

## Summary of the “Peconic River Cleanup: Decision-Process” Roundtables

### Introduction

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL) conducted three public roundtable meetings on October 3, 4, and 9, 2001 plus an employee session on October 1, 2001. The subject of the meetings was the decision process leading to a cleanup plan for Peconic River sediment. Presentations on this topic were also given to the Community Advisory Council and to the Brookhaven Executive Roundtable.



Community members discuss cleanup of the Peconic River during a break at the October 3 roundtable session. From left to right are: Bob Conklin (Riverhead Town), Rita Biss (Lake Panamoka Civic Association), and Frank Anastasi (Neighbors Expecting Accountability and Remediation).

This report summarizes the results of the community roundtable meetings.

- Section 1.0 provides an overview of the meetings including their purpose, format, general content, and attendance.
- Section 2.0 summarizes the key discussion segments at the meetings, lists the community comments recorded on the evaluation sheets, and lists the questions that were asked at each of the meetings.
- Section 3.0 provides summaries of participant feedback based on information recorded on the evaluation sheets.

## 1.0 Overview of Community Roundtable Meetings

**Purpose:** Community roundtable meetings are one of the key activities in the community relations plan for the Peconic River cleanup. The roundtable meetings allow for a mutually beneficial exchange of information between the project staff, the local community and other stakeholders. Stakeholders are individuals and organizations that are involved with, interested in, or potentially affected by decisions regarding the Peconic River cleanup project.

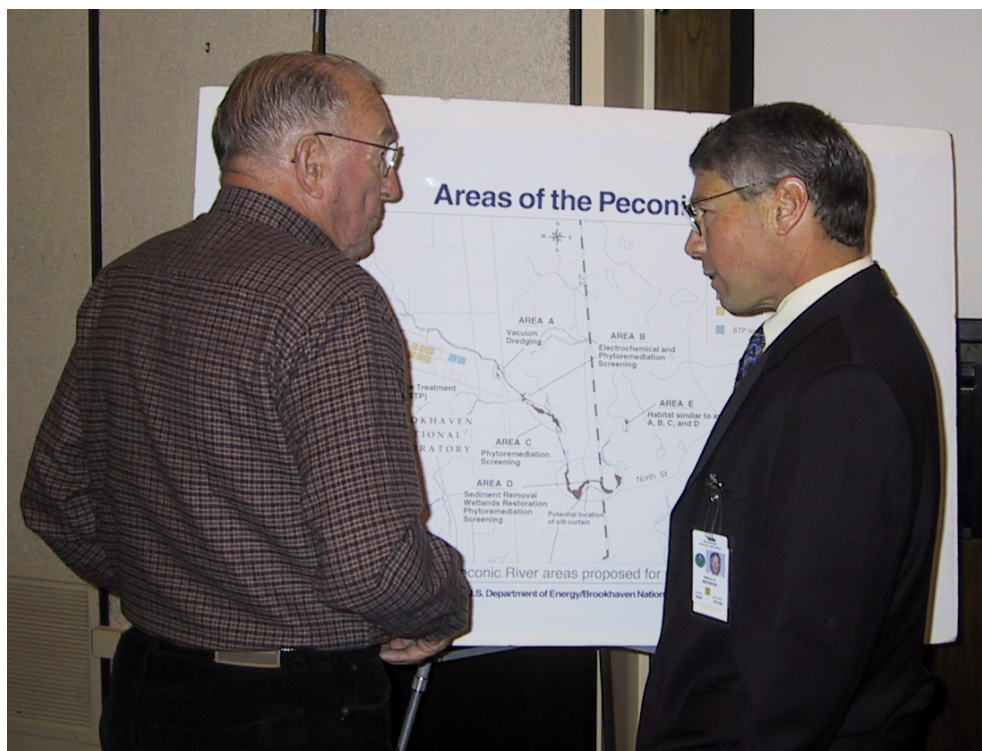
The roundtable meetings held on October 1, 3, 4, and 9 were the first following the December 2000 Peconic River Remedial Alternatives Workshop. In that workshop, the community requested that the Laboratory explore cleanup technologies other than excavation to clean up contaminated river sediment. The objectives of the October 2001 meetings were to deliver a progress report and to outline the process by which one or more cleanup technologies would be considered for use when developing a final cleanup strategy.

