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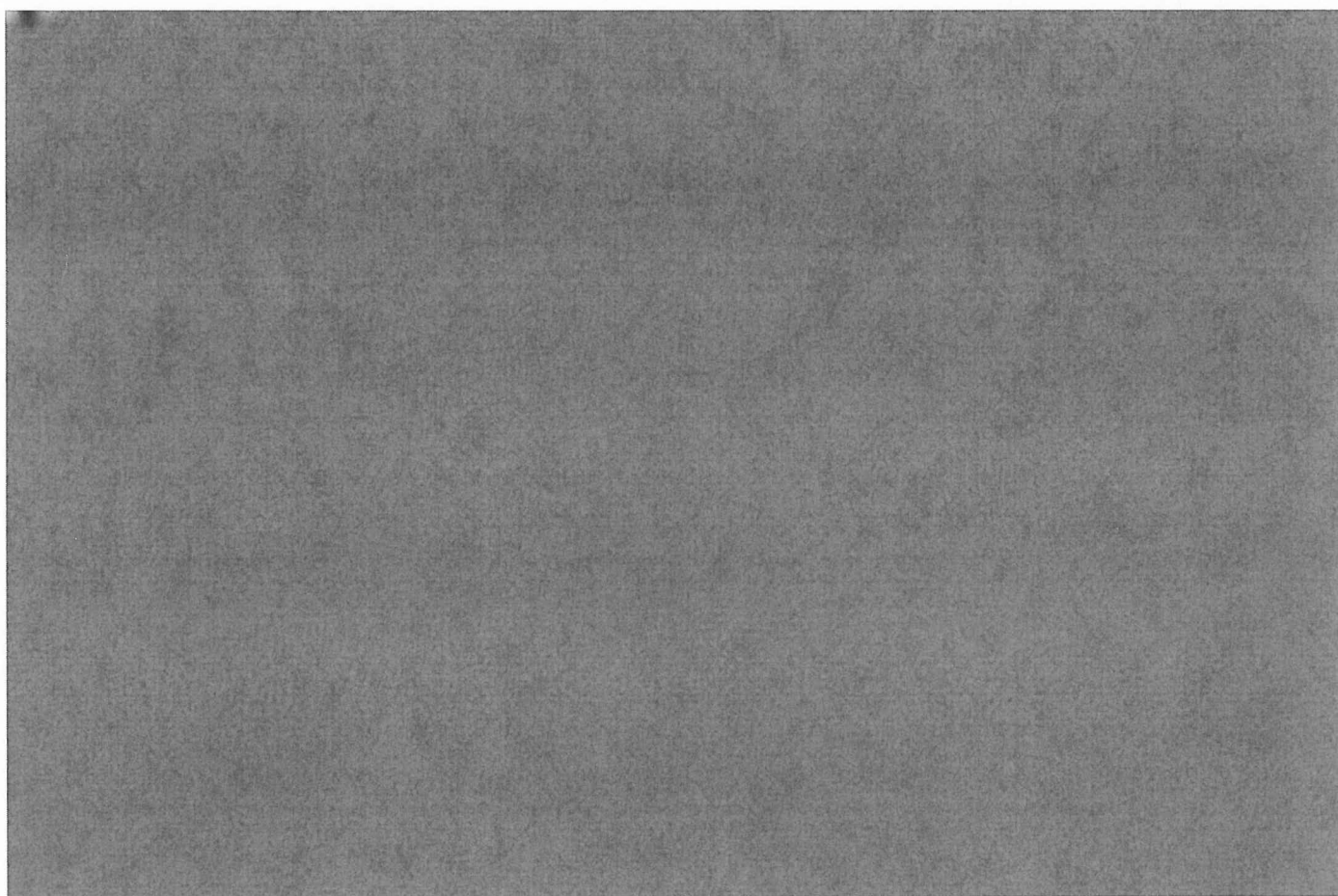
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Local Great Lakes 'areas of concern' to be cleaned up by 2030

Jerry Zremski

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Tyler Siegmann fishes in the lower Niagara River in Lewiston.

