

Cleanup settlement reached for Plainwell paper mill site

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PLAINWELL—A settlement between Weyerhaeuser Co., the Justice Department and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is considered by city officials as a major step toward residential and commercial development at the site of the now-closed Plainwell Paper Co. in the heart of downtown.

"This is the best New Year's present the city could get," said Erik Wilson, Plainwell city administrator. "It's a great deal in the middle of EPA's cleanup and we've wanted to develop it for some time." Earlier this month, the EPA and Justice Department announced a settlement that will require Weyerhaeuser to clean up the



Erik Wilson

Plainwell Mill and the 12th Street Landfill in Plainwell. Both are parts of the Kalamazoo River Superfund site.

The settlement also will require Weyerhaeuser to reimburse the EPA for approximately \$180,000 in costs incurred in connection with the cleanup and landfill. Justice Department officials said.

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Federal officials have announced a settlement that requires Weyerhaeuser Co., which once operated Plainwell Paper Co., to pay more than \$5 million toward environmental cleanup.

Continued from A1

Paper mill contamination settlement reached

In addition to paying the EPA's past costs, Weyerhaeuser will pay \$2 million, which the EPA will use to fund the cleanup of polychlorinated biphenyl contamination in the Kalamazoo River adjacent to the sites. "This is a big step in the cleanup," said Shari Kolak, Kalamazoo River Superfund remedial project manager. "These negotiations have been under way for six to eight months."

Justice officials said the settlement requires Weyerhaeuser to withdraw its objections to a related settlement with Plainwell Inc., its corporate parent and several affiliated companies, which is now pending in bankruptcy court.

Implementation of the Plainwell settlement will make additional funds available for investigation of the site and cleanup. Wilson said he expects the bankruptcy proceedings to end fairly quickly and that the city will acquire title to the 35-acre site.

Yet to be determined, Wilson said, is the extent of the contamination on-site and the cleanup bill that Weyerhaeuser will pay. Weyerhaeuser is one of several companies responsible for PCB contamination in the Kalamazoo River Superfund site, which includes a landfill and an 80-mile stretch of the river from Saugatuck to about 10 miles east of Battle Creek. The EPA estimates there are

hundreds of thousands of pounds of PCBs in the soil and sediment, primarily from paper companies that produced and processed PCB-containing carbonless copy paper along the river from the 1950s to the 1970s. The settlement does not resolve Weyerhaeuser's liability for the cleanup of PCBs at any part of the Superfund site other than the mill and landfill, Justice officials said. Nor does it resolve Weyerhaeuser's liability for natural resource damages.

The settlement agreement was filed with the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan and is subject to a 15-day public comment period which began Monday.