Environmental Fact Sheet

EPA U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 10 February 2003

Update on Upper Columbia River Sediment Investigation

Late last year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) held several public meetings and asked for written comments on a draft report about pollution in the sediments in the Upper Columbia River. This fact sheet summarizes what we heard during the comment period, how EPA is using the input and what will happen next.

EPA Reviewing Comments and Finalizing Report

EPA would like to thank everyone who took the time to participate in the public comment period on the Upper Columbia River draft expanded site inspection report during November and December of last year. EPA received nearly 30 comment letters, and about 150 people attended the four public meetings. The input we received is very helpful in finalizing the report and in helping EPA managers understand the concerns of people in the affected communities.

EPA expects to finalize the report by the end of March 2003. The final report will be available on EPA's website and at several locations in the communities near the River (*see page 3 for addresses*).

Northport residents and members of the Colville Confederated Tribes at December 2002 public meeting about the results of Upper Columbia River Sediment testing.

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What We Heard – Summary of Written Comments

The following is a brief summary of the written comments EPA received on the draft expanded site inspection report.

The comment letters generally fell into two categories, those with specific comments on the contents of the draft report and those expressing general views about future work or Superfund listing.

About half of the comment letters contained specific comments on the contents of the draft report. Most of these comments were requests for corrections, text changes, and suggestions for including additional information. Examples of suggestions for additional information were related to:

- the geography and geology of the upper Columbia River watershed
- plants and animals that could be affected
- potential sources of contamination
- defining background levels of metals
- the use of data with qualifiers.

Several of the individual letters, as well as a petition signed by 23 area residents, called for a more detailed investigation of the contamination. These letters requested a more thorough study of the type and extent of contamination and the possible risks to people's health and the environment. Some people also asked specifically for:

- testing of fish in the river to identify possible risks to people who eat the fish
- cleanup, protection and/or restoration of the river's ecology
- holding those responsible for the contamination accountable for cleanup.

One letter signed by three people expressed opposition to further investigation of the Upper Columbia River under the federal Superfund Program and any potential Superfund or National Priorities Listing of the Upper Columbia River.

What Else is Happening?

Over the next several weeks, EPA staff and managers will be meeting with the State of Washington, the Colville Confederated Tribes and the Spokane Tribe for official government-to-government consultation to discuss the results of the site inspection and to gather input on possible next steps.

Later this spring, the EPA's Regional Management Review Team will meet to consider the findings of the site inspection as well as the input from government consultations, the public and other interested parties. The goal of the Management Review Team meeting is to reach a recommendation on appropriate next steps for the Upper Columbia River site.

Next steps could include listing the site on the National Priorities List or other site management options like deferring the site to the State of Washington or working outside the formal Superfund listing process.

Need More Information?

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Background

Elevated levels of contaminants in Upper Columbia River sediments have been documented over the years in past studies done by federal and state agencies. Some of the contaminants found during those studies are heavy metals such as cadmium, copper, lead, mercury and zinc, as well as other contaminants like dioxins and furans.

In August 1999, the Colville Confederated Tribes petitioned EPA to conduct an assessment at the Upper Columbia River. The petition expressed concerns about risks to people's health and to the health of the environment from contamination in the river. In December 2000, EPA completed a preliminary assessment of the Upper Columbia River and determined that a sampling investigation was necessary.

In mid-2001, EPA collected samples from the Upper Columbia River to learn more about the types and amounts of pollution in the sediments. The results of the sampling were released in November 2002 in a draft Site Inspection Report. Sampling results suggest that further investigation of contamination in the Upper Columbia River is warranted. EPA asked for written comments on the report. EPA is now finalizing the report and will recommend a course of action later this spring.

For More Information

EPA wants to make sure that you have access to useful information about the Upper Columbia River. Please contact Marianne Deppman to let us know how we can provide information that suits your needs.

The draft expanded site inspection report for the Upper Columbia River site, and other documents about the site are available for review at the following locations:

Northport: Northport Town Hall, 315 Summit St.

Colville: Colville Public Library, 195 S. Oak Street

Inchelium: Inchelium Tribal Resource Center, 12 Community Loop

Nespelem: Office of Environmental Trust, Colville Confederated Tribes, 1 Colville

Republic: Republic Library, 794 S. Clark Ave.

The documents are also available on the EPA Region 10 web site: http://www.epa.gov/r10earth/ Click on "Index," then "U," and then "Upper Columbia River Site."

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February, 2003

UPDATE ON EPA'S SEDIMENT INVESTIGATION