**Format:** The roundtable sessions included a combination of presentations, question and answer periods, and facilitated discussions. The sessions were designed as small group meetings to encourage participation and interactions among the attendees.

The two-hour meeting on October 1 was aimed at BNL employees.

The meetings on October 3, 4, and 9 were open to the public and lasted two to three hours each. The public sessions were conducted with participants who responded to advertisements in *Newsday* and *Suffolk Life*, poster advertisements at several locations in Riverhead, a mailing to nearly 3,000 residents, website announcements, and telephone invitations. The October 3 and 9 meetings took place at BNL; the October 4 session took place at Cornell Cooperative Extension in Riverhead.

**Content:** The meeting facilitators, Jen Clodius and Ken White, provided opening remarks, a review of the agenda, and an invitation for attendees to introduce themselves. Lloyd Nelson, the Department of Energy project manager, delivered opening remarks and introduced Skip Medieros, the BNL Peconic River Project Group Manager. His presentation included a status report of the Peconic River cleanup, details on the process for moving forward, and an outline of the cleanup technologies under consideration.



Joe Gibbons (left, Lake Panamoka Civic Association) discusses potential cleanup areas of the Peconic River with Skip Medeiros (BNL).

**Summary of Results:** Participants were generally supportive of the plan to move forward with the pilot studies and demonstrations. A number of comments were made that will be helpful to the project staff as the process moves forward. Some participants noted that cleanup goals are not yet finalized. Most participants focused their questions on the cleanup technologies, their costs, and the timeframes to achieve cleanup objectives.

## Section 2.0 Community Input

The following sections cover the questions and comments made at the roundtable meetings, and the comments that were recorded on the roundtable evaluation sheets. Many of the questions were straightforward and were answered directly at the meeting. Others concerned exploring hypothetical conditions or scenarios. Such questions are helpful to the project team by providing its members with a fuller understanding of community concerns to address during the design of the pilot studies and demonstration projects. Many staff members from the Department of Energy and the Laboratory also attended the sessions with a similar goal of attaining a better understanding of community interests and concerns.

## Section 2.1 Summary of Community Discussion Points (Values, Issues, and Perspectives)

The following summary of roundtable discussions reviews the comments and questions voiced by community members at the meetings. The categories presented here represent the key discussion areas. Details, including a breakdown of the questions asked at each meeting, are covered in Section 2.2.

- **Effectiveness of Cleanup Technologies**

Community members focused a lot of discussion on how well the cleanup technologies would perform, with a particular emphasis on phytoremediation and electrochemical questions and techniques. "Were the cattails absorbing contaminants?" and "would we be capable of measuring whether the electrochemical process was truly collecting metals and not just moving them around," as well as "would the process collect PCBs and collect or otherwise impact radionuclides?" were the kinds of questions that generalized the community concerns about the technologies.

- **Definition of Cleanup Goals**

By far, most of the roundtable discussion points were on the cleanup goals. The community wanted to know who set the cleanup goals that were formerly proposed, but withdrawn, and what those cleanup goals were. Questions such as "what cleanup goals did you give contractors so they could make their estimates?" characterized the public's interest in knowing the clear cleanup goals. The project team stated that BNL and DOE had proposed the former cleanup goals and that new cleanup goals will be proposed by BNL/DOE when new data is available from recent and ongoing vegetation, sediment, and fish sampling; and a new risk-assessment has been completed. The proposed cleanup goals will be reviewed by BNL/DOE, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, or the Suffolk County Department of Health Services.

