

# Tannery Bay Dredging Will Remove Pollution

**Tannery Bay Legacy Act Site/St. Marys River Area of Concern**

Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan

July 2006

## Meeting scheduled

You are invited to attend an informational meeting Monday, July 31, 7–9 p.m., at Lake Superior State University's Cisler Student and Conference Center, 650 W. Easterday Ave., Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., to hear details of the Tannery Bay project and ask questions. EPA, company and state officials will be on hand to explain the work and how it will affect local residents.

For special accommodations at the meeting contact Don de Blasio at EPA. If you have questions about the meeting or the project contact any of these representatives:

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To learn more about the Great Lakes Legacy Act and the other cleanup projects funded by the statute please visit:  
[epa.gov/glla/](http://epa.gov/glla/)

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Phelps Dodge Corp. along with the state of Michigan will share the costs of an \$8 million cleanup project on Tannery Bay, a polluted bay west of Sault Ste. Marie, Mich. Chromium and mercury from a former tannery polluted the bay, which is on St. Marys River, the connecting channel between lakes Superior and Huron. St. Marys River is a joint U.S.-Canadian "area of concern," which marks the region for special environmental attention. Dredging on Tannery Bay should begin in August and be completed late this fall.

The project is being paid for by using \$4.8 million in federal Great Lakes Legacy Act funds. Phelps Dodge, which owns the former Cannelton Industries tannery property, will contribute \$2.6 million. Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, through the state's Clean Michigan Initiative, will provide \$600,000 in funding.

The pollution is mainly byproducts from the Northwestern Leather Co. tannery that operated from 1900 to 1958. When the tannery was operating, waste was dumped into ditches and flowed into the bay where it settled in the mud (sediment). To give a better picture of the size of the project, the 40,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment that will be removed from



the bay and nearby wetland would cover an area the size of a football field to a height of 24 feet. The dredging will remove 500,000 pounds of chromium and 25 pounds of mercury from the bay and wetland on Tannery Point. The sediment will be dredged and barged to a staging area about three miles east of the site. There, water will be drained from the sludge and sent to a municipal water treatment facility. Remaining material will be disposed of in the nearby Dafter Landfill. After sediment removal, the shoreline will be restored and replanted with native plants.

### **History of Tannery Bay site**

The former tannery site itself was cleaned up under EPA's Superfund program in 1999. Contaminated soil and tannery waste were disposed of in the Dafter Landfill, and a shoreline rock barrier was installed to keep any

remaining waste from eroding into the bay. The Tannery Bay cleanup plan called for allowing clean silt from St. Marys River to gradually cover the contaminated sediment in the bay while environmental monitoring would be performed indefinitely to make sure the process was working. In the early 2000s, Phelps Dodge bought another mining company's properties, which included the tannery site.

After the purchase, Phelps Dodge — along with public entities including the city of Sault Ste. Marie, the U.S.-Canada Binational Public Advisory Council and the state of Michigan — expressed a preference for sediment removal instead of waiting for natural recovery. Removing the sediment will improve environmental conditions in St. Marys River.

### **The Great Lakes Legacy Act**

Although discharges of toxic substances into the Great Lakes have been reduced over the last 20 years, high concentrations of pollution remain in the bottom of some rivers and harbors. That poses a potential risk to people and wildlife. As a result, states have issued advisories in most locations around the Great Lakes against eating locally caught fish.

The tributaries and harbors identified as having pollution problems are known as "areas of concern," or AOCs. There are 43 AOCs on the Great Lakes — 26 on the American side, 12 in Canada, and five shared between the two countries. Tannery Bay is part of the 69-mile long St. Marys River AOC, which connects lakes Superior and Huron through the Soo Locks. The Tannery Bay cleanup will remove the last known contaminated sediment area on the U.S. side of the St. Marys River AOC.

Congress passed and the President signed the Great Lakes Legacy Act of 2002 to address the problem of contaminated sediment in the American AOCs. The Legacy Act authorizes \$270 million in funding over five years for cleanups. Fiscal year 2004 was the first in which Legacy Act funds were available for projects, and Congress appropriated \$10 million. In FY2005 more than \$22 million was appropriated, and for the current fiscal year, Congress approved nearly \$30 million in funding. For Fiscal Year 2007 the President proposed \$50 million for the Great Lakes program. Legacy Act cleanups completed within the last two years are the Black Lagoon near Detroit, Hog Island Inlet/St. Louis River in Superior, Wis., and Ruddiman Creek in Muskegon, Mich. The Ashtabula River cleanup in Ashtabula, Ohio, is currently under way. Several other cleanup projects using Legacy Act funds have been proposed.