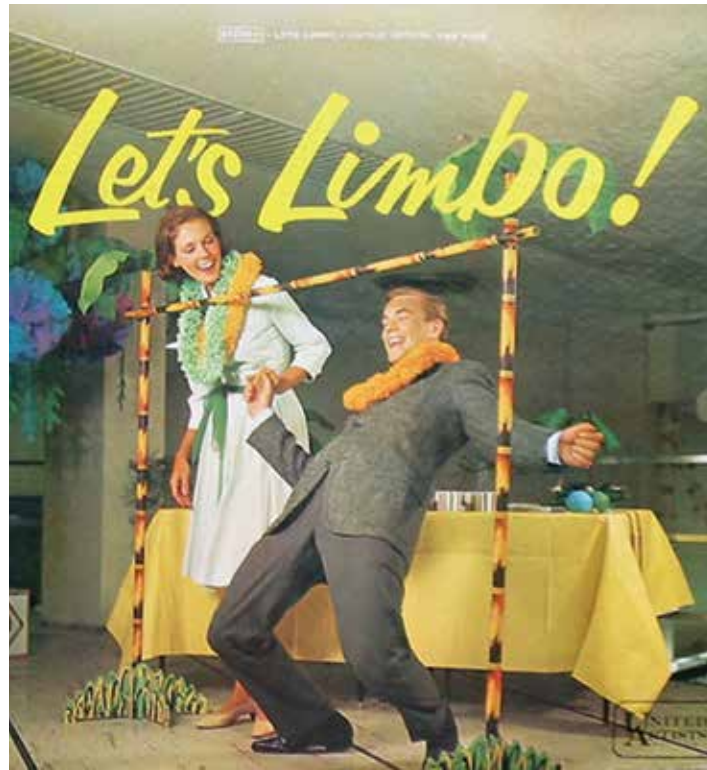


The Limbo Is A Great Dance, But Not In The Middle Of The Hudson River!!!



by Pete Bardunias
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A NYS Marine Highway tugboat on the Hudson River off Stillwater in 2016.



A white perch.
Photo courtesy of
Marylandbiodiversity.com

“Jack be nimble, Jack be quick....” Chubby Checker’s hit of the early 1960s may well describe the dance being conducted with the Hudson’s future hanging in the balance, but we may all end up in “limbo” for generations to come!

A bit of a limbo dance seemingly has developed regarding the current state of environmental cleanliness of the Hudson River, as various State and Federal agencies grapple for the solution to a problem that originated while Grandma was still alive, namely the cleanup of manufacturing deposits which were legally dumped into the river from upstate factories but the aftereffects of which have curtailed economic development along the upper River since the late 1970s.

Without getting into the details of the various factions and the government decrees that have gotten us to this point (follow the hyperlinks to read more about the positions of the EPA and various groups involved), suffice it to say that this “dance” has put us in a “limbo” of sorts, to use a different definition of the word. Simply put, we are stuck between the political answer and the scientific answer of whether the Hudson River is “clean”. If its clean, then we should be able to fully utilize it for both

recreational and commercial use. Build docks, bulkheads, boat and kayak launches, and even 21st Century environmentally-sustainable factories along its shores. If its not clean, then steps should be underway to make it sufficiently clean as soon as possible so the ideas above can be implemented. But where the EPA seems to have settled is on a “clean enough” standard, using measured levels of PCBs in various fish such as the ubiquitous white perch and a concept of “attenuation” that will help straighten the water out in about 50 years. 50 years??????

The problem with “clean enough” is that it really isn’t clean enough to do anything meaningful at all, except check off a few boxes on some bureaucrats’ to-do lists. Can the Village of Schuylerville clean out the storm drains adjacent to the waterfront ballfields at Fort Hardy Park so that potentially-contaminated water doesn’t keep backing up onto them? Can the main navigational channel be dredged to and maintained at the Constitutionally-mandated 12 feet versus the current controlling depth of about 9? Can a waterfront terminal be created in Halfmoon to support the proposed Area 3 project and bring jobs and major investment to the area?

To be fair, the representatives of the EPA are just doing their job and adhering to scientific principles and the letter of agreements made at the start of the PCB dredging project to measure their success. At a July 19 hearing at the Saratoga Hilton, EPA representatives presented evidence to support their assertion that measured results indicate the desired improvements have largely been achieved. Groups like Scenic Hudson and Riverkeeper have evidence to the contrary and have been very vocal about it. For example Althea Mullarkey of Scenic Hudson said, “the data does not support the claim that this remedy will



Scenic Hudson's Althea Mullarkey makes a point during the comment portion of the July 19 meeting.

be protective of the environment." Kevin Farrar from the NY State DEC concurred, stating his belief that "the levels of PCBs are too high." Whether these sentiments will prevail in modifying the EPA assessment is questionable – after all a deal is a deal and in the opinion of EPA Project Director Gary Klawinski, "we don't believe more dredging would significantly affect fish recovery time."

The real problem is that fish recovery time is a lousy measurement of whether or not the River is functioning as a fully utilized asset to our community. The problems on the Hudson are a function of a century of neglect – first using the River as a disposal pit and, quite frankly, a toilet, and then later ignoring the polluted River and riverfront sites in favor of other locales which

required less environmental review and remediation in order to provide economic value to the community. This despite the fact that the Canal system remains fully open and viable even with some constraints between Troy and Fort Edward. A more aggressive effort over the decades to keep industry thriving along its shores might have put more companies in the River Towns with vested interests in helping it live up to its full potential, and the resources to help make it so. Alas, this is not the case, so the ongoing saga of reaching far into the past to try and place blame, assess culpability and prescribe remedies continues. As Lee Jameson of Stuyvesant, NY said yesterday during the hearing, "a little bit of pollution may cause centuries of damage." This is a warning we all should heed.

We can't wait 50 years to have a fully-utilized Hudson River.




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We need to be able to do the same things on that river that we can do on the Mohawk. A harbor was dredged in months when it was decided that a marina and adjacent casino belonged in Schenectady despite any challenges emanating from its former use as a locomotive factory. Can we do something similar, perhaps, to put a bulkhead in for tugs and barges in northeastern Halfmoon, or help Schuylerville clean out its drainage culverts?

The only way to resolve this issue is to bring all stakeholders together to come up with an economically sustainable plan that doesn't scapegoat individual companies but brings all parties together to build partnerships, develop ideas, accumulate investment, clean the River, and construct waterfront facilities in a manner that may not completely satisfy everyone, but at least would be something everyone can live with. Otherwise, our communities' future will be in "limbo" for a long, long time.

This article first appeared in the Times Union blog July 2017.



THESE MAGNIFICENT EAGLES

On August 8th, 2017 I was standing on the very tip of Catskill Point at 8 AM. This is the very spot where Catskill Creek empties into the Hudson. Across from Catskill Point is a marsh, and behind that is a string of trees, some with dead branches. There high in the treetops were these two beautiful birds. They had to be a quarter mile away but my telephoto lens picked them out.

The tide was running out, with carp jumping all around the point and other schools of fish swirling in the fast ebbing waters. Pieces of plants floated by signifying the end of summer were fast approaching.

From Catskill north to Albany the Hudson River is alive with virility, eagles and other forms of wildlife. There are fresh water drum, walleye, and perhaps a hundred species of fish in the waters around Catskill Point.

Sad, so very sad, that the powers that be are still harping on the same old rhetoric of a dirty, dead Hudson River while all this is going on around us.

Is anyone ever going to wake up, smell the Rose's, and move on to the better world that surrounds us?