

# COLUMBIA RIVERKEEPER

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RIVER CURRENTS | 2019 Issue 2

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# PLAYBOOK



**Columbia Riverkeeper** protects and restores the water quality of the Columbia River and all life connected to it, from the headwaters to the Pacific Ocean.

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# RIVER NOTES

## A Letter from the Legal & Program Director

The theme of this newsletter is Columbia Riverkeeper's playbook. In the sports world, a playbook describes a team's strategies and plays. Our goal: to pull back the curtain to share strategies and stories about how Riverkeeper is tackling corporate polluters, staving off fossil fuel giants, and inspiring people to fight for clean water.



Lauren Goldberg

Like many sports, we work as a team every day—as a staff and board, with our members, and alongside community partners. But our work is no game. Riverkeeper engages in high-stakes campaigns. Will a small town get saddled with decades of cancer-causing toxic pollution from a coal export terminal? Will another run of Columbia River salmon go extinct in our lifetimes? Riverkeeper runs creative plays—whether organizing in rural communities, arguing in court, or developing exposés in the media—to fight for clean water and our climate.

Riverkeeper's playbook has its critics. Washington state Rep. Jim Walsh recently wrote an op-ed criticizing Riverkeeper and Sierra Club for "screchy . . . anti-development hysterics" and complaining our organizations have too much influence in the fossil fuel fights. He said we are "notorious for busing seedy out-of-state protestors" to public hearings on development permits.

The op-ed made my blood boil. I thought back to a hearing about the Port of Columbia County's proposal to rezone 837 acres of farmland to industrial and pave the way for more fossil fuel terminals. Columbia County has an amazing core of local activists who showed up in force. Volunteers handed out locally-grown blueberries and wore "Farms Feed Us" stickers.

Then the reinforcements rolled in.

A carload of people from Clatsop County came to talk about how they defeated liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals and protected the Columbia. People from Longview, who had stopped the nation's largest coal export terminal, crossed the bridge to describe what they had learned about fossil fuel terminals and local health impacts. The "seedy protestors" were commercial fishermen from Astoria, accountants from Kalama, and teachers from Vancouver. The "buses" were old pick-ups, new Bolts, and everything in between. So I say to Rep. Walsh: When it comes to fighting for clean water and our climate, toss your stereotypes and political rhetoric out the window. Time and again, people support their neighbors and embrace how we are connected by the mighty Columbia, not divided.

After our first LNG victory, superstar volunteer and retired librarian Cheryl Johnson reflected, "People asked, 'How can you continue to do this work that seems depressing some of the time and overwhelming most the time?' The laughter and the friendships we have shared along the way are the glue that holds us all together and sustained us to carry on." We are inspired by the same laughter and friendships from members in Cowlitz County, WA, today as they stand up to the the world's largest fracked-gas-to-methanol refinery.

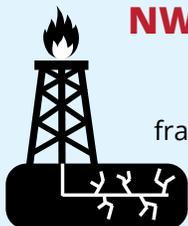
In short, we're united in our resolve. This spring, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee did the unthinkable for a politician: He changed his mind. After years of supporting two contentious fossil fuel facilities, the governor announced, "I cannot in good conscience support continued construction of a liquefied natural gas plant in Tacoma or a methanol production facility in Kalama." The plays are working. Together, we are earning big victories for clean water and our climate. Nice work, team.

Lauren Goldberg  
Legal & Program Director

BACK COVER: Sockeye salmon, photo by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

# GAME ON

## Who We're Up Against



### NW Innovation Works

#### IN PLAY

Proposal: World's largest fracked-gas-to-methanol refinery  
Kalama, WA



### Tesoro-Savage

#### VICTORY

Proposal: Nation's largest oil-by-rail terminal  
Vancouver, WA

### Lighthouse Resources



#### VICTORY

Proposal: Nation's largest coal export terminal, Millennium Bulk Logistics  
Cowlitz County, WA

### Bradwood LNG



#### VICTORY

Proposal: LNG terminal and fracked gas pipeline  
Clatsop County, OR

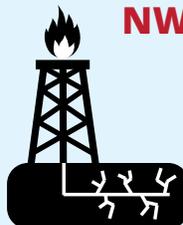
### Oregon LNG



#### VICTORY

Proposal: LNG terminal and over 200 miles of fracked gas pipeline  
Warrenton, OR

### NW Natural and TransCanada



#### VICTORY

Proposal: \$750 million Palomar fracked gas pipeline

## Electeds on the Fossil Fuel Industry's Team

"Let there be no doubt this administration fully stands behind protecting our coal industries."



