



Thunder Bay Area of Concern

Newsletter 2014

Working towards a solution for contaminated sediment

Work is underway to develop the best solution for managing 22 hectares of contaminated sediment in the north harbour. Environment Canada and the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change are working with Cascades Fine Paper, the Thunder Bay Port Authority, and other stakeholders to develop the plan. The sediment, contaminated with organic fibre and mercury, is located next to a former mill. Cleanup options include combinations of capping and dredging. Dredged material would be placed in a regulated disposal facility, or would be treated and disposed of.

Engagement with Aboriginal communities, the public and interested stakeholders is underway and will continue through 2014. This is an important part of the process to evaluate sediment management options. EcoSuperior Environmental Programs is managing the options assessment and coordinating public involvement with funding and expertise from Environment Canada, the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, and Cascades Fine Paper Group.



Once a sediment management option is chosen, an environmental assessment and engineering design will be completed.

Next steps

Most remedial actions for the Thunder Bay Area of Concern (AOC) are complete and the environment has improved significantly. The sediment cleanup is a priority in the remedial action plan (RAP), and is the largest and most significant project needed to address remaining environmental issues in the area.

Other projects to improve fish habitat and water quality are

underway. With financial support from Environment Canada and the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, the City of Thunder Bay is looking at ways to reduce the impacts of stormwater on local waterways, and the North Shore Steelhead Association, a non-governmental organization, is improving the quality of fish habitat in local creeks and rivers. Scientific studies are ongoing to assess the health of fish and wildlife populations and habitat. Results will be reviewed to determine if locally-established environmental targets are being met.

Restoring and protecting the Thunder Bay AOC is a collaborative effort that involves all levels of government, the Lakehead Region Conservation Authority, EcoSuperior Environmental Programs, the Thunder Bay District Health Unit, non-governmental organizations and community groups. With the support of Environment Canada and the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, Lakehead University coordinates the Remedial Action Plan and seeks input from the public advisory committee, which meets regularly to discuss matters relevant to the AOC.

Background: The Thunder Bay Area of Concern

Thunder Bay is one of 43 AOCs (now 38 with five fully remediated) in the Great Lakes identified in accordance with the 1987 Canada-United States Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. Canada and the United States are responsible for working with partners to develop and implement RAPs for each area.

In Thunder Bay, urbanization and historical pollution from industrial and municipal sources led to:

- unpleasant foam, oily residue and odour in waterways
- high levels of chemicals in sediment and fish
- loss of fish and wildlife habitat
- impacts to sediment-dwelling organisms
- impacts on fish populations.

The Thunder Bay AOC extends 28 kilometres along the shoreline of Lake Superior and up to nine kilometres offshore, including the Welcome Islands. Most environmental impacts were concentrated around the urbanized area of the waterfront and tributaries, such as the Kaministiquia River. Remedial actions have focused on these areas.

Many actions have been taken to help clean up this AOC. Local pulp and paper mills improved the quality of their wastewater in response to provincial and federal wastewater regulations in the 1990s. That resulted in better water quality, and improved fish habitat. A large area of contaminated sediment, known locally as the “creosote blob,” was cleaned up near the former Northern Wood Preservers site with funding from the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario and industry. RAP partners have also completed projects to create aquatic habitat, improve water quality and restore wetlands.

Cleaning up Areas of Concern

Canada and Ontario work together to restore Canadian and binational AOCs. That work relies on collaboration with conservation authorities, municipalities, First Nation and Métis communities, environmental groups, industry and the public. Working together, communities and governments develop and implement RAPs.

Of the 38 remaining AOCs in the Great Lakes, there are nine in Canada, 24 in the United States and five that are shared by both countries. Three Canadian and two United States locations have been fully remediated and removed from the list of AOCs. Two Canadian locations have been recognized as Areas of Concern in Recovery.



Photo credit: Darren McChristie

For more information:

For more information on the Thunder Bay Area of Concern: www.northshorerap.ca

For more information on Areas of Concern visit: www.ec.gc.ca/raps-pas

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