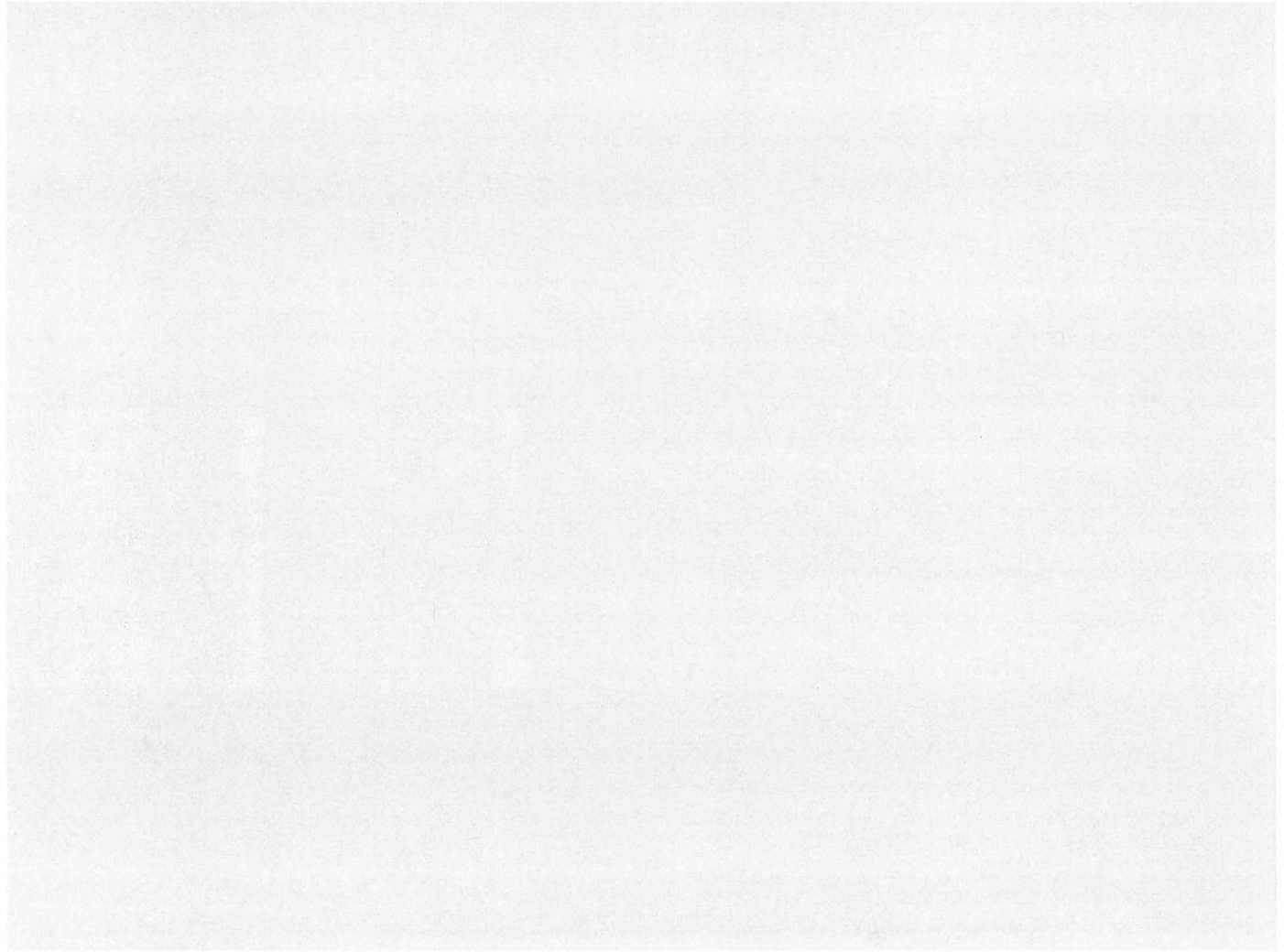
John Hickey / News file photo

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WASHINGTON – All three of the polluted waterways on the federal list of Great Lakes "areas of concern" – the Buffalo River, the Niagara River and Eighteen Mile Creek – are on target to be cleaned up by 2030, the Biden

administration was set to announce on Thursday.