### Mark Gordon

Governor, State of Wyoming  
Champion for Wyoming challenging Washington State's permit denials for Columbia River Coal Export Terminal

"I shudder to think of the precedent set if federal courts allow Washington to deny the expansion of the Millennium Bulk Terminals coal port because of that state's ideological-driven opposition to exporting coal."



### Tim Fox

Attorney General,  
State of Montana



### David Bernhardt

Secretary of the Interior  
Trump cabinet member,  
former lobbyist for the oil,  
fracked gas, and mining industries

"This is going to be a very clean facility."



### Richard DeBolt

Representative, Washington House  
of Representatives Member,  
Director of External Affairs, NW Innovation Works  
(aka Kalama fracked-gas-to-methanol refinery)

# RIVERKEEPER'S PLAYBOOK:

## How We Fight for Clean Water, Our Climate

This newsletter cracks open Columbia Riverkeeper's playbook—the strategies and tactics we use to protect clean water and our climate. We divide our playbook into three overarching strategies: (1) build power, (2) enforce the law, and (3) inspire action.

Before we explore the strategies, let's talk about why. Why invest in community organizing? Or sue polluters? Can't we all just get along? For nearly 20 years, Riverkeeper has been listening to and working in Columbia River communities. People are fed up with giant corporations threatening their communities. Our playbook is a direct response to the imbalance of power and problems that demand action now.

### Imbalance of power

Corporate greed dominates our politics. Left to their own devices, corporations and the politicians they control elevate profits over public health and social justice. When fossil fuel giants and other polluters roll in, our cities and towns are at a huge disadvantage. The corporations have slick lobbyists, a squadron of attorneys, and consultants who give all the right answers. They do the rounds with local politicians. First they get everything lined up, then they announce the project to the public.

Riverkeeper fights back. We are your environmental lawyers in the courtroom and your community organizers on the streets. As a Riverkeeper member, you can stand up for clean water. By joining together, we can even the playing field.

### Time is of the essence

Here's what we face: species are on the brink of a massive extinction, the federal government is paralyzed, and we have a climate denier in the White House hell-bent on eradicating our environmental laws and gutting the agencies that enforce them. According to the United Nations, only 11 years remain to avert climate catastrophe.

Here on the Columbia, the water is too hot for long-term salmon survival, and warming every year. At some popular fishing spots, resident fish are unsafe to eat due to toxic

pollution like mercury and cancer-causing PCBs. And groundwater plumes of nuclear waste flow slowly toward the Columbia River while Hanford cleanup languishes. Across the board, Columbia River communities face challenges that cannot wait another 50 or 100 years to solve.

## STRATEGY ONE:

### Build Power

When community activists stand up to a threat, they grow stronger. People come together for a common cause. And when they win, the victories build power.

Riverkeeper works shoulder to shoulder with people in dozens of diverse communities. You are protecting the Columbia—whether fighting David-versus-Goliath battles against the fossil fuel industry or testing water quality to empower people to swim safely. From phone banking in small towns, to media trainings for activists, to strategic planning with our members, we help develop local leaders in the heat of high-stakes campaigns. Together, we are making a difference for clean water and strong salmon runs.

Riverkeeper strategically engages in urban areas like Portland, Vancouver, and Longview, as well as dozens of rural communities. We work with allies beyond environmental organizations. This includes frontline communities, farmers, fishers, rural landowners, labor unions, and health professionals.

# Building Power Case Studies:

## Creating new pathways to build power: Comunidades

Comunidades is a new collaborative project that provides space for more Latinos and people of color to get involved in environmental issues. “There are many Latinos who want to protect clean water, clean air, and all of our natural resources, but have not engaged in traditional environmental groups,” explains Ubaldo Hernández, community organizer for Riverkeeper. “Comunidades aims to change that.”

The group formed in late 2018 and includes Columbia Gorge-based educators, activists, parents, and students. Comunidades provides an inclusive, Latino-led space that encourages people to protect the places they love. Riverkeeper lends a hand with staff support and meeting space.

## A Tale of two cities: From fossil fuel proposal to ban

Former Portland Mayor Charlie Hales was a major booster of a propane-by-rail export terminal. Then we organized. Then he changed his mind. “At some point, those of us in power have to listen to those who put us there,” he remarked. One year later, Portland’s City Council voted unanimously to prohibit all new fossil fuel infrastructure such as oil and gas terminals. This is building power.

What moved Mayor Hales from a fossil fuel project booster to a climate change champion? Singing kids, raging grannies, and heartfelt testimony from people from all walks

of life. Diverse coalition partners carried the same message: We need local climate leadership. “Testimony from young leaders had a dramatic impact in strengthening the City Council’s resolve to pass a strong ordinance,” said Dan Serres, Riverkeeper’s conservation director. “The hearing seemed to turn on the stark contrast in testimony between students and industry lobbyists. Some of those same young people are pushing today to stop tar-sands trains from coming through Portland.”

## Victories build ~~hope~~ power: CREATE

Building power also means keeping people engaged after important victories. Case in point: after defeating two liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals in the Columbia River estuary, local activists formed the Columbia River Estuary Action Team (CREATE). CREATE’s mission is to protect the health of the rich and productive Columbia River estuary, the life it supports, and the many livelihoods that depend on it. In over a decade of fighting LNG terminals and pipelines, volunteers honed their skills organizing, talking to media, and activating their neighbors. The LNG victories also built power beyond CREATE. Activists ran for local offices and won. They continue to work on political campaigns. They take on important issues related to logging, pesticides, and affordable housing, to name a few. They share their skills and passion to help other communities, too.



Shemona Moreno,  
Power Past Fracked Gas Rally,  
February 21, 2019, in Olympia, WA.  
Photo by Alexandra Blakely.

# STRATEGY TWO:

## Enforce the Law

Since the birth of the Waterkeeper movement, Keepers have been enforcing the laws that keep our water clean and safe. Sadly, some corporate polluters ignore the rules of the game to make a quick buck—at the expense of everyone downstream. The Clean Water Act is an important law, but as former Supreme Court Justice William Brennan warned, “Enforcement of the law is what really counts.” So that’s what Riverkeeper does. When polluters illegally dump waste into the Columbia and its tributaries, we go to court to protect clean water.

Nowadays, Riverkeeper also goes to court to protect the public’s access to information and its right to be heard when our leaders make important choices. This means challenging government officials who withhold public information or who write environmental impact statements that hide the harm caused by fossil fuel exports.

Why do we fight so hard for government transparency and truthful environmental reviews? Critics say that we litigate to cause delay. In reality, Riverkeeper believes that facts still matter and every person—not just wealthy, well-connected corporations—deserves a voice. So we insist that governments release information, make decisions in public, and tell the truth about how their decisions affect our water and health.

Transparency is not only central to our democracy, it’s how Riverkeeper wins grassroots campaigns against powerful, well-funded fossil fuel corporations. When the truth comes out and government officials are accountable to real people, we get better results.

Litigation is not the only, or even the first, strategy in our playbook. A lawsuit usually won’t permanently stop a bad project. But without litigation to obtain important documents or undo illegal backroom deals, we lose our chance to run other, winning plays.

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“After working for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in D.C. for six years, I left the paid workforce to care for my young children. I’m excited to join the hardworking staff at Riverkeeper and to share the results of that work with my three kids. ”

— Erin Saylor  
*Riverkeeper’s New Staff Attorney*

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Erin Saylor

# Enforcing the Law Case Studies:

## Keeping toxic oil out of the Columbia

For years, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has spilled oil from eight large hydroelectric dams into the Columbia and Snake rivers. Some of that oil contained cancer-causing PCBs. Oregon and Washington tried unsuccessfully to get the Army Corps to clean up its act. Then, Riverkeeper sued under the Clean Water Act and forced the Army Corps to reduce its oil pollution and switch to non-toxic, biodegradable oils where feasible. The New York Times called this victory “historic” and the Wall Street Journal said the result was “groundbreaking.”

## Fighting for transparency, against oil-by-rail

Port of Vancouver commissioners met in secret with Tesoro to negotiate a lease for Tesoro’s oil-by-rail terminal. Riverkeeper challenged the Port’s secret meetings for violating Washington’s Open Public Meeting Act. The Washington Supreme Court agreed with Riverkeeper and scolded the Port for shutting out the public. This victory created Supreme Court precedent to prevent future backroom deals between local governments and fossil fuel corporations, a victory that will promote transparency for years to come.

## Shutting down Oregon’s only coal-fired power plant

In 2020 Oregon’s only coal-fired power plant will shut down. Wondering if you should send a thank-you note to Oregon regulators? Nope. It took a people-powered campaign and lawsuit brought by Riverkeeper and our partners to end decades of dangerous air pollution at Portland General Electric’s (PGE) Boardman coal-fired power plant.

In 2008, Sierra Club, Columbia Riverkeeper, Friends of the Columbia Gorge, Hells Canyon Preservation Council, and the Northwest Environmental Defense Center (NEDC), with legal representation from the Earthrise Law Center, launched a campaign to clean up the Boardman plant. Two years later, we won. PGE agreed to a binding shut-down date; lower sulfur dioxide limits during the plant’s final years in operation; and a \$2.5-million penalty for violating the law.

## Slashing toxic pollution at 800 industrial facilities

According to the National Research Council, urban stormwater runoff is the leading cause of water pollution in the United States. Fortunately, the Clean Water Act requires that industrial sites test stormwater and reduce pollution.

The stormwater permit matters because it controls how much toxic stormwater is discharged by 800 industrial sites. Riverkeeper and NEDC reached a legal settlement that requires the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to reduce pollution from industrial facilities such as metal scrap yards, truck depots, and lumber yards.

With a stronger permit, the State of Oregon can keep thousands of pounds of toxic pollution out of our of rivers.



# STRATEGY THREE:

## Inspire Action

How can we inspire people to take action in their community? On social media and email, we work hard to bring you stories about people using creative—and effective—strategies to win. And we aggressively pursue earned media—television and radio interviews, newspaper and magazine coverage, op-eds—to reach a broader audience and decision makers.

But our most important tactic, our bread-and-butter play, is providing opportunities for people to come together and be part of something bigger. This includes community events to connect with friends and neighbors like the annual Pete Seeger Sing-Along, Happy Hours for Habitat, and educational forums on the Hanford Nuclear Site cleanup, rising river temperatures, oil-by-rail, and other hot-button issues.

We encourage deeper involvement like participating in specific campaigns, engaging in leadership training, restoring habitat, or testing water quality. And, by donating money to Riverkeeper, our members are protecting the Columbia everyday. The following stories illustrate how Riverkeeper members are coming together on behalf of the Columbia. However you choose to engage, through your Riverkeeper membership, you are inspiring action.

### **Hit the pavement for clean water**

Did you join Riverkeeper after talking to a canvasser? Riverkeeper's professional canvass team builds our membership and has thousands of conversations about clean water each year. Importantly, our canvass team reaches new supporters who might not get involved otherwise. "We knock on doors rain or shine," explains Canvass Director Alex Smith. "My favorite part of this job is providing opportunities for people to get involved in issues they care deeply about." With one-on-one conversations, people are inspired to make a difference and connect with other

community members who are passionate about climate change and clean water.

### **Transform a former industrial area into an outdoor classroom**

The Nichols Natural Area is a living laboratory in the middle of the bustling Hood River waterfront. Riverkeeper holds a conservation easement to restore nearly three acres of land where Nichols Boat Works operated a boatyard for more than 50 years. Our vision for the Nichols Natural Area is to engage, educate, and inspire the diverse communities of the Columbia River Gorge to turn this former industrial site into vibrant riverfront habitat. At Nichols, learning is not confined by classroom walls. Young students plant trees and inventory bugs. High school students sample water quality. All students learn how imagination and the power of community can transform our river.

From targeted outreach to underrepresented communities, to bilingual events, to plans for interpretive signs in English and Spanish, Nichols Natural Area serves as a model for inclusion. "The value of outdoor science exploration lasts far beyond the day in the field," explains Lorri Epstein, water quality director for Riverkeeper. "The teachers are thrilled that our program closely mirrors many of concepts they are covering in the classroom. And the kids can watch with pride as the Nichols Natural Area grows, knowing that they took part in the restoration."

### **Connect and inspire on Conoce tu Columbia**

Two years ago, Riverkeeper Community Organizer Ubaldo Hernández added an engagement tool: a bilingual radio show and podcast. Conoce tu Columbia features inspiring stories from the environmental and social justice movements along



Conoce tu Columbia spring celebration at Kelley Point Park, Portland, OR, March 16, 2019, photo by Stan Hellman.

the Columbia River and shares the latest news on how to get involved. Conoce tu Columbia airs live every other Tuesday from 7 to 8 p.m. on Radio Tierra 95.1 FM Hood River. You can also find archived shows at [columbiariverkeeper.org/en-espanol](http://columbiariverkeeper.org/en-espanol).

### **Test water quality, inspire river use**

An important part of Riverkeeper's playbook is inspiring people to learn about and use the Columbia. And that starts with access to information. That's why Riverkeeper staff and volunteers regularly test for E.coli bacteria at popular recreation sites along the Columbia River, then post the real-time data on Swim Guide, a website and app that makes it easy to find popular swimming beaches and check their current water quality. At a glance, users can see if their beach is safe for swimming and other recreation that day.

Clean water is a right. All people deserve the opportunity to enjoy the Columbia River—swimming, fishing, boating, enjoying its incredible beaches and islands—without fear of getting sick. Sadly, toxic pollution and high bacteria levels make some stretches of the Columbia unsafe. Yet state and federal agencies collect very little site-specific data to help users make an informed decision about where they can go to safely enjoy the river. By providing the information needed to make informed choices, Riverkeeper inspires people to use and enjoy their river.

### **Riverkeeper's playbook: The power of you**

Playbooks are meaningless without people like you who transform strategy into action. We learn from your experience and knowledge. You are a key part of a critical movement to protect clean water and our climate. You are making a difference. Riverkeeper's playbook is powered by you.

## **In Your Words: Luis Estrada, Riverkeeper Volunteer**

My name is Luis Estrada, I am 22 years old and live in Hood River, Oregon. I have been volunteering with Columbia Riverkeeper for about three years now. When I first started I was a year removed from graduating high school. I hadn't gone to college due to being the first generation of my family to graduate so I didn't know many of the opportunities I had at my disposal. Beginning to volunteer opened a lot of those doors for me since I was able to meet people who shared in a lot the struggles I went through. Being a DACA student volunteering has somewhat become vital to know about what's going on around us. Ubaldo Hernández at Columbia Riverkeeper helped start Comunidades with members of the community to form a Latino environmental group. It's through Comunidades that I have been able to continue volunteering in something I am passionate about such as the environment. They have helped me find scholarships that I am able to apply to and helped me learn more about ORSAA [Oregon Student Aid Application] to continue my education. It is also because of them that I know what career path I want to take and I know now how I can successfully get there.

# HEAD COACH:

## an interview with Executive Director Brett VandenHeuvel

*Brett became Columbia Riverkeeper's executive director in 2009 after serving as staff attorney. Before joining Riverkeeper, Brett conducted research on climate change during field expeditions to Antarctica and New Zealand, taught kids at the Hancock Field Station in eastern Oregon, and started a legal practice representing nonprofits. Brett's work with Riverkeeper has been featured in numerous media outlets, including The New York Times, Fox News, The Seattle Times, and OPB.*

### **What sports coach inspires your leadership style?**

My father. He gave up a successful varsity coaching job to coach my brother and me in middle-school basketball. He had all the corny coach sayings like, "There is no 'I' in team," and "Prepare to be prepared." We snickered at the time, but looking back, he was always prepared. He was always the hardest worker. And he put the team first. Those values have hopefully rubbed off on me.

### **You took the helm at Riverkeeper 11 years ago. What was your strategy going into the job, and how has it evolved over time?**

Number one: be bold. Don't shy away from important and difficult issues. It's easy to try and make everyone happy, but I wanted to work on a team that creates real changes. Number two: be a good listener. Listening and learning from our members, staff, and allies is a critical part of this job.

Over time, I've recognized more and more the importance of working in coalitions. Riverkeeper tackles hard problems: working together is more effective and fun. So we've built wonderful and inspiring coalitions on many issues. I didn't recognize how important that was early in my career.

### **You've attended countless public hearings. Share a favorite story that captures the essence of Riverkeeper's playbook in action.**

Our strategies came together in an amazing way at the Tesoro oil terminal hearings in Vancouver. Tesoro reserved all the rooms at the Convention Center to block us from having a