



U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

NEWS RELEASE

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EPA Proposes Adding Bear Creek Sediments Site to Superfund List

PHILADELPHIA (Sept. 8, 2021) – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed adding the Bear Creek Sediments site in Baltimore County, Maryland, today to the Superfund National Priorities List (NPL). The NPL is the list of hazardous waste sites in the United States eligible for remedial cleanup action financed under the federal Superfund program.

With this Superfund NPL update, the Biden-Harris Administration is demonstrating a commitment to updating the NPL twice a year. By pledging to add sites more regularly to the NPL, EPA is taking action to protect the health of communities across the country while cleaning up and returning blighted properties to safe and productive reuse in areas where environmental cleanup and jobs are needed most.

The Bear Creek Sediments site consists of a minimum of 60 acres of contaminated sediments in the waters of Bear Creek, near its confluence with the Patapsco River along the northwestern shore of the Sparrows Point peninsula, six miles southeast of downtown Baltimore.

Bear Creek is a tidal surface water body adjacent to the 3,100-acre Sparrows Point Peninsula, which was the site of steelmaking and shipbuilding industries. The Bethlehem Steel Corporation (BSC) was the primary owner and operator for much of the Sparrows Point operational history between 1887 and 2013.

More than 100 years of steelmaking left behind a legacy of contamination on both land and in the waters surrounding the Peninsula. Sediments in Bear Creek were contaminated primarily by the migration of hazardous substances from the steel making process and the effluent discharges from process wastewater and stormwater that discharged to Bear Creek.

“If finalized, this proposed listing will enable us to continue our work with our strong partnership with the state of Maryland, to investigate, and to clean up the contamination of the Bear Creek Sediments Site,” said **EPA Mid-Atlantic Acting Regional Administrator Diana Esher**. “We determined the site needs to be placed on the NPL because the Bear Creek sediments off-shore of Sparrows Point are contaminated with hazardous substances, and EPA resources are necessary to provide long-term cleanup at this time.”

People are exposed to contamination as they use the waters of Bear Creek for recreational activity and fishing/crabbing. The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) has issued a fish consumption advisory for 10 species of fish and the blue crab caught in the Patapsco River-Baltimore Harbor Watershed due to the presence of polychlorinated biphenyls or PCBs.

Land sources of contamination are being addressed by the current owner of the facility under MDE and EPA oversight through other cleanup programs and are not included as part of this site. The facility has undergone extensive removal of contamination and capping to ensure contaminants no longer have the potential to migrate into Bear Creek.

To date, there have been no cleanup activities associated with the offshore sediments in Bear Creek. On May 18, EPA received a letter of support for placing this site on the NPL from the state of Maryland.

When EPA proposes to add a site to the NPL, the Agency publishes the proposed rule in the Federal Register and notifies the community through the local media so interested members of the community can comment on the proposal.

There will be a 60-day comment period from September 9 – November 8, 2021, where the public can comment on the listing of the Bear Creek Sediments Site. EPA will consider those comments in the final decision to list the site on the NPL.

If, after the formal comment period, the site still qualifies for cleanup under Superfund, the Agency will publish a final rule in the Federal Register and Bear Creek Sediments will become a Superfund Site. EPA then conducts a more comprehensive investigation of the Superfund Site, called a Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study.

More information on the public comment process of listing sites can be found [here](#).

All comments received will be treated equally. Comments can be submitted one of two ways:

Online: <http://www.regulations.gov>
Search for “EPA-HQ-OLEM-2021-0458”

Mail: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
EPA Docket Center
Docket # EPA-HQ-OLEM-2021-0458
Mailcode 28221T
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20460

Background on the Superfund Program

Superfund, which Congress established in 1980, investigates and cleans up hazardous waste sites. The Superfund law directs EPA to update the NPL annually. Only sites added to the NPL are eligible to receive federal funding for long-term cleanup.

EPA adds sites to the NPL when contamination threatens human health and the environment. EPA deletes sites from the NPL once all response actions are complete and all cleanup goals have been achieved. EPA typically initiates Superfund involvement because states, tribes or citizens ask for EPA's help. EPA may also find contamination during its own investigations. For information about Superfund and the NPL: <http://www.epa.gov/superfund>

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