

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 21, 2017

Administrator Scott Pruitt
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Pruitt:

We write to express our grave concern about a recent report in The Record that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has determined there are elevated levels of toxic and hazardous compounds in the Hackensack River. This report underscores the need for immediate action to protect the health of our waterway and the safety of our constituents. As a result, we urge the EPA to work with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to finalize review of the site so it can be determined if this site should be added to the Superfund National Priorities List, which is a critical step to determining the extent of and parties responsible for contaminating the Hackensack River and an appropriate cleanup plan can be developed.

According to the report, sediment samples collected by the EPA and DEP contained as many as 20 or more contaminants affecting 22 miles of the Hackensack River. These alarming samples confirm your agency's previous finding of elevated levels of cadmium, lead, mercury, dioxin and PCBs in the river. We are concerned about the high levels of contaminants that have been detected throughout the riverbed because they have been found in recreational areas. Additionally, we are uneasy that the EPA has spent \$40 million since 2008 to study mercury contamination in Berry's Creek, a six-mile tributary of the Hackensack that has among the highest levels of mercury ever recorded in a freshwater ecosystem in the United States, and we have yet to see a cleanup plan developed.

As you know, it is the EPA's responsibility to enforce federal clean water standards and protect residents from dangerous pollutants. Until this contaminated sediment is removed from the river, swimming will remain prohibited, and residents will be unable to enjoy eating fish and crabs from the river. In addition to the serious threat to public health that these contaminants pose, the Lower Hackensack River filters into the Meadowlands, a key spawning and nursery area for fish and an important habitat for numerous state-listed threatened and endangered species.

The Hackensack River is in desperate need of attention and plays a key role to our local economy and ecosystem. That is why we remain deeply concerned about the potential impact of the EPA's federal hiring freeze on environmental projects like the Hackensack River that are in urgent need of attention. We urge the EPA to dedicate resources to expedite the review of the river and determine the best plan to protect the health and safety of our constituents and recover this important river.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to working with you to protect the health and safety of our constituents.

Sincerely,



Josh Gottheimer
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Bill Pascrell, Jr.
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

CC: Bob Martin, Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection