

The Duwamish Waterway is one of the most environmentally controversial areas within the city limits.
Photography by James Friel



Cleaning Up

By Craig Welch

For a century, we have straightened, poisoned, dug, soiled, filled and recontaminated the Duwamish River, the freshwater corridor that transformed Seattle into a major port city.

We buried old trucks and tossed in piles of oil-soaked tires. We dumped carcinogenic lubricants and coolants down drains and let solvents seep deep into its muddy bottom.

But this week — after 14 years of research and planning — the federal government unveiled a final \$342 million cleanup plan that officials insist should rid the beleaguered waterway of 90 percent of its pollution.

The full effort will take nearly two decades, with costs borne by Boeing, King County, and the city of Seattle and the Port of Seattle.

But Obama administration officials said the results will allow residents of South Park to safely eat more food from the river, while letting tugs and other businesses still work the Duwamish as an industrial waterway.

“I think we’re delivering a plan that is as aggressive a plan as can be done,” said Dennis McLarren, regional administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which oversees the Duwamish cleanup.

“This is a carefully thought through, technically sound approach that we believe will leave us with the cleanest possible river we can get,” he said.

The EPA will require 105 acres of river bottom to be dug up, removing nearly 1 million more cubic yards of polluted earth to landfills.