

Hazardous Waste Sites along the Columbia River, Yakama Nation's Work to Identify and Prioritize Sites

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Issue:

Yakama Nation Chairman Harry Smiskin said, "Fish advisories pass the burden of responsibility from industry and government to Tribes and people in the region. Rather than addressing the contamination, we are being told to reduce our reliance on the Columbia River's fish," "This is unacceptable. The focus should not be 'Do not eat'—it should be 'Clean up' the Columbia River."

Project: The Yakama Nation has implemented a project to identify, evaluate and rank contaminated sites impacting aquatic resources in the Columbia River. Yakama Nation's master database of sites includes 114,000 hazardous wastes sites within the Columbia River Basin drainage for the states of Washington and Oregon. Within a ½ mile of the Columbia River banks are 766 hazardous waste sites. All sites are screened using Yakama Nation-derived criteria for such things as contaminants of concern, habitat evaluation, proximity to environmentally sensitive areas, former and current site uses, and other agency ranking or scores. Using these criteria, a subset of sites on the Oregon State- and Washington State-sides of the Columbia River were extracted for further prioritization and in-depth research. These priority sites are targeted to ensure cleanup decisions afford adequate protection to the environment and tribal health. This is accomplished by working with federal and state agencies to conduct site investigations that fully consider tribal specific risks posed by site contamination.

Goal: The goal is simple: protect and restore the Columbia River, its tributaries and its resources. The direct benefits of site remediation are the reduction of hazardous substances in the Columbia River, reduced risks to human health and the environment, and improvements to the habitat needed for sustaining a productive and diverse aquatic system.

Vision: The Yakama Nation envisions a clean and productive Columbia River that sustains the cultural practices of Yakama members and improves life for our neighbors and future generations.