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## Oregon, Toledo councilmen to offer dredging alternative

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A joint proposal to end the federal government's controversial practice of dumping dredged material into Lake Erie is to be unveiled in downtown Toledo at 6 p.m. Thursday.

The alternative is being offered by Sandy Bihn and Lindsey Webb, Oregon and Toledo council members, respectively, who have been working on the issue with a coalition of fishermen, boaters, and environmentalists.

Their pitch is to be announced at a news conference that precedes a scheduled Ohio Environmental Protection Agency event for the public that begins at 6:30 p.m. in One Government Center.

It calls for silt dredged from the shipping channel to be confined in a shoreline disposal facility in Oregon starting this summer, with an island to be built near the Toledo Lighthouse.

The island would have the dual purposes of being fish habitat and a repository for dredged lake sediment.

Since the 1980s, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has redeposited most of the silt it has dug from the Toledo shipping channel into Lake Erie's North Maumee Bay, one of the region's most productive fish nurseries.

Biologists long have said that turbidity caused by the resuspended sediment affects the fishery.

The Corps' position has been that the practice is safe because it transfers only sediment that meets U.S. EPA standards. The most polluted sediment is buried elsewhere.

The Corps is seeking authorization to dump three times as much silt as it did in 2009. Records show the Corps has been steadily dumping more into the open water despite promises to cut back.

Toledo is by far the Great Lakes region's most heavily dredged port because it is the shallowest. The dredging keeps the shipping channel from clogging.

In recent years, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has annually dumped about 600,000 cubic yards of silt into North Maumee Bay. That amount is about two-thirds of the 800,000 to 900,000 cubic yards dredged annually.

The Corps now wants permission to dredge as much as 2 million cubic yards annually from 2010 through 2012, with as much as 1.9 million cubic yards of it being dumped into the lake.

The Ohio EPA has extended the comment period through Feb. 22.

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