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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CITIZEN GROUPS DEMAND MORE AGGRESSIVE CLEANUP ALONG COLUMBIA RIVER NEAR SITE OF FORMER HANFORD NUCLEAR REACTOR

Groups Urge U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to Reject Plan that would Allow Contamination to Remain along the Columbia River at Dangerous Levels for 150 to 264 Years

Aug. 13, 2014 (Richland, WA) — Columbia Riverkeeper and Heart of America Northwest called on regulators at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to reject a proposed Hanford cleanup plan that would leave high levels of radioactive and chemical contamination in groundwater along the Columbia River.

The U.S. Department of Energy's (Energy) proposal would leave behind dangerous levels of toxic and radioactive pollution for over 260 years. The proposed cleanup plan targets an area that once housed one of Hanford's nine plutonium production reactors — the F Reactor. Today, soil and groundwater in the area along the Columbia River, known as the 100 F/1U Area, is contaminated with hexavalent chromium, cesium-137, strontium-90, cobalt-60, europium-152 and 154, and nickel-63.

"Energy's do-nothing approach will pose a long-term risk to salmon and people that rely on the Columbia River," said Dan Serres, Conservation Director for nonprofit organization Columbia Riverkeeper. "Energy is trying to set a dangerous precedent for future cleanup near the Columbia by allowing chemical and radioactive pollution in soils and groundwater to remain in the environment. This is unacceptable."

"Keeping people from using valuable groundwater and sites alongside the Columbia River at Hanford is not a cleanup plan," said Washington State Representative Gerry Pollet, Executive Director of the citizens' group Heart of America Northwest, which joined Columbia Riverkeeper in objecting to Energy's plan. "People will be exposed to dangerous contamination, including Tribal members exercising their Treaty rights to live along and fish these shorelines."

Columbia Riverkeeper and Heart of America Northwest joined the Yakama Nation and the Hanford Advisory Board, a nonpartisan stakeholder group that provides policy advice on

Hanford cleanup, in leveling a harsh critique of Energy's proposed cleanup plan. In detailed letters submitted to the Energy, the Hanford stakeholders urged Energy to remove and treat dangerous contaminants, not wait for pollution to slowly dissipate into groundwater and the Columbia River.

The F Reactor is the first major reactor area in Hanford's 100 Area to reach a final Proposed Plan, and it drew attention from the Hanford Advisory Board because of its long-term implications. Energy estimates that strontium-90 in the groundwater will not naturally diminish over time to reach today's cancer risk standards for 150 years, while sites with contamination greater than 15 feet deep in the soil would have to have some way of keeping people from using the areas for 264 years.

A public comment period on the proposed plan closed on Monday. Stakeholders are urging Energy and EPA to go back to the drawing board and develop a cleanup plan that deals with the serious long-term risks posed by radioactive and toxic groundwater and soil near the Columbia River.

Hanford is the most contaminated site in the western hemisphere. A legacy of World War II and the Cold War, Hanford is now the focus of one of the nation's largest nuclear cleanup operations. Energy, which is responsible for Hanford cleanup, is still developing and implementing plans to deal with some of the most insidious pollution.

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