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General Electric faces second damage suit

ROME, Ga. (AP) — Two north Georgia property-owners have filed a $500,000 federal damage suit against General Electric Co., contending that a chemical substance discharged into the Coosa River has hurt recreational income and sent land value plummeting.

General Electric as well as Monsanto Co. — which manufactures polychlorinated biphenyls — face a similar suit for a much larger amount — $500 million — filed by other Georgia and Alabama property-owners last month.

The suit filed Wednesday was brought by Lester Lindsey Jr. of Rome, operator of the Coosa Hunting and Fishing Lodge on the Coosa River, and Dr. Richard Jewell of Cedartown, owner of property on Alabama's Lake Weiss into which the Coosa flows.

The suit contends that General Electric "either willfully, wantonly, negligently or recklessly allowed PCBs to enter Lake Weiss and other waters."

General Electric has a plant near Rome that uses PCBs in manufacturing electric transformers.

State officials have closed the river to commercial fishing, saying the fish were contaminated with PCBs apparently discharged by the General Electric plant. Fishing is not restricted in Weiss Lake.

Similar restrictions have been put on fishing in Lake Hartwell on the Georgia-South Carolina border, and property owners there have filed a $1 billion damage suit against the Sangamo Electric Co. plant in Pickens, S.C., and Monsanto Co.

Health authorities say concentrations of PCBs in humans can cause skin eruptions, excessive eye discharges and possibly cancer.