- **Environmental Impact**

Community members spoke about the possible need to re-establish organic matter following sediment removal, and that if replanting efforts were to begin a year from now, then local native plants should be collected now for their seeds. General discussions on excavation efforts included the degree to which the topology of the river might change. Other discussion focused on the impact of the electrochemical technology. For example, community members asked whether any risk to wildlife could be caused by this technology.

- **Cost and Schedule**

Periodically, discussion turned to clarification on the cost and schedule. People questioned, in particular, the high cost of electrochemical technology. Regarding the project team's cost breakdown, community members engaged project staff on what the cost included. Did the cost include sampling efforts and did the cost for vacuum dredging include a sediment replacement aspect?" were among the particular discussion points centered on cost breakdown. In conjunction with the cost of the pilot studies, community members asked when the studies would

begin and how long they would last. In particular, community members were concerned that the price tag for the electrochemical process was extreme for “a very small area, about the size of this room.” Other members observed that the costs cited by BNL for wetland excavation and reconstruction were not consistent with their experience.

## Section 2.2 Questions and Comments from the Public Roundtable Meetings

This section lists the questions and comments expressed by community members during the public meetings.

### Section 2.2.1 Community Questions and Comments from October 3, 2001

1. Did you check whether the cattails were absorbing contaminants?
2. What's the timeframe for pilot studies?
3. Does electrochemical screening have a cost broken out?
4. Do you like Electrochemical? Could it alter the chemistry of the sediment?
5. Can you measure that the metals are moving to determine whether they're moving around and not just taking them out...?
6. For Electrochemical, what's the benefit in terms of moving PCBs?
7. Are all the technologies going through a screening and piloting process?
8. What type of power level is used for electrochemical?
9. Why not start pilot studies downstream and work your way up?
10. Can you tell us more about the silt screen? What are the dimensions, etc.?
11. When you did your cost estimates, what cleanup goals did you give contractors so that they could make their cost estimates?
12. Can we have clarification on Phytoremediation?
13. Electrical rates are high, but electrochemical is really high. How come?
14. The County doesn't agree with the cleanup level of the state. Are we not using DEC cleanup goals?
15. How comfortable are you with knowing the cleanup area? How comfortable are you going to be after the risk assessment? Does it look like you're going to be finished? Is this project going to get bigger or smaller?
16. Is there a cleanup goal for Cesium-137? Will the county be in a position to recommend cleanup goals? Is there a timeline?
17. What about the sediment between the areas?

### 2.2.2 Community Questions and Comments from October 4

1. What are you using to make the new risk assessment? What's prompted a new set of cleanup goals?
2. Is there a difference in the data between the data now and '97?

3. When do you expect the result of the new supplemental sampling?
4. Do you have a process for the public to review the pilot studies?
5. Regarding electrochemical, this could also be effective for radionuclides? You're saying that it breaks down the organics?
6. You're already starting testing with phytoremediation?
7. You're proposing that the silt screen will go east of Area D?
8. It's (Electrochemical pilot) a very small area, about the size of this room?
9. Is there a time frame for how long electrochemical takes?
10. Are they planning chelating agents in Puget Sound?
11. Does the cost include all of the sampling?
12. The costs for vacuum dredging don't jive with what I've seen. Is there a sediment replacement aspect for that as well? You may have to re-establish the same levels to set the species back.
13. Who came up with the idea of chelating agents? Are chelating agents required?
14. What percentage of the overall project will be done for the pilot?
15. Is the overall plan one, or a combination of plans?
16. Does the (electrochemical) current impact wildlife? What are the impacts of electrochemical? Is it a safe field?
17. The community would also be damaged with dredging??
18. My understanding is contrary to what you said about the Benthic community?
19. Is there a plan to re-establish organic matter?
20. Is work being done in the roots rhizomes, and shoots?
21. Am I correct that cleanup goals have not been established? It's like going to a race and not knowing where the finish line is.
22. With Phytoremediation, what exactly are you testing for?
23. Is the geoprobe data available?
24. If you intercept the contaminants, then what? I understand the ground water and the river are the same. When it gets in the water, what can we do?
25. Can we reduce the source? What's the source?
26. Are you considering vacuum guzzling in Area D?
27. In terms of replanting, is that within a year from now? Local native plants can be collected now.

