

NEWS

A&T licenses dredge patents to Illinois firm

By **MATT EVANS**

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GREENSBORO — N.C. A&T State University has licensed a series of patents covering a new kind of dredging system to a startup in Illinois.

That firm, Mud Hen Technologies, will seek to turn that design into a tool for removing the sediment from the bottoms of shallow rivers, reservoirs and lakes, according to Doug Speight, the director of A&T's Office of Technology Transfer.

If Mud Hen finds the market it expects, Speight said, the deal could be worth up to \$1.6 million per year in revenue to the

university after about three years, Speight said. He declined to detail the financial arrangements of the deal.

The new design is an improvement over traditional "clam shell" or hydraulic dredging because it uses a wheel system to skim off built-up sediment without mixing that sediment with water to make a slurry.

A&T engineers say the slurry from traditional dredging is mostly water, which must be transported to a place where the sediment can settle out. Returning the water afterward also has the potential for negative environmental impacts, the engineers say.

Joseph Monroe, dean of A&T's College of Engineering, said the system was not developed at A&T but rather an industrial partner, which then donated control of the technology to the university. Monroe declined to identify the partner.

"I don't know that this will be a revolutionary technology, but it's going to be very important on the margins," Monroe said. "It may not be necessary in all situations, but it is very important in shallow water, so it will certainly be a good product to work in that niche."

Mud Hen board member and former director of Illinois Department of Natural Resources Brent Manning said the company will need to line up additional financing or investors before it can start manufacturing the dredges and putting them to work. He expects that to happen, though, because the new system promises to reduce the cost of removing a cubic yard of sediment from as much as \$7 now to between 25 cents and \$1.25.

That would be a blessing to cash-strapped federal and municipal agencies,

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which are often paying for the dredging. Demand is especially high in areas where rivers and streams were clogged by the effects of Hurricane Katrina. Manning said the A&T technology has the potential not to just be profitable, but to provide a significant benefit to the environment.

"I'm an ecologist by trade, and I'm seeing the life choked out of our rivers and streams by the overburden of sediment," Manning said. "They once nurtured huge numbers of waterfowl and fish, but right now they're becoming biological deserts."

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