

# Dredging Project On Upper Hudson Will Not Clear The Navigation Channel

by Carmella R. Mantello

While the update on the Upper Hudson Superfund dredging project in the January-February issue of Boating on the Hudson was useful in explaining the status of the environmental work, the update failed to address the ongoing need for navigational dredging of the waterway. This portion of the Hudson River is also a part of the Champlain Canal, a segment of the world renowned New York State Canal System that links the Hudson with Lake Champlain and Canada. The 524-mile Canal System links hundreds of communities rich in culture across upstate New York and provides countless recreational opportunities such as boating. Unfortunately, since General Electric's (GE) remedial project does not focus on navigation, it will ultimately provide limited improvement of the river for navigational purposes and thus hinder related economic development opportunities in the region.

Because of longstanding complications from the contamination by polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's),

the New York State Canal Corporation and Department of Transportation have been unable to maintain the canal's published depth for decades. This has limited the waterway's usefulness, particularly for commercial navigation by large tugs and barges. In its existing state, the waterway is too shallow in certain places for larger recreational vessels to operate as well. Given the increased cost associated with dredging and disposal of PCB contaminated sediments, it is likely that these navigational areas will remain un-dredged and continue to obstruct navigation of the Champlain Canal, a state constitutionally protected resource. When navigability is restricted, economic development suffers in canalside communities that have relied on the waterway for commerce for nearly 200 years.

## 2006 Damage Report

While the restoration of navigational access is not part of the current clean up being conducted by GE, it could be addressed through a different mechanism in the federal Superfund law, a Natural Resources Damage (NRD) Claim. This aspect of Superfund doesn't focus on the environmental cleanup but instead focuses on restoration and compensation for environmental damages suffered from previous contamination. Following years of studies, a report was issued in 2006 by the Hudson River NRD Trustees, a group representing the U.S. Department of the Interior, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The report declared that the surface waters and navigational channel of the Hudson River were injured by the presence of PCBs in the sediment (see <http://www.nyscanals.gov/news/index.html>).

Canal Corporation analysis indicates that the current GE remediation project will address less than 15% of the navigational dredging needs in the Champlain Canal. Absent a NRD settlement with GE, the remaining 85% of the required navigational dredging would presumably have to be conducted by the Canal Corporation at great cost.

## Economic Issues

Without completing all the necessary navigational dredging in the waterway, canal-related economic development in the surrounding upstate communities will continue to be hindered. As part of its remedial project, GE has constructed a facility that can process the dredged contaminated sediments. By conducting additional navigational dredging during the remedial project, GE can take advantage of this facility to process the extra sediments at minimal cost.

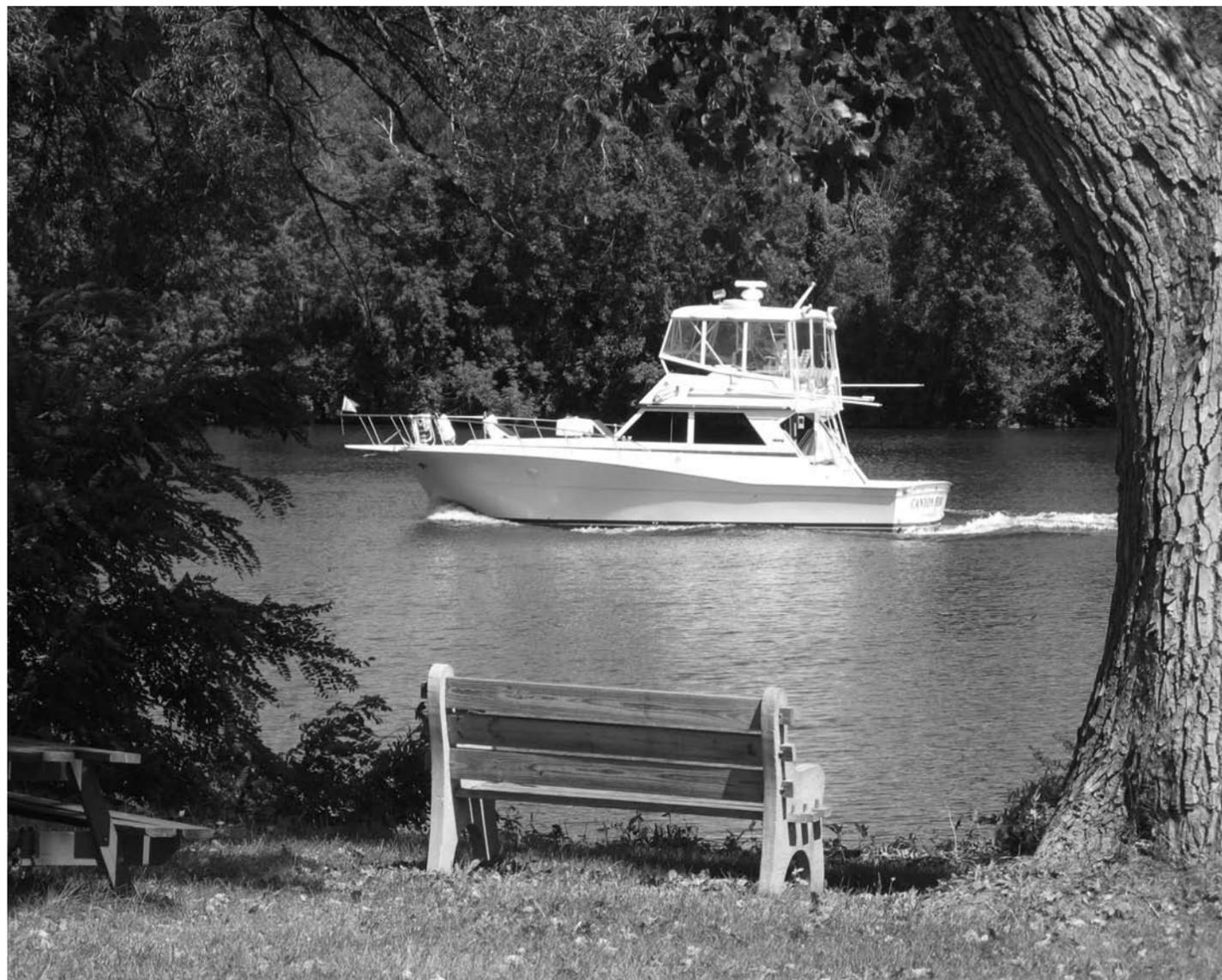
The future reuse of the GE processing facility is an important economic development issue for the region. Several competing ideas for the reuse of the property are already taking shape in the community, but without

navigational dredging being conducted by GE, the facility will be of limited use to commercial shipping due to the restrictions in the Canal channel.

One possible reuse of the facility is to continue its use as a sediment processing facility during navigation dredging after GE completes the remedial project. This alternative would unfortunately delay the economic reuse of the property for up to another ten years, further postponing possible future economic development for the region. Therefore, the best solution right now is for GE to conduct navigational dredging during the current remediation project.

While a comprehensive solution to the issue will likely await a final settlement with GE regarding the NRD claim, it is in the best interest of all parties that increased navigational dredging be incorporated into the project's Phase 2, scheduled to begin in 2011. Increased clearing of the channel will allow GE's tugs and barges to remove larger amounts of sediment and thus provide a more efficient operation in meeting the environmental goals of the cleanup. Not only will increased navigational dredging increase efficiency, it will also help the historic waterway and its surrounding communities realize their true economic potential.

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