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Contaminated sites could soon be in the final phase of cleanup

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Mar 30, 2024

A proposed plan could be ready by summer to begin the final phases of cleaning up the contamination left in the ground, marsh and groundwater at the LCP Chemicals site just north of the Brunswick city limits.

That is about the same time the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency hopes to have fully completed the first major phase of remediation on another federal Superfund site in the Terry Creek outfall ditch, across U.S. 17 from the now defunct Pinova plant in Brunswick.

The EPA was in town Thursday for a community meeting to update the community on both projects. Both are moving slowly because there is a lot of work to do, and it needs to be done properly, said Angela Miller, community involvement coordinator for the EPA.

At LCP Chemicals, work on the area known as operable unit 1, or OU1, finished in December 2023, said Pam Scully, project manager for the EPA's Superfund Division. She said she received the final construction report on the project Thursday.

In all, the OU1 project dredged more than 30,000 cubic yards of soil over nearly 11 acres of marsh and creek bottom that was contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, mercury, lead, dioxins and cancer-causing polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons left behind by the companies that operated on the site.

More than 24,000 cubic yards of soil was then backfilled over the 11 acres and a thin layer of sand, 6-inches deep, was spread across the marsh to promote new spartina grass growth and wildlife habitat.

The thin sand layer is already successful, Scully said. Fiddler crab populations have rebounded, which is a positive sign, and marsh grasses are growing, she said.

The next and final steps will be to focus on OU2, which is the site of the former production facility they call the cell buildings. Those buildings leaked a caustic brine laden with mercury and other chemicals that ate its way into the ground and formed a subterranean pool.

The OU3 portion of the project, the former plant grounds, is also complete.

Scully said the EPA hopes by summer to have an interim proposed plan for OU2 to first address the building site itself and the plume beneath it before setting its sights on the contamination that spread into the ground water around it. A public comment period will accompany the release of the proposed plan.

Long-term monitoring plans are in place for the project that will begin for OU1 in October, Scully said.

“The goal is to restore the area so that people can fish and wildlife can thrive,” she said.

Honeywell is shouldering most of the cost for the cleanup at the LCP Chemicals site. It merged with AlliedSignal in 1999 and the corporation is now known as Honeywell. AlliedSignal was the former owner of the site before selling it to the Hanlin Group in the 1970s. Hanlin Group eventually went bankrupt so AlliedSignal, which built the chlor-alkali plant, returned as one of the three principally responsible parties.

A Honeywell official said in 2023 that the company has spent more than $100 million on the project so far.

Georgia Power, which once operated a generating facility on the site, and ARCO, which had a refinery on the property more than 100 years ago, are also responsible parties and are funding smaller portions of the cleanup.

At the Terry Creek outfall site, which is on the east side of U.S. 17, across from the decommissioning Pinova plant, a new 850-foot long canal has been dug and final pieces of the project are nearing completion, said Scott Martin, remedial project manager for the Terry Creek project.

The canal is lined with articulated concrete blocks tied together to form a barrier between the water and the soil. The water flows under U.S. 17 through the canal and into Dupree and Terry creeks.

The soil in the 216-acre Terry Creek dredge spoil area and the original outfall ditch is contaminated with Toxaphene, a powerful pesticide produced by Hercules at the plant across the road for decades. A dredging removal action in 1999 and 2000 removed roughly 35,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment from the original outfall ditch and portions of Dupree and Terry creek.

Hercules, which operated the factory site where Pinova currently sits, is the responsible party for the cleanup.

In addition to building the new canal, the project, which is operable unit 1 for the project, includes cutting off the old canal and covering it with clean fill to contain Toxaphene-contaminated sediment from moving out of the area and downstream, Martin said.

The outfall canal replacement will not be the final work done at the Superfund alternative site. Still to come are OU2, which will address upland areas and hundreds of acres of marsh to the east of the canal site, and OU3, which will address the sediments in Dupree and Terry creeks.

“There is still work to do on Terry Creek. Work is getting done and it is getting cleaned up and we’re working toward our goal,” Miller said.

Martin said a five-year review of the construction and the progress is set for 2028.

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