

Consider carefully

The author of this editorial comes from a place far from Alaska and far from Ketchikan.

The place is a land of lush valleys and friendly people, the kind of place that one is comfortable calling home.

The place also is a land of streams that cannot be used for swimming and rivers with fish that cannot be eaten due to towns.

The place is the Fox River Valley in Wisconsin where the namesake for the valley has grown so polluted that the once thriving river cannot be used for swimming or fishing.

I grew up looking at the river and nearby Green Bay longingly wishing I could swim. My mother would tell me that she used to swim off the beaches on Green Bay as a little girl. But before I was born those beaches were shut down to such use. Too much pollution.

People in the Fox River Valley would make jokes about one of the towns in the valley — Kaukauna — because you could smell the town long before you ever saw the town. In fact, on a drive through the valley, my nose always told me when I would see the city limit sign.

In the summer, the scum from the paper plant run-off would coat the river around the mills until its yellow residue would be carried off by the current. And in the winter, the ice would be yellow as if rotten from the scum.

The vision of obviously poor folks from the large urban areas of Milwaukee and Chicago sticks in my mind. They would line the banks of the Fox River as it snaked through one of the southernmost towns in the valley, fishing for the carp that no one else in the valley would eat. Few other fish survived there.

The problem for the Fox River was created by the industry that used the river as a massive disposal system — paper pulp mills. The mills were the financial base for the valley and provided jobs for generations of valley residents.

They also created the pollution.

I learned this year that there is hope for Green Bay. That in two or three *decades* the Bay may be clean enough to swim. The cleaner in this case was the imposition of Environmental Protection Standards which forced a cleaner paper processing method.

Which brings us to Ketchikan.

Last week, the Environmental Protection Agency held hearings on the requests of two paper processing mills in Ketchikan to ease EPA standards in order to operate the mills more economically. Many people of Ketchikan wanted those easements. The Governor of Alaska wanted the easements.

Their prime reason was the economy and jobs. Ketchikan needs an industrial economic shot in the arm and these mills would provide such a shot if EPA eases up, they said.

This is a very difficult situation to decide. People need jobs to earn the money to eat. They undoubtedly need jobs.

But we would urge Ketchikan and the state to consider what they are asking. In the short run, such jobs are a boon.

In the long run, in the time that our children and grandchildren will live, such a boon may become a poisonous cancer on the land.

Alaska has the advantage of being a virgin land which can establish rules and regulations by using the lessons taught us in other virgin lands in the Lower 48.

The Fox River Valley can teach us much. Consider carefully.

— L.L.-J.