

Sheboygan River dredging set to begin

Trucking of sediments will make project a 24/7 operation

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Dr. Susan Hedman, EPA Region 5 Administrator, speaks Wednesday about the final stage of the Sheboygan River dredging project at Highland House. / Photo by Bruce Halmo/The Sheboygan Press

That sediment will be trucked out of the area constantly — roughly 280 truckloads per day, every day, from the two sites, said city Development Manager Chad Pelishek.

The [trucks](#) will travel west on Indiana Avenue to Taylor Drive, where some of them will turn north to Manitowoc County and some will go south to Milwaukee, where landfills will accept the contaminants, he said.

“That’s the reason we’ve been sending out notices ... for months now,” Pelishek said. “It’s going to be a 24/7 operation, with bright lights and noise. It’s a short-term inconvenience for a long-term gain.”

He said trucks will be entering and exiting both de-watering sites, where sediment will be dried and contaminants extracted, between 5 a.m. and 5 p.m. every day, staggering whether they’re going east to the site along South Pier [Drive](#) or west to the parking lot next to the Wisconsin Naval Ship Association building, the former Alliant Energy building, on South Eight Street.

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Downtown Sheboygan, get ready to rumble — literally.

The dredging project both east and west of the Eighth Street Bridge is slated to begin this weekend, and dignitaries from the Environmental [Protection](#) Agency, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Sheboygan County, the City of Sheboygan and others were on hand Wednesday morning to kick it all off.

The project is slated to remove about 300,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment from the inner harbor east of the Eighth Street Bridge and from the river between the Eighth Street Bridge and the 14th Street Bridge.

There won't be any material transported out overnight, Pelishek said, but work at both sites will go on around the clock.

Projects to clean up other areas of the river, including the Camp Marina site off Water Street, have already removed more than 90,000 cubic yards of contaminants.

Wednesday's speakers, including EPA Region 5 director Susan Hedman, lauded the many people and organizations involved in getting the river clean-up project off the ground and well on its way to completion.

"It's the beginning of the end of years of work removing PCBs, reducing health threats to people, [fish](#) and wildlife and restoring opportunities for recreation and economic activity," Hedman said during the short ceremony on the upper deck of Highland House Restaurant overlooking the river and dredging barges.

Those projects are among the last steps in a 25-year process of cleaning up the Sheboygan River from Lake Michigan upstream to Sheboygan Falls since the river was declared an EPA Superfund site in the mid-1980s.

The dredging will deepen the harbor to 16 feet, and the DNR also will be working this year to restore fish and [wildlife](#) habitat along the river. When all the work is done, the river will be removed from the EPA's list of the most polluted areas in the Great Lakes region.

"In 25 years, one 'area of concern' on the U.S. side of the (Canadian) border has been cleaned up enough to be removed from the list of the most contaminated spots on the Great Lakes," Hedman said, adding that the Sheboygan River will be one of the next four to be de-listed in the coming year.

Mayor Terry Van Akkeren said the clean-up would not have been possible without the collaboration between all the involved government agencies, organizations and people, and therefore neither would the development that is sure to follow.

"There's a developer interested in building along the river," Van Akkeren said, declining to pinpoint which building is in play. "They're waiting for the dredging ... to be finished.

The potential plan is a \$2 million to \$3 million combined retail and housing development, Van Akkeren said.

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