

Onondaga Lake Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration

Onondaga Lake Superfund Site, Syracuse, New York

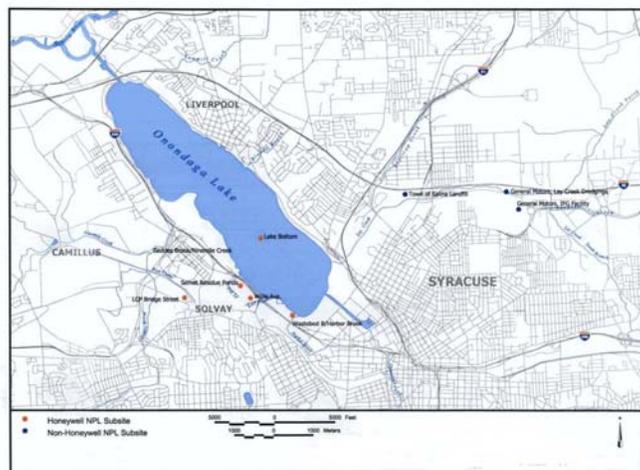
Latest News

[02/02/2009 Onondaga Lake Natural Resource Trustee Council Press Release](#)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) of the Department of the Interior (DOI), the Onondaga Nation (Nation), and the State of New York Department of Environmental Conservation (“DEC”) collectively, the “Trustees”, are preparing to assess damages to natural resources at the Onondaga Lake Superfund Site, that have resulted from releases of hazardous substances.

Onondaga Lake Superfund Site Background

The Onondaga Lake site is located in the City of Syracuse and in the Towns of Salina, Geddes, and Camillus, Onondaga County, New York. Onondaga Lake is approximately 4.5 miles long and averages 1 mile in width. Seven major tributaries flow into the lake; water exits the lake via a barge canal at its northwest end and flows into the Seneca River. The land immediately adjacent to the lake consists primarily of industrial properties and county parks. The site is composed of the lake itself, its tributaries and the upland hazardous waste sites which have contributed or are contributing contamination to the lake (sub-sites).



Onondaga Lake has been the recipient of industrial and municipal sewage discharges for over 100 years. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Onondaga Lake supported a thriving resort industry based upon the recreational utilization of the lake, including swimming and recreational fishing. The lake also had a plentiful cold-water fishery, which supported a commercial fishing industry until the late 1800s. However, from the late 1800s to the present, both industrial and municipal wastes have degraded the Lake.

Onondaga Lake was placed on the National Priorities List (NPL) on December 16, 1994, setting the stage for cleanup under Federal law. Several sites have been listed as "sub-sites" of the Onondaga Lake NPL site. In addition to the lake, sub-sites include Honeywell LCP Bridge Street, Honeywell Semet Residue Ponds, Honeywell Wastebed B/Harbor Brook, Honeywell Willis Avenue, the Town of Salina Landfill, General Motors - former Inland Fisher Guide facility, Ley Creek Deferred Media, the GM - Ley Creek Dredgings, and Geddes Brook/Nine Mile Creek.

Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR)



As a process, NRDAR is a complementary component to a hazardous waste site cleanup under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, also known as CERCLA or the Federal Superfund law. The purpose of a CERCLA cleanup is to stop a hazardous substance release from continuing to cause harm or risk to human health and the environment. Hazardous waste site cleanups under CERCLA are administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency or may be led by a state such as New York State for the Onondaga Lake Superfund Site.

The purpose of an NRDAR action under CERCLA is to compensate the public, or make the public whole, for the injury to the environment and the loss of use of the environment caused by the release of a hazardous substance before during and after the cleanup is completed.

NRDAR actions under CERCLA are administered by designated Federal and State agencies and Indian Nations acting on behalf of the public as natural resource trustees. In conjunction with a cleanup, an NRDAR action makes the public whole by requiring a responsible party to perform or pay for restoration projects that restore the injured natural resources and the uses and services they provide.

The assessment planning process represents the second phase of the NRDAR process. In the preassessment phase, which was the first phase of the NRDAR process, the DEC and the USFWS made the determination to proceed with a damage assessment for the site, concluding that based on a rapid review of readily available data, there is a reasonable probability of making a successful claim for damages.

Assessing NRDARs can be a large and complex undertaking. The Federal government has developed regulations which guide the process. The Trustees have been following the Federal Regulations for Natural Resource Damages Assessments (Title 43, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 11).

In September 1994, the DEC took the first step in the natural resources damages assessment process with the issuance of a preassessment screen determination for the Onondaga Lake Superfund Site on behalf of New York State. In September 2006, the FWS also formalized a preassessment screen determination for the Site on behalf of the Federal Government. Both preassessment screens were based on existing data concerning the impacts to natural resources by mercury and other contaminants. The preassessment screens document the Trustees' determination that conditions at the Site warrant a natural resource damage assessment.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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In November, 1996, the DEC initialized the second phase of the assessment process when it released the Onondaga Lake Natural Resource Damage Assessment Plan. The purpose of the assessment plan is to ensure that the trustees perform the assessment in a planned and systematic manner, using appropriate methodologies for evaluating and quantifying injuries to the Onondaga Lake Site's natural resources. The planning process will also allow the Trustees to determine whether the assessment can be conducted at a reasonable cost.

Following the formation of the Onondaga Lake Natural Resource Trustee Council, the Trustees are now at the next step, which is the continued development of the Onondaga Lake Assessment Plan through cooperation and coordination of assessment and restoration activities in furtherance of the Trustee's mutual goal of assessing injury and determining damages to natural resources, and planning and implementing restoration in consultation with the public.

NRDAR Related Documents:

[September 1994, DEC Preassessment Screen Determination](#) (542KB)

[September 2006, USFWS Preassessment Screen Determination](#) (1,021 KB)

NRDAR Related Links



U.S. Department of the Interior's Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program
<http://www.fws.gov/scripts/exit.cfm?link=http://restoration.doi.gov/index.html>

CERCLA Related Links



EPA Superfund Home Page

Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund Program Homepage
<http://www.fws.gov/scripts/exit.cfm?link=http://www.epa.gov/superfund/index.htm>



ONONDAGA LAKE (EPA ID: NYD986913580)
EPA Superfund Site Progress Profile
<http://www.fws.gov/scripts/exit.cfm?link=http://cfpub.epa.gov/supercpad/cursites/csitinfo.cfm?id=0203382>

Onondaga Lake Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration

CERCLA Related Links (continued)



Record of Decision: Onondaga Lake Subsite of Onondaga Lake Superfund Site
<http://www.fws.gov/scripts/exit.cfm?link=http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/34481.html>

Proposed Plan for Onondaga Lake Cleanup
<http://www.fws.gov/scripts/exit.cfm?link=http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8994.html>



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