

ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 10

June 2004

EPA to Investigate Upper Columbia River Pollution

Study will take two to four years to complete

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is moving ahead with a study of hazardous waste contamination, called a *Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study* (RI/FS), in the Upper Columbia River from the U.S.-Canadian border to the Grand Coulee Dam. The goal of the study is to:

- Evaluate how much contamination exists and where it is located;
- Determine if people's health or the environment are at risk from the contamination;
- Determine if any cleanup is necessary.

We are committed to developing a study that both meets EPA's rigorous scientific standards and reflects the values and concerns of nearby communities.

Getting Started

Our first step is to develop a work plan for the study that describes how information will be collected and how that information will be used to evaluate potential cleanup options. This summer, EPA and its contractor, CH2M Hill, will develop the work plan and define overall objectives for the study. We expect to have a draft work plan available in August 2004. The first tasks will be to:

- Gather input from tribes, states, elected officials, environmental groups, local citizens and other interested parties;
- Compile existing data and reports and determine their quality and usability;
- Prepare a report summarizing the existing data;
- Develop a preliminary "conceptual site model" that will help us determine what contaminants (heavy metals, etc.) are a potential concern, who is being exposed to them, and how and where they are being exposed;
- Identify information gaps so we can target areas where further study is needed.

Involving the Community

We are committed to making sure local communities have access to useful information about this project. If you are on our mailing list, you will receive updates about the work we are doing and will learn about opportunities to talk with us in person at community meetings. Our staff members are also available to answer questions and discuss your concerns by phone or e-mail (see page 4).

During the next several months, our community involvement activities will focus on:

- Providing updates about the project by sending fact sheets to the mailing list;
- Talking with community representatives and writing a Community Involvement Plan to describe how we will share information with and involve people in the communities;
- Continuing to meet with groups that have already expressed interest in being involved in this project.

(continued)

Involving the Community *(continued)*

We have created seven Information Repositories across the project area to give you convenient access to information, including technical documents (for locations, see page 4).

In addition, many of these documents are available on the Internet. Visit our Web page at www.epa.gov/r10earth (click on Index A-Z, then U, then Upper Columbia River).

Background

Previous studies done by federal and state agencies have shown elevated levels of contamination in Upper Columbia River sediments. 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.

These contaminants can be harmful to people and the environment. Dioxins, furans, and mercury in fish tissue are harmful to people if swallowed, and heavy metals in river sediment are harmful to aquatic life. Some metals, such as lead and arsenic, may pose a risk to people who come into contact with sediments. Lead and mercury can effect brain development and the central nervous system. Dioxins, furans, and arsenic are known to cause cancer.

In August 1999, the Colville Confederated Tribes petitioned EPA to conduct an assessment of hazardous substance contamination at the Upper Columbia River. The petition expressed concerns about risks to people's health and the environment from contamination in the river.

In December 2000, EPA completed a preliminary assessment of the Upper Columbia River. In 2001, based on the preliminary assessment, EPA collected samples to learn more about the types and amounts of pollution in the sediments. The sample results suggest that further detailed investigation of contamination in the Upper Columbia River is warranted.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why did discussions with Teck Cominco end ?

EPA and Teck Cominco spent over a year negotiating an approach for investigating the Upper Columbia River. Teck Cominco was unwilling to comply with U.S. laws and standards in the study, and negotiations ended without

reaching an agreement. In December 2003, EPA issued a legal order to Teck Cominco to complete the study consistent with U.S. Superfund laws. Teck Cominco did not comply with the order. EPA has decided to move ahead with the study according to Superfund laws and requirements.

