagara Falls, N.Y. The company is required to begin work in September but is expected to get started before that.

FYI

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has scheduled a public meeting to discuss the cleanup of the Fox River at 7 p.m. Aug. 3 in the lower level auditorium of the Brown County Central Library, 515 Pine St. Representatives from the EPA, DNR and the Fox River Group are expected to present updates about the state of the river and the progress of the Superfund cleanup.

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The Green Bay News-Chronicle
P.O. Box 2467
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