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July 23, 2008

Robert W. Varney  
Regional Administrator  
EPA New England, Region 1  
One Congress Street, Suite 1100  
Boston, MA 02114-2023

I am writing in regard to the proposed Corrective Measures Study submitted by the General Electric Company to evaluate potential alternatives for the reclamation of PCB-contaminated areas along the Housatonic River.

As you are well aware, GE's proposals fall far short of the expectations of the public and several conservation and recreational groups, and for good reason. The cleanup study, I believe, offers potential solutions that are neither practical nor creative in terms of effective reclamation and long-term viability for one of Berkshire County's most scenic and environmentally important resources. I understand that the EPA had intended to seek major changes in the CMS, but is now delaying that process because of the widespread opposition to the plan that has developed. One of the major points of contention is GE's reliance upon invasive methods such as dredging and landfilling while ignoring developing or ongoing technologies that could treat the PCB's in place. After all the health concerns and controversy GE experienced over Hill 78 in Pittsfield, the placement of PCB landfills along the river seems ill-advised. The CMS literally falls short in that it eliminates the section of the river south of the Rising Pond - about two thirds of its entire length - except for "Monitored Natural Recovery," which to my knowledge means nothing other than watching the river clean itself.

I am writing today to express my strong support for those conservation organizations and river advocates who want to see GE consider newer, more innovative cleanup methods and to provide the public a larger role in the coming decisions on the CMS. I understand that the EPA meets or hears regularly with conservation groups, such as the Citizens Coordinating Council and the Housatonic Clean River Coalition. Membership of these groups is comprised of individuals and conservation organizations with the kind of expertise and advocacy needed to help coordinate a cleanup that will meet the high standards necessary in restoring the Housatonic River ecosystem to its former glory. I encourage the EPA to recognize the worth of these groups and to give them the attention their efforts deserve.

To ensure the integrity of the process, I also support the idea of designating the upper stretch of the Housatonic River as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern, which I understand will be formally proposed next month by such groups as the Massachusetts Audubon Society, the Berkshire League of Sportsmen, Berkshire

Natural Resources and Green Berkshires Inc. Such a designation by the Commonwealth would help instill the stewardship and environmental oversight necessary to ensure that the project is done right.

The dumping of PCB's into the Housatonic River was not made illegal until 1977, when evidence arose of its caustic and carcinogenic properties. In the years leading up to that point, there is no dispute that GE engaged in the routine practice of dumping a heavy, viscous and noxious insulating substance into the river. GE's explanation for its actions back then was that the dumping was not illegal. Despite its legality, the dumping was an act of disregard and indifference to a natural resource of great importance to the region. GE must face up to its responsibility for polluting our river with PCB's. And the way to accomplish that is to collaborate with environmental officials and river advocates to come up with an effective reclamation project. A fully fishable, swimmable river is the ideal that the cleanup should aspire to.

I would be greatly appreciative if you could respond to me at my Pittsfield address with any updates or thoughts you might have on the process of dealing with the proposed CMS. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



John W. Olver  
Member of Congress

JWO:rtd

CC: Susan Svirsky  
Rest of River Project Manager