### **2.2.3 Community Questions and Comments from October 9**

1. Where does the sediment get squeezed out?
2. Where will the multi-waste be disposed?
3. You mentioned a certain cost...what is the total estimated cost to clean up to the boundary line, all the metals?
4. If you applied Electrochemical in one place and the screen in the other, what would the cost be? If you did nothing in terms of cleanup actions, what would you do? What harm would there be in doing that? What risk has there been to wildlife so far?
5. What kind of volume are you taking out with vacuum guzzling? You're not replacing it? Aren't you changing the whole topology of the river?

6. With Electrochemical, couldn't you just be spreading contaminants in a broader area if you don't collect them?
7. With regard to access roads to get in, couldn't you just use a helicopter rather than build a road?
8. Regarding electrochemical and mixed waste, wouldn't the sediment moving also be considered a mixed waste?
9. Can you speak more about chelating agents? You mentioned that their use might be damaging?
10. Is the mixed waste included in the price?
11. Can you build a pond to collect the contaminants?
12. You mentioned fish. Have there been any genetic changes in the fish or wildlife?
13. You always use the term "community concerns." But there are so few people here. What is community concern?
14. When you say BNL Cleanup, you say sediment. Are you responsible for the sediment? Are you people responsible for the sediment?

## Section 2.3 Community Comments

The following comments were recorded on the roundtable evaluation sheets:

1. I would like to have a tour of the headwaters of the river.
2. I was disappointed to see that this study was only to BNL property and the land just east of the BNL property. I find it hard to believe that contamination hasn't spread in the spring runoff to other sections of the river.
3. Have information to review prior to meeting.
4. Four meetings appear to be adequate.
5. I like having so many experts and regulatory in attendance, especially to learn that the wetlands are restorable.
6. Nice work! (Esp. Skip)
7. I think it was helpful to have the NYS DEC people present. There seemed to be a lot of confusion as to which pilot projects were definite and which technologies were still being screened.
8. Excellent. Good job sticking to time frame.
9. A few voices tend to dominate the question-and-answer sessions. It might be good to go around the room and solicit comments from others who haven't spoken.
10. Additional pictures of actual cleanup and technology being employed may have been helpful.
11. Last 25 minutes were a discussion between two individuals. The meeting should have ended on time and they could have had their discussion without holding the rest of us hostage.
12. Complicated issues, difficult to cover in allotted time. But well done anyway.
13. Good progress/status update.
14. Effective balance between presentation and discussion.
15. Room was congested and poorly climate controlled [Cornell Cooperative Extension]