Officials from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said in December that the Buffalo River would be removed from the list of polluted waterways by 2025, but the White House announcement for the first time sets a likely end date for the cleanups of the Niagara River and Eighteen Mile Creek.



EPA says Buffalo River soon may no longer be an 'area of concern'

"This is fantastic news," said Jill Spisiak Jedlicka, executive director of Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper. "This is exactly what these areas of concern need."

Rep. Brian Higgins, a Buffalo Democrat, agreed.

"This is a big statement, a big commitment to Buffalo," he said.

Times Beach to be restored with \$10 million in infrastructure funds

Thanks to \$1 billion in Great Lakes funding included in the \$1.1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill passed by Congress last year, 22 of the remaining 25 areas of concern around the Great Lakes are set to be cleaned up within eight years. That will leave only three sites on that list: the St. Lawrence River in New York and the Kalamazoo and Saginaw rivers in Michigan, EPA officials said.

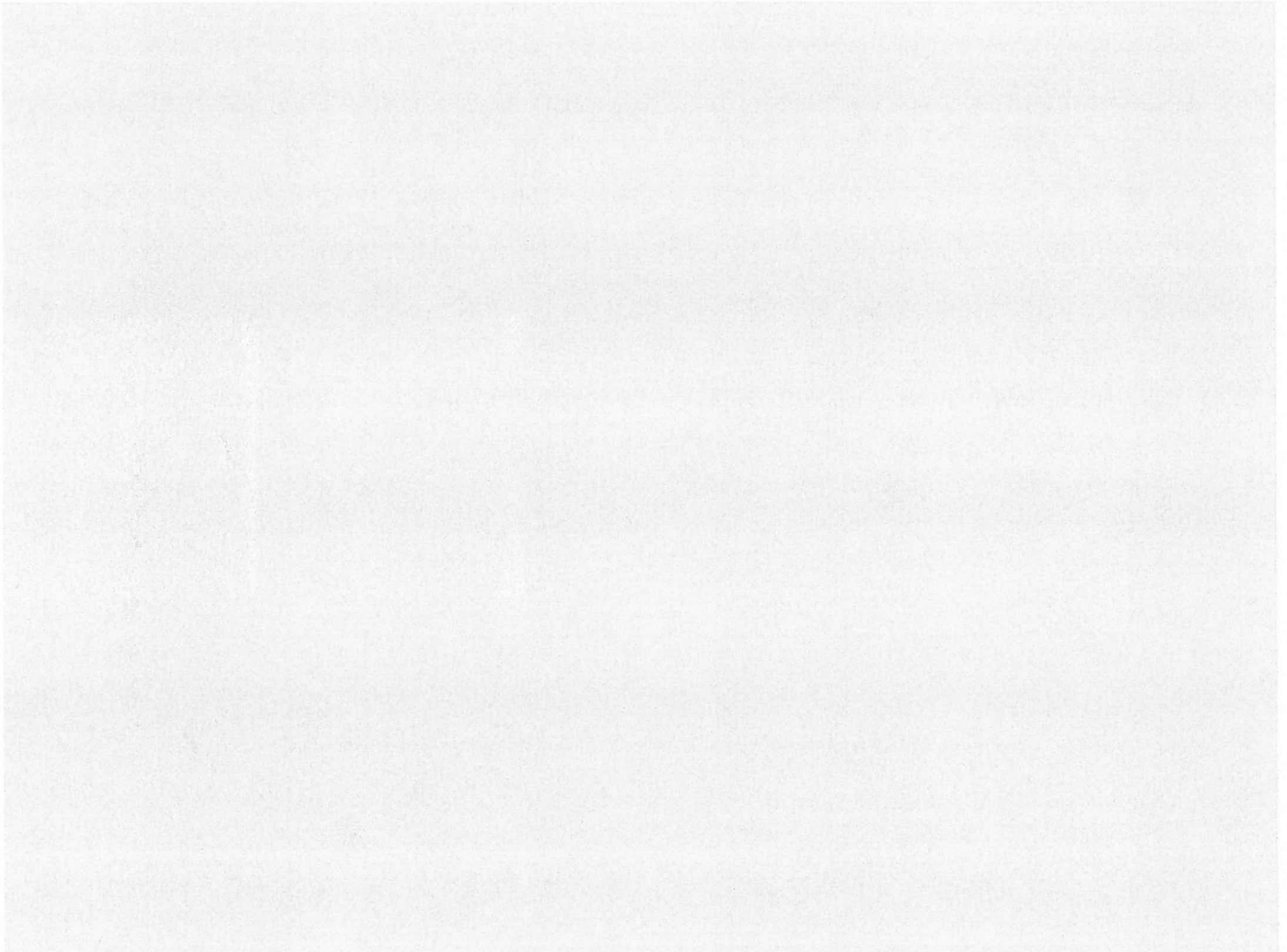
Officials did not offer a specific cost breakdown or details about the cleanup efforts of each individual waterway, but said the efforts will involve the removal of vast amounts of contaminated sediments.

Removing that toxic muck from the bottom of waterways will open them to the sort of recreational opportunities that have sprouted in recent years along the Buffalo River, where nearly \$100 million in federal money has already been spent to revive a

waterway that was declared dead in 1967 and that caught on fire a year later.

With most environmental work done at the Buffalo River, EPA planners are moving on to a similar cleanup in the Niagara River – which, they acknowledged, will be daunting.

"Niagara is one where we're going to have some significant sediment work to do," said an EPA official who asked not to be identified by name.



How the infrastructure bill could be spent on Buffalo Niagara waterways

That work is so significant that while the Niagara cleanup is set to be done by 2030, the site may not actually be removed from the list of Great Lakes areas of concern by that date, the EPA official said. That's because the EPA needs to allow time to pass between the end of a cleanup effort and the delisting in order to conduct environmental tests that can prove that an area has been cleaned up.

Jedlicka said EPA officials are trying to gauge the cost of the Niagara cleanup, which is no easy task.

"The Niagara River is a little bit more complex, and there's some areas that are a little bit more contaminated," she said, noting that it is not yet clear whether the contaminated sediment from the Niagara River will be disposed of or treated.

The contaminated sediment is part of metro Buffalo's industrial legacy. Generations of factories once lined the region's waterways and spilled untreated contaminants into them, leaving environmental officials later to clean up sludge laden with toxic chemicals and heavy metals.

The Eighteen Mile Creek site in Niagara County is also a complex area of concern: It is so polluted that it is included on EPA's Superfund list of hazardous waste sites. The EPA announced in December that it would use funds from the infrastructure bill to clean up the toxic lead and PCBs in the waterway, an investment that will result in its removal from both the Superfund list and the list of areas of concern.



'Water will define our future': How the Buffalo Blueway is connecting residents to the city's rivers

Similar projects are set to take place across the Great Lakes basin.

"Building a better America requires us to confront legacy pollution and clean up the environment – ensuring our kids drink clean water and creating good-paying jobs in the process," said Mitch Landrieu, the Biden administration infrastructure implementation coordinator. "We know that cleaning up these waterways and improving the health of the Great Lakes will also create great economic opportunities for communities across the eight-state region and beyond."

Jerry Zremski

Washington bureau chief