

June 7, 2013

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U.S. Department of Energy
Attn: 2015 Budget
P.O. Box 550
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Richland, WA 99354

Via email: HanfordBudget2015@rl.gov

RE: Don't Shortchange Hanford's Groundwater Cleanup Program

Dear Sirs:

Columbia Riverkeeper, Cascadia Wildlands, Friends of the Gorge, Hanford Challenge, Hanford Watch, Heart of America Northwest, The Lands Council, Oregon Environmental Council, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility, Sierra Club Nuclear Free Campaign, Spokane Riverkeeper, Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility, Native Fish Society and eighteen Native Fish Society River Stewards are calling on the Department of Energy (Energy) to prioritize funding Hanford's Groundwater Program. The Groundwater 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. Despite the well-documented threats from toxic and radioactive pollution in Hanford's groundwater, Energy's proposed 2014 and 2015 budget underfunds the critical Groundwater Program. This decision is out of line with Energy's stated commitment to protect the Columbia River. Our organizations, which represent over 27,000 members in the Pacific Northwest, urge Energy keep its word and prioritize funding for the Groundwater Program.

Our region's economic vitality and public health as well as the future of endangered salmon depend on the Groundwater Program to stop dangerous radioactive and toxic pollution from entering the Columbia River. Energy's proposed budget ignores this reality. According to Energy's own estimates, the Groundwater Program will receive **only half of the funds necessary to reach cleanup milestones**.¹ Just six percent of the proposed Hanford budget of \$2.2 billion is targeted at groundwater cleanup.

What does this mean on the ground? First, Energy will lack necessary funding to drill more wells. 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. For example, Energy's *2013 Hanford Lifecycle Scope, Schedule and Cost Report* calls for a significant increase in funding for new wells to meet cleanup milestones.²

Second, Energy cannot follow through with plans to stem the flow of strontium-90 into the Columbia River. Energy's current plans call for injecting apatite minerals into groundwater wells to capture and hold radioactive and metal contaminants. Strontium-90 is a radioactive waste product that causes bone cancer and immune system suppression. It also concentrates in fish bone tissues. Recent measurements in the groundwater beneath the 100-N area show that strontium-90 levels are over 1000% greater than the drinking water standard (over 8000 picocuries/liter (pCi/L) versus 8 pCi/L).³ Under Energy's proposed budget, it is unclear how the department plans to fund apatite injections at recently drilled wells.

Energy's decision to shortchange the Groundwater Program is stunning given the threats groundwater pollution poses endangered salmon and to people who drink water from the Columbia River. Just last month Energy touted the success of the pump-and-treat program after Energy's contractors reported removing 500 pounds of hexavalent chromium from the groundwater in 2013. It makes sense for Energy to capitalize on its success by fully funding the Groundwater Program to defend the river from Hanford's nuclear legacy.

Sincerely,

Brett VandenHeuvel
Executive Director
Columbia Riverkeeper

Matt McQueen
Native Fish Society
Klickitat River Steward

Bob Ferris
Executive Director
Cascadia Wildlands

Steve Lent
Native Fish Society
Washougal River Steward

¹ 2013 Hanford Lifecycle, Scope, Schedule and Cost Report (Dec. 2012) at 5-20

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

³ U.S. Department of Energy. *Hanford Site Environmental Report for Calendar Year 2008* at 220.

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Gig Harbor Creeks River Steward

cc: Washington State Department of Ecology
U.S. EPA, Dennis Faulk
Senator Patty Murray
Senator Maria Cantwell
Senator Ron Wyden
Senator Jeff Merkley
Rep. Doc Hastings
Rep. Adam Smith
Rep. Rick Larsen
Governor Jay Inslee