

**GRATIOT COUNTY**

# Pine River group hopes for lift on EPA grant freeze

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To say Jane Keon is passionate about the environment would be an understatement.

Keon, chairwoman of the Pine River Superfund Task Force, lives on the river and has long championed clean-up efforts after the waterway was contaminated with chemicals and radioactive waste by a now-defunct DDT manufacturer in St. Louis.

Keon was fraught with worry when she learned about President Donald Trump's order that the United States Environmental Protection Agency freeze all of its grants and contracts.

"When I heard about the freeze on the grants and contracts, I worried it might have an impact on our Superfund sites in St. Louis," Keon said. "Plus I was receiving anxious emails from some of our task force members."

To allay her fear and assure others that the Trump administration's move would not affect the Pine River clean-up, Keon contacted the EPA manager in Chicago who heads up the Pine River clean-up efforts.

"He assured me that this was not an unusual occurrence for a new administration, and that it wouldn't last long," Keon said. "Now the news stories are saying the same thing."

Keon listened to roughly two hours of Trump EPA administrator pick Scott Pruitt's confirmation hearing, and said her ears perked up when she heard him responding to a senator who was concerned about a 200-page regulation for small fishermen in Alaska, and in his response he said there are 1300 CERCLA (Superfund) sites in the country that need to be cleaned up.

"Actually, I feel more hopeful

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PHOTO COURTESY OF SCOTT PRATT

Pine River Superfund Task Force Chair Jane Keon stands next to a tombstone, warning passersby of the contamination.

## EPA

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now that EPA will start the flow of money for our sites since the new administrator sees the Superfund sites as a priority," she said. "Despite the expectation that Democrats care more about the environment, in the last 19 years we have received more money for our cleanups when the Republicans have held the presidency.

"Maybe strange, but true."

Doug Ericksen, the Trump transition team's communications lead for EPA, indicated the grants review should have been completed last week, Keon said.

"Ericksen said several sources of funds have not been paused — including revolving fund accounts to states, tribes and other entities for capital construction

and wastewater treatment — as well as for Brownfield and Superfund cleanup projects," she said.

Karl Brooks, who led the EPA Office of Administration and Resources Management under former President Barack Obama, said it's not unusual for a new president to want to get an overview of what agencies are doing and "to put in place a brief pause to survey the landscape," Keon said.

Keon, who is also a member of the Healthy Pine River group, has been part of the group of residents who became concerned about the river after the PBB disaster more than 40 years ago.

A flame retardant from the Velsicol Chemical Co. was mixed into animal feed, causing health problems in Michigan residents.

In fact, studies conducted by Emory University show that 60 percent of Michigan residents have very high levels of PBB in their bodies.