**Two sites dropped from list of Great Lakes hot spots**

By John Flesher, Associated Press

Two waterways in Michigan have been removed from a list of highly contaminated sites around the Great Lakes, progress in the effort to restore toxic hot spots left over from the region’s early manufacturing era, federal officials said Thursday.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said cleanup had been completed at Deer Lake in the Upper Peninsula and White Lake in Muskegon County. Both were among 43 “areas of concern” identified by the U.S. and Canada in 1987 that were fouled by industrial chemicals largely before modern anti-pollution laws took effect.

Most still need plenty of work, although the pace has picked up in recent years. Three U.S. sites have been dropped from the list since the Obama administration’s Great Lakes Restoration Initiative took effect in 2010. Three others are nearly completed.

Twenty-six of the originally listed areas are in the U.S., while 12 are in Canada and five straddle the border.

“These areas of concern have represented a lack of progress for several decades on cleaning up the Great Lakes,” EPA regional administrator Susan Hedman said. With the latest cleanups, she added, “we have turned a very sharp corner.”

The Deer Lake site in Marquette County includes the 1,000-acre lake and two streams, including the Carp River, which flows into Lake Superior. Mercury from an abandoned iron mine and other sources made fish unsafe to eat and harmed wildlife, including bald eagles. An $8 million federal grant paid for the last cleanup task: diverting a creek that had flowed through the underground mine and carried mercury to Deer Lake.

The White Lake site on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan was contaminated by tannery operations and chemical factories. The restoration initiative provided $4.6 million to clean tainted sediments and repair shorelines and degraded fish and wildlife habitat.

EPA officials said monitoring of both sites will continue.

So far, seven areas of concern have been given clean bills of health, four in the U.S. and three in Canada. Cleanup has been completed at three others — Waukegan Harbor in Illinois; Sheboygan Harbor in Wisconsin; and Ashtabula River near Lake Erie in Ohio — and will be dropped from the list after observations confirm ecological problems have been fixed, Hedman said.

A second phase of the Great Lakes program announced last month calls for accelerating cleanups of remaining U.S. sites. If Congress provides enough money, work could be finished on half of them in the next couple of years, Hedman said.

Sen. Debbie Stabenow, a Michigan Democrat, said she would push to continue funding the program, which has drawn $1.6 billion since 2010. The federal farm bill could be an additional source, she said.

“Cutting funding will only make projects more difficult and expensive,” said Todd Ambs, campaign director of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, which has lobbied for the program.