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OUR VIEW

Investments in Eighteenmile Creek are most welcomed

Two good-news developments in as many months reveal light at the end of the tunnel for advocates of an Eighteenmile Creek cleanup.

In mid December, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced that a share of funding from the \$1 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that's earmarked for cleanup of U.S. Superfund sites will be invested in the portion of the Eighteenmile Creek Corridor Site that's in the city of Lockport. Alongside creek channel cleaning, the land on more than two dozen commercial / industrial and residential properties along or near the creek will get a good scrubbing.

Then, last week, the EPA and President Joe Biden confirmed \$1 billion from the IIJA will be directed to clean-up of 25 Great Lakes Areas of Concern. On that list is the Eighteenmile Creek Area of Concern, the 11-mile stretch of creek from Olcott south to Harwood Street in the city. According to EPA, this cleanup work should be completed by 2030.

After years of inaction, and then years of drifting slowly in the bureaucratic pipeline, it seems as though a legacy pollution problem in eastern Niagara County will finally be rem-

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edied. This will be very good for the fish, wildlife, flora and fauna that have been harmed by toxic wastes in the creek sediment, and the creek's recovery will in turn be good for Lockport, Newfane and the county.

Great Lakes Areas of Concern are places where contamination of a tributary flowing into a lake is severe enough to impair aquatic life and thus damage the ecosystem. The three-quarter-mile stretch of Eighteenmile Creek at the mouth of Lake Ontario was identified as an area of concern back in 1987, along with 30 others in the United States, and it grew as the sources of pollution — PCBs, mercury, dioxins, heavy metals and pesticides including DDT — were located upstream. In the creek bed, those pollutants don't pose an immediate threat to people, but they're suspected of harming fish and wildlife over the long term, and, by extension, harming the local economy.

Eighteenmile Creek is a sportfishing hot spot, to be sure. Imagine how much hotter it could be without the "toxic" label that's been stuck on it the past few decades. Imagine the eco-tourism opportunities that could arise from its health being restored.

It is much to the credit of the Great Lakes delegation in Congress that listed areas of concern are finally, definitively, being addressed. Protecting the lakes may be one of the few policy goals that transcends partisanship anymore. Republicans in lake states stepped up to protect funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative early on in the Trump Administration. Thanks to the initiative, which has received nearly \$4 billion since 2010, EPA was able to remediate and delist six of 31 original areas of concern. Now, the Biden Administration sees the merit in directing infrastructure dollars to remediating the rest sooner than someday. The Great Lakes are critical infrastructure, providing drinking water for 40 million people and underpinning the economy in eight midwestern and northeastern states including New York.

The day when the Eighteenmile Creek Corridor Site and the larger area of concern are finally off the "toxic" lists will be a good day for the locals, plants and animals included.