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New Bedford cleanup projects get \$6.6m

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JUNE 18, 2012

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Six restoration projects in New Bedford Harbor and Buzzards Bay will share nearly \$6.6 million in settlement funds, the final allocation of \$20 million collected in the 1990s from companies responsible for releasing hazardous waste into the harbor decades ago.

Officials from the New Bedford Harbor Trustee Council plan to award the funding on Monday afternoon.

Rob Hancock, vice president of education and public engagement at the nonprofit Buzzards Bay Coalition, which is leading two of the projects sharing the funding, said a number of the projects are in the area that was the hardest hit by the polychlorinated biphenyls pollution.

“It’s a really great thing for the community,” he said. “And these projects are not just about ecological restoration, but also about access and community development.”

The coalition recently removed a group of industrial buildings from a former sawmill site in Acushnet and is using \$1.2 million of the funding to restore wetlands and riverbanks near the harbor. The project is expected to be completed in 2014, Hancock said. The organization will also use \$600,000 to buy and restore a 46.6-acre farm next to the sawmill property.

Other projects sharing in the settlement funds are: \$2.9 million for the Acushnet River upland riparian walkway project; \$100,000 for ecological restoration of Palmer's Island in New Bedford; \$1.3 million to help the restoration of a marsh in the Round Hill area in Dartmouth; and \$485,440 toward continued work on three Buzzards Bay islands to provide protection and restoration of common and roseate terns, bird species harmed by the contamination.

The funding distribution was approved a year ago, Hancock said.

From the 1940s to the 1970s, electrical parts manufacturers discharged wastes containing polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, and toxic metals into New Bedford Harbor. PCBs, considered probable human carcinogens, were federally banned in the mid-1970s.

In 1983, the harbor was declared one of the nation's most polluted locations. Hundreds of millions of dollars in public and private funds have gone toward cleanup efforts over the past two decades. But the removal of polluted sediment is said to be far from complete.

Since the late 1970s, state regulations have banned the consumption of fish and shellfish caught in certain areas of the harbor.

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