

Episode 4: Undisturbed Sanctuary. Chemical Dump On-The-Hudson.

From the producers of Katrina: The Hurricane comes the local production of Sand Pit: Pretend it Stops Pollution. Yes, the US Army Corp of Engineers is right here on venerable Houghtaling Island between River Miles 130 and 135. The Army Corps, that principality in the Federal government which by history is a kingdom unreachable, ungovernable and ever able to do as it pleases over the landscape of America, is here in our midst building pits for toxin-laced sludge.

It is important to separate their very responsible and sober duty of keeping a shipping lane open from what the USACE decided to do with the sludge sucked off the river bottom. The fiction we are offered by “the Corps” is that the industrial toxins will stay in the sand forever and not wash out through the Corp’s system of drainage pipes, returning ultimately to the waters from which they were taken.

A currently expanding field of drainage pits on Houghtaling Island is what we get locally when a distant, bureaucratic engineering mentality is applied to our local reality. The fiction that chemical waste-infused sludge (“dredge spoils”) will stay in the sand pits is supposed to be reassuring. What is really going on is just more kicking the can of environmental responsibility down the road for the next generation to live with.

This responsibility-ducking rests also on the greater fiction that some industrial pollution is just the way life is and always will be. The message to everyone else is: live with it, go back to sleep and don’t ask where it all goes when major industries flush their toilets into the Hudson River.

What the US Army Corps of Engineers has built and is currently expanding on Houghtaling Island is an outhouse for industry.

Why does it matter, beyond being played for local fools?

Seven communities downriver take drinking water from the Hudson River.(5)

Despite years of environmental activism, eating fish from the river, drinking from it and swimming in it are still fear inducing for the public. The Hudson River is still not clean, safe or healthy and the average person in this area knows it.

Currently, more of the natural endowment of the Island is being bulldozed to make room for more sand pits. As for the Corps? Did someone do a cost benefit analysis and decide this was the cheapest way to get around the appearance of being in league with industrial pollution?

What to do?

1. Stop the Pits! Give the Island back to the people as park land expanding the Schodack Island State Park into a much greater asset for recreation and tourism, benefiting the local economy, communities and businesses.
2. Tax industrial pollution, heavily. Put financial pressure on industry to update and create production processes that are less dangerous to people and the environment. Polluting the Hudson River is cheap. Until it can be finally stopped, make it expensive.
3. Require industry to spend the money needed for on-site water treatment facilities to completely clean water used, until it is potable, before any discharge into the Hudson River and tributaries.
4. Make heavy industry process its toxic remainders on-site to ultimately stop all industrial pollution of the Hudson.

5. Firmly establish law, policy and regulation to support Zero Tolerance of industrial pollution of the Hudson River. Abolish the regulatory dodge of allowable minimums for toxic industrial chemicals. No more allowable minimums - Zero!

Bibliography:

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4. Houghtaling Island, Town of New Baltimore, Hudson River, NY. Federal Contract Opportunity, updated Sept. 12, 2019. Govtribe.com, Govtribe Inc.
5. Poughkeepsie Journal, "Communities that drink from the Hudson River Push for Further Water Protections". Amy Wu. Feb. 23, 2018.

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