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When the Government Owns the Environment, Part 2

by Scott McPherson

On December 19, 2002, I wrote about the Army Corps of Engineers' practice of dumping toxic sludge into the Potomac River, in violation of the Endangered Species and Clean Water Act (www.fff.org/comment/com0212j.asp). I pointed out that this practice had been going on for *decades* before the Environmental Protection Agency decided to review the terms of the Corps's dumping permit. At that time I asked, "Can the government be trusted to protect its possessions?"

Now, three months later, it's fair to ask that question again. Speaking to this very topic, the March 18 issue of the *Washington Times* reports that the Corps of Engineers still "doesn't have to comply fully with [new dumping] rules *for nearly seven years*" (emphasis added).

So after more than 20 years of dumping pollution into its own river, the federal government has given itself a further 7 years to clean up its own act.

Worse, one of the Corps's critics, Rep. George Radanovich (R-Calif.), pointed out a devil in the details. Apparently the new EPA guidelines — which, I must repeat, the Corps does not have to implement for almost another entire *decade* — will allow the Corps to continue to use its "best professional judgment" in determining how much sludge it will continue to dump. "That's alarming given the fact that, for decades, the 'best professional judgment' at the Corps and EPA has been that sludge is good for fish, and dumping million of pounds of it into a river every year is fine, too," the congressman said.

Still, the EPA can, with a straight face, issue a statement claiming that "with this new permit, EPA has demonstrated its continued commitment to the environmental protection of the waterways."

Did I mention that one of the Corps's favorite dumping spots includes a spawning ground for an endangered species? Only government can get away with such crass deception and dishonesty, prompting me to ask once again, tongue placed firmly in cheek, "Who but a hopeless cynic could believe that the government is a poor steward of the environment?"

Business as usual, indeed.

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