Allied Paper, City Pondering What's In Store For Mill Ponds



By
Bob Novosad
Gazette Staff Writer

What does the future hold in store for the Allied Paper Co.'s Bryant Mill Ponds off Alcott Street?

Allied wants to lower the ponds, and stabilize PCB - rich bottom sediments with ground cover so the toxic chemical doesn't work its way into Portage Creek.

If Allied lowers the ponds, the City of Kalamazoo is interested in using the impoundment as a stormwater runoff basin to alleviate localized flooding.

That's where a conflict may arise. Department of Natural Resources officials are worried using the ponds as a retention basin could erode ground cover, and carry PCB - filled sediments right back into the creek.

Whatever happens to the ponds will depend on whether the DNR issues a permit. So far, Allied has applied for a permit, while the city is biding its time, waiting for the DNR to act on the firm's request.

Leon Cook, DNR hydrologic studies section chief, said the DNR is very agreeable to Allied's proposal, and will probably issue a permit "within a week."

Cook says the city's intentions are another matter. If the city seeks to make its plans a reality, he said, it would likely also need a permit, subject to extensive hydrologic testing of the impoundment.

"Key question will be how often would the impoundment be inundated," Cook said. "If that happens often, the ground cover would be eroded, and the sediments with the PCBs would be washed into the creek."

"That's exactly what Allied is trying to prevent by lowering the ponds," he said.

Sediments in the Bryant Mill Ponds hold large amounts of polychlorinated biphenyls, heat-resistant compounds that have been shown to be harmful to fish, wildlife and humans.

DNR water quality specialists have identified the Kalamazoo River as the state's most concentrated discharge source of PCB contamination into Lake Michigan.

Main source of PCBs in the river is from Portage Creek, the Bryant Mill Ponds, and the Kalamazoo Wastewater Treatment Plant, DNR tests have shown.

Sediments in the pond contain PCB levels up to 368 parts per million (ppm). In contrast, federally-set maximum level in fish intended for human consumption is 5 ppm. There is no federal yardstick for PCB levels in sediments.

PCBs in the ponds are byproducts of wastepaper recycling. Allied stopped deinking (recycling) wastepaper in 1971, so no PCBs have been added to the ponds since.

However, PCBs do not degrade when disposed of. They accumulate in bottom sediments for years.

Lowering the ponds and planting ground cover on bottom sediments should "lock in" the PCBs, explained Ernest J. Gilman, Allied vice president for manufacturing.

"The ponds are actually part of Portage Creek. We want to release the water gradually until it's level with the creek channel," Gilman said.

If granted a permit, Gilman said Allied would alter the discharge capacity of the Alcott Street dam to be sure the ponds won't reflood during periods of high water.

Chester Harvey, DNR district basin engineer, said lowering the impoundment would improve water quality in Portage Creek.

"Oxygen demand on the water would be greatly reduced, and that can only make the creek cleaner," he said.

Harvey said when the ponds are initially lowered, large amounts of PCBs would likely be washed into Portage Creek. After that, ground cover would hold PCBs in place.

"Unless, of course, the pond was subject to more flooding which would ruin the plantings and maybe even wash away more sediments," he said.

Don Swets, city public works director, said he would like to see the Alcott Street dam remain if the ponds are lowered. He called it a safety valve.

"It could work as a controlled discharge opening. Normal flow would go through, but when there is high runoff, extra water could back-up into the pond and be discharged at a slower rate to avoid flooding," he said.

Inundation would take hours, not days, to drain into the creek, Swets said. Most often only a portion of the ponds would fill in, he said.

"Maybe once a year during severe runoff would the entire thing be filled," Swets said.

At the moment, Swets said the city has asked Allied to consider the alternative use of the ponds.

If Allied agrees, then the city may be faced with the chore of convincing the DNR that flooding wouldn't dislodge PCBs locked in bottom sediments.

KALAMAZOO GAZETTE
KALAMAZOO, MICH.
D. 58,090 SUN. 70,100

FEB 29 1976

MONS 033129