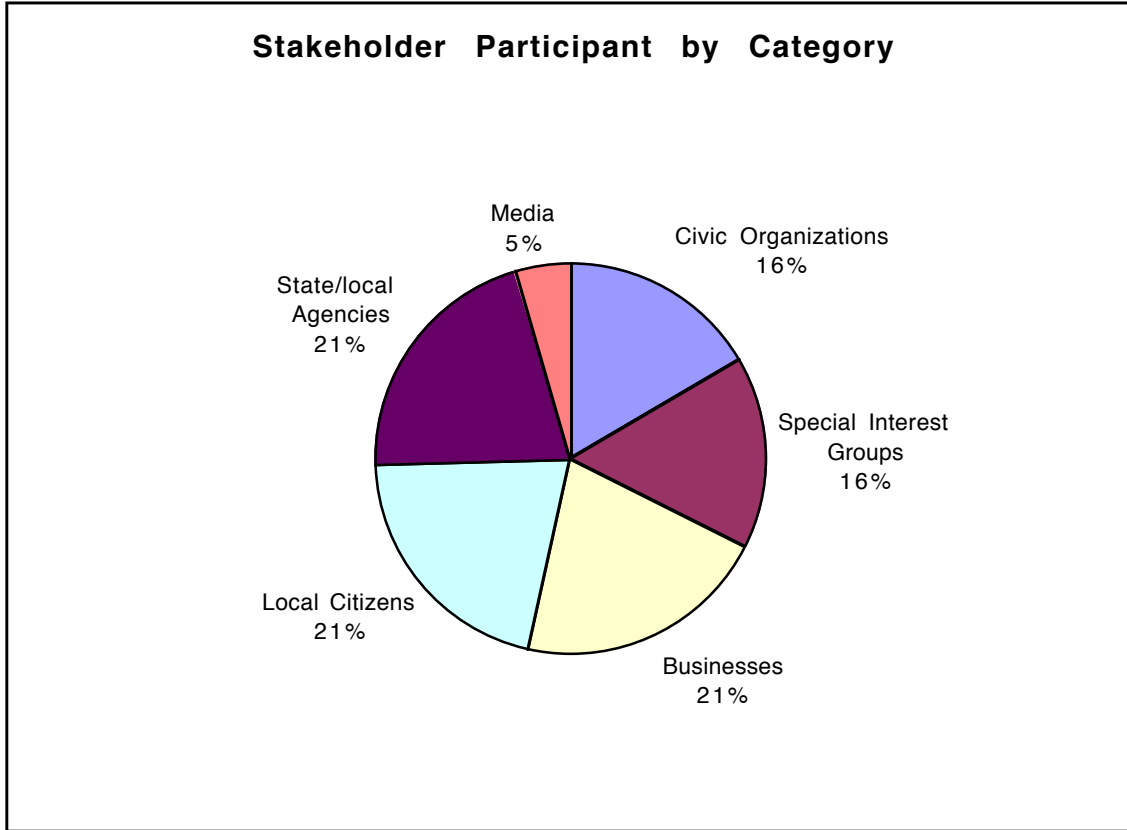
16. Too much material in a short time. Material needs to be fleshed out in more detail.
17. More details needed, vague statements about future conditions.
18. Time good, location convenient, facility OK [Cornell Cooperative Extension].
19. Good format.
20. Skip did very well.
21. Questions were either addressed or promised to look into.
22. Overly long presentation reduced time available for discussion.

### Section 3.0 Tables and Figures on Stakeholder Participation

<b>Date and Time</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Number of Attendees</b>
October 1, 2001, 2–4 p.m.	BNL	20
October 3, 2001, 1–3 p.m.	BNL	40
October 4, 2001, 7–9 p.m.	Cornell Cooperative Extension, Riverhead	29
October 9, 2001, 7–9 p.m.	BNL	18
Total		107

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of Attendees</b>
Civic Organizations	7
Special Interest Groups	7
Businesses	9
Local Citizens	9
State/local Agencies	9
Media	2





**Table 3. Number of Evaluations Collected**

Date	Location	Number of Attendees Who Completed Evaluations	Percent of Total Attendees Who Completed Evaluations
October 1, 2001	BNL	9	45%
October 3, 2001	BNL	16	40%
October 4, 2001	Cornell Cooperative Extension	7	25%
October 9, 2001	BNL	3	16%

**Table 4. Roundtable Evaluations**

Area of Evaluation	Ranking 1-5 (5=high)
Meeting facilities, locations, and times were appropriate	4.5
Format of meeting was effective	4.2
Presentations were clear and understandable	4.6
Questions were addressed	4.0
Time allotted was adequate	3.5
Overall rating	4.1

<b>Method of Notifications</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Preferred Method</b>
Newspaper	1	3
Radio	0	0
Phone	4	8
News story	0	3
Direct mail	13	13
E-mail	6	23
Other	8	2