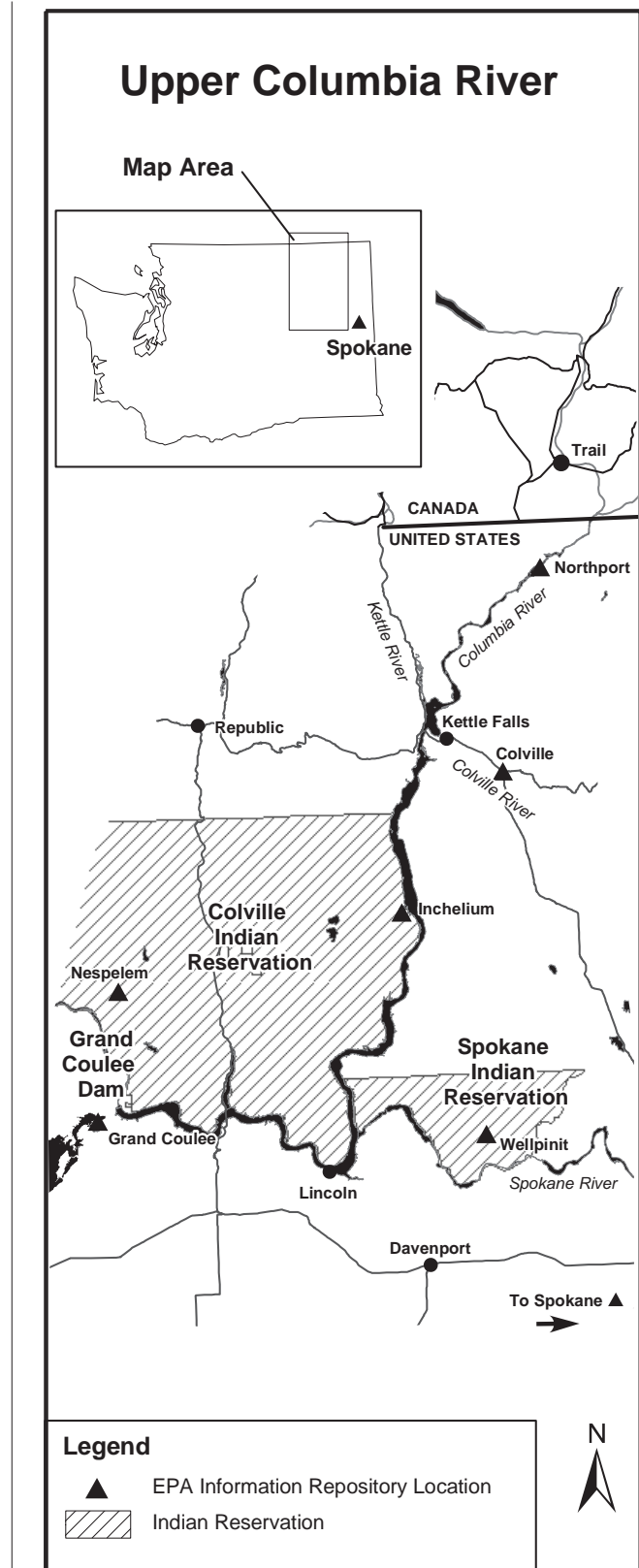
Frequently Asked Questions

Who will pay for the study?

EPA will use federal funds to pay for the study initially. However, we generally seek to recover our costs from polluters.

How does the Upper Columbia River project relate to work being done in Northport?

EPA’s work in Northport is called an “early action” cleanup and is part of the broader Upper Columbia River project. This work is focused on areas of soil contamination from historic smelter operations in and near Northport, Washington. EPA’s study of the Upper Columbia River is a comprehensive study of contamination in river sediments and nearby areas. Data gathered from the Northport project will be used by the team working on the larger Upper Columbia River investigation.



For More Information

CONTACT

Debby Neal

Community Involvement Coordinator
1-800-424-4372, extension 0115
neal.deborah@epa.gov

Charles Bert

Community Involvement Coordinator
360-753-8073
bert.charles@epa.gov

Cami Grandinetti

Project Manager
1-800-424-4372, extension 8696
grandinetti.cami@epa.gov

Information Repositories

For your convenience, information about this project will be available for review at the following locations by June 30, 2004. Please call ahead for business hours:

Northport: Northport Town Hall, 315 Summit St., (509) 732-4450

Colville: Colville Public Library, 195 S. Oak Street, (509) 684-6620

Inchelium: Inchelium Tribal Resource Center, 12 Community Loop, (509) 634-2791

Nespelem: Office of Environmental Trust, Colville Confederated Tribes, 1 Colville, (509) 634-2425

Grand Coulee: Grand Coulee Library, 225 Federal Street, (509) 633-0972

Wellpinit: Spokane Tribe Department of Natural Resources, 6290 B Ford-Wellpinit Road, (509) 258-9042

Spokane: Spokane Library, 906 W. Main, (509) 444-5334

Web Page

Information and technical documents are also available on the EPA Region 10 website at: <http://www.epa.gov/r10earth> (click on Index A-Z, then U, then Upper Columbia River).

Join EPA's mailing list for Upper Columbia River

If you would like to receive future fact sheets about EPA's Upper Columbia River project, please fill out this form and mail, email or fax it to EPA.

Mail to:

Deborah Neal
U.S. EPA Region 10, ECO-081
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98019

FAX: 206-553-2955

Email: neal.deborah@epa.gov



Name

Address

Are there topics you would like to hear about in future fact sheets?

Upper Columbia River Mail List



Alternative formats are available upon request by calling Deborah Neal at 1-800-424-4372, ext. 0115. TTY users: please call 1-800-877-8339.



United States Environmental Protection Agency

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EPA TO INVESTIGATE
UPPER COLUMBIA RIVER POLLUTION
JUNE 2004

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