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## **Help decide the future of the Hudson**

For a couple of years, the hottest debate over the Hudson was, of course, whether to dredge the upper river.

This was page one stuff, complete with expensive propaganda films from polluter General Electric trying to sway the public – and pressure the Environmental Protection Agency -- against dredging the river bottom contaminated with PCBs.

There were overflow crowds at public hearings from Fort Edward to New York City, expressing themselves in the most adamant and passionate terms. Citizens groups, environmental activists, elected officials -- they all caught the fever that featured more heat and noise than light. You couldn't go to a diner along 200 miles of river and estuary and not get into an argument, or at least I couldn't.

But once the EPA came down with a pro-dredging decision and General Electric acknowledged that it was accepting that decision and moving on to the next phase, you'd have thought that debate had happened on another planet.

Interest in the health and future of the river, the supposed nub of the dredging debate, all but disappeared.

It's too bad we can't be as passionate about providing constructive suggestions to improve the Hudson as we were about opinionating.

The last of four public hearings for input into how the river was damaged by PCB contamination and how it ought to be restored will take place from 2 to 4 p.m. and from 7 to 9 p.m. Wednesday at the Fort Edward Municipal Office Building.

In attendance will be representatives from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and our own Department of Environmental Conservation.

These agencies, two federal and one state, are the trustees of the Hudson River acting on our behalf.

While the EPA's Superfund cleanup record of decision calling for the removal of 150,000 pounds of PCBs from 40 miles of upper river got all the attention, the shy sister of a duo act is the natural resource damage assessment. General Electric is supposed to foot most of the bill for both. There was a time when, we're told, GE was actually more concerned about a whopping NRDA fine than it was of the \$500 million or so cleanup cost.

But for vague reasons that might have something to do with national politics, it appears that instead of being forced to fork over hundreds of millions including penalties to the trustees, General Electric will fund a thick dictionary of projects and repairs, including making myriad habitat improvements, creating fish ladders, removing dams from feeder streams, building new boat launches, purchasing buffer lands and establishing public access all along the estuary and up through the contaminated part of the river.

Now's the time for all concerned citizens to put in their two cents on how the river can be made better.

Yet, apart from one recent and well-attended hearing in Albany, few have taken the opportunity.

Not that the trustees themselves won't be presenting a litany of repair work to General Electric, which is as it should be. But now is when ordinary citizens can make an enormous difference in what the river will look like and what services the river can be shaped to provide -- the shoreline of tomorrow.

Which is not to suggest that the anti-dredgers won't be heard from again and again sometime down the line.

There are a noisy, die-hard few from up north who feel they can still block what ought to be apparent by now is the right and proper course of action, a direction that even General Electric accepts.

Oddly enough these same die-hards are among those who will most benefit and profit from a cleaner, deeper, PCB-free Hudson. Go figure. Contact Fred LeBrun at 454-5453.