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## PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 11, 2013

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### **Hanford's Groundwater Cleanup on the Chopping Block**

Thirteen organizations and eighteen River Stewards are calling on the Department of Energy (the Energy Department) to withdraw plans to cut funding for Hanford's groundwater cleanup program. In a letter sent to the Energy Department's recently appointed head, Dr. Ernest Moniz, Columbia Riverkeeper, Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility, Native Fish Society, Hanford Challenge and other, representing over 27,000 northwest residents called out the agency for touting the success of groundwater treatment at Hanford while simultaneously burying plans to cut funding for new groundwater well drilling and pump-and-treat systems. The Energy Department's proposed budget shortchanges Hanford's critical groundwater treatment program, which intercepts radioactive and chemical waste in the groundwater before it reaches the Columbia River.

During World War II and the Cold War, the U.S. government produced plutonium at the 586-square-mile Hanford site near Richland, Washington, along the Columbia River. Today the Hanford site is the world's largest nuclear cleanup site and about 80 square miles of contaminated groundwater lurks underground.

"Energy's groundwater cleanup program is the last line of defense for the Columbia River" said Theresa Labriola, Hanford Coordinator for Columbia Riverkeeper. The program funds well drilling and pump-and-treat systems to remove toxic and radioactive pollutants such as strontium-90 and hexavalent chromium before they reach the Columbia River. Strontium-90 causes bone cancer and immune system suppression. It also concentrates in fish bone tissues. Recent measurements in the groundwater beneath Hanford show strontium-90 at levels over 1000% greater than the drinking water standard.<sup>1</sup> Under Energy's proposed budget, the department would not fund plans to inject minerals into recently drilled wells to stop strontium-90 from reaching the Columbia River.

Despite the well-documented threats from toxic and radioactive pollution in Hanford's groundwater, Energy's proposed 2014 and 2015 budget allocates only half of the funds necessary to reach cleanup milestones. Just 6 percent of the proposed Hanford budget of \$2.2 billion is targeted toward groundwater cleanup.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Energy. *Hanford Site Environmental Report for Calendar Year 2008* at 220.

“This decision is out of line with Energy’s stated commitment to protect the Columbia River and our endangered salmon,” said Labriola. The Hanford Reach of the Columbia River runs adjacent to the Hanford site and supports the largest and most productive population of wild Chinook salmon in the Pacific Northwest.

This cut comes at a time when Energy needs to increase groundwater treatment, drill additional wells, and stem the flow of strontium-90 and other radioactive pollutants to the Columbia River. Energy’s own reports acknowledge that more wells are necessary to monitor groundwater plumes and extract hexavalent chromium, which is highly toxic to salmon and other aquatic life. At the end of last year Energy released a report—the *2013 Hanford Lifecycle Scope, Schedule and Cost Report*—which calls for a significant increase in funding for new wells to meet cleanup milestones.<sup>2</sup>

“Energy must honor their obligation to defend the River from Hanford’s nuclear waste by fully funding the groundwater program,” said Theresa Labriola.

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<sup>2</sup> 2013 Hanford Lifecycle, Scope, Schedule and Cost Report (Dec. 2012) at D-36.