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Sports



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Tonight

Tuesday

Technology will suck muck from river

By JO ANN HUSTIS
Herald Writer

MARSEILLES — An experimental dredging operation on the Illinois River may be the wave of the future for silt-choked waterways.

Years of mud and sludge deposits will be scooped from the public boat launch bay at Illini State Park in an experiment using the Tornado Dredge Eddy Pump system developed by Roy F. Weston Inc., of Vernon Hills.

The pump works by sucking, deep, thick muck through the discharge pipes, much like drinking malted milk through a straw.

This is totally unlike the traditional clamshell dredging system wherein each scoop of muck scooped from the riverbed is up to 85 percent water.

The Tornado Dredge will be up and running by the end of the month, noted Weston Superintendent Donald Hutchins. Weston crewmen began assembling the pump in the water at the cove last Wednesday.

Estimated time for dredging the bay is a week to 10 days.

Because everything about the Eddy Pump system is so new, all times are estimated, Hutchins noted.

"With the little experience we've had with this new technology, it's hard to say how long the dredging will take," he said.

After the bay is dredged, Weston will move the Eddy Pump to the south side of Ballard's Island, just east of the park. Another 20,000 yards of muck will be removed from the river channel there, Hutchins said.

The \$250,000 cost of the Ballard's Island portion was appropriated by State Rep. Mary Kay O'Brien, D-Coal City, two years ago, and

carried over in the state's budget to this year. The Illini Park area is a part of O'Brien's 75th Illinois District.

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources is funding the \$15,000 cost at the public boat ramp, and is sponsoring both projects.

"I am very pleased that we were able to fund this worthwhile project," O'Brien said.

"For nearly 30 years, the debris and overgrowth that filled the Ballard's Island portion of the Illinois River was totally ignored by the state. Now, we are able to finally give this area the attention it deserves."

The newest type of technology known, the Eddy Pump is a lot more efficient than the traditional clamshell dredge that scoops up to 85 percent water in each load, and cannot get into tight places, said Hutchins.

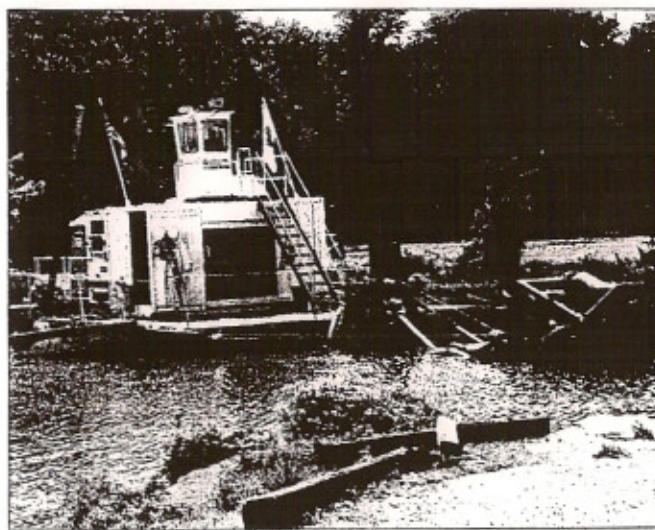
The Eddy Pump uses submerged pumps to suck bottom sediment through 10-inch hoses, pumping the mixture to installations on shore or floating barges for reprocessing.

At Illini Park, a holding area with six-foot earthen berms was created this spring to contain the sludge. The sludge will remain there to dry out to its earthen state again. It will then be used in various DNR projects.

The sludge from the Ballard's Island project will be similarly stored on a field on the Ralph Coyle farm south of the island on the Illinois River. The DNR constructed the earthen berms around that field a year ago.

The sludge will dry in the field about two years, then be used for topsoil and similar purposes. Testing showed the sludge is free of harmful contaminants, the DNR said.

The Eddy Pump system works by creating a vacuum. Hutchins did not want to get into the



The innovative Tornado Dredge Eddy Pump system manufactured by Roy F. Weston Inc. is being assembled in a bay at Illini State Park in Marseilles. The bay dredging will mark the first application of the new system in Illinois and the nation. (Herald Photo/Jo Ann Hustis)

logistics because of potential competition.

He said the system is being applied to a waterway for the first time in Illinois and the nation.

"This is both test and application - the best way to do it," he said.

"If you're going to test it, you might as well make use of it also."

Some controlled tests on a smaller basis were undertaken in other states. The DNR project is

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Technology

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the first large-scale test and application of the Eddy Pump system, he said.

Hutchins estimated the Ballard's Island project at about 28 days.

"The first day of dredging will tell us how long it will take," he said.

John C. Marlin, head of the DNR's waste management and research center, said earlier the Eddy Pump would change the way silt and other materials are removed from river and lake basins, and make wholesale dredging cost-effective for recreational and environmental purposes.

Silt has been building up for years just below the surface of the river, Marlin said.

More than 67,000 acres of Illinois River backwaters that once were six to seven feet in depth — including that at Marseilles — now average 18 inches in depth, he noted.

Unless corrective actions are taken, in another 10 to 20 years, many thousands of acres of this land will emerge above the surface of the water as shallow mudflats, covered with willow trees, Marlin said.