



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – September 17, 2007
07-264

Ecology poised to issue final cleanup plan for the Whatcom Waterway Site

BELLINGHAM – The Department of Ecology (Ecology) anticipates issuing a final cleanup plan addressing historic contamination at the Whatcom Waterway Site in Bellingham. The final cleanup plan will not change substantively from the draft cleanup plan which was issued for public review and comment in July 2007.

The Whatcom Waterway Site cleanup plan calls for removing more than 500,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment and sludge, capping in areas where future activities are unlikely to disturb bottom sediments, and long-term monitoring to ensure the effectiveness of the cleanup action.

The cleanup plan is part of legal agreement, called a consent decree, among Ecology, the Port of Bellingham (Port), City of Bellingham, Washington Department of Natural Resources, and Meridian-Pacific, LLC. Ecology is preparing the Consent Decree for signature and has scheduled a signing ceremony for 10:30 a.m., Sept. 20, at the main Georgia-Pacific (GP) facility on Cornwall Avenue in Bellingham.

Jointly with the final Consent Decree, Ecology anticipates issuing the final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) for the Site cleanup as well as a Responsiveness Summary addressing public comments received on the draft Consent Decree.

Ecology's cleanup plan for the Whatcom Waterway Site stems from a comprehensive 10-year investigation and assessment under state cleanup law. The plan will protect human health and the environment given Port and City land use plans for transitioning Bellingham's waterfront from existing heavy industrial uses to mixed-uses. The Whatcom Waterway Site is one of 11 cleanup sites on the waterfront being coordinated through the multi-agency cooperative partnership of the Bellingham Bay Demonstration Pilot.

Cleaning up the Whatcom Waterway Site is estimated to cost more than \$44 million and take six years to complete. The Whatcom Waterway Site cleanup is a priority for the state and part of Governor Christine Gregoire's Puget Sound Initiative, a Sound-wide effort to reduce toxic pollution and protect the health of marine habitat.

The Whatcom Waterway's sediment pollution resulted in part from mercury discharges from GP's former chlor-alkali plant in the 1960's and '1970's.

In 2005, the Port acquired 137 acres of waterfront property from GP including property within the Whatcom Waterway site to develop a portion of the property into a marina and convert the property from industrial uses to mixed uses. In exchange for the property, the Port assumed responsibility for cleaning up the site and is leading the cleanup effort with oversight by Ecology.

The cleanup plan includes the removal of contaminated material from the Aerated Stabilization Basin (ASB), a wastewater treatment pond currently being used by GP but slated for development into a marina by the Port.

After the Consent Decree is signed, a draft Engineering Design Report will be developed and issued for public review. This report is expected to be released in late 2009 or early 2010 and will contain design details for the proposed caps and other cleanup elements including monitoring and contingency response actions.

###

Media contact: Shannon Sullivan, Regional Communication Manager, 360-715-5205
e-mail: ssul461@ecy.wa.gov

Ecology Web site: www.ecy.wa.gov
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/tcp/sites/whatcom/ww.htm>

Broadcast version

The Department of Ecology (Ecology) anticipates issuing a final cleanup plan addressing historic mercury contamination at the Whatcom Waterway Site in Bellingham.

The Whatcom Waterway site includes properties adjacent to the former location of the Georgia Pacific paper mill on Bellingham Bay.

The cleanup plan calls for removing more than 500,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment and sludge, capping in areas where future activities are unlikely to disturb bottom sediments, and long-term monitoring to ensure the effectiveness of the cleanup action.

The cleanup plan is part of legal agreement, called a consent decree, between Ecology, the Port of Bellingham, City of Bellingham, Washington Department of Natural Resources, and Meridian-Pacific, LLC.

Ecology is preparing the cleanup documents for signature and has scheduled a signing ceremony for 10:30 a.m., September 20th at the main Georgia Pacific facility on Cornwall Avenue in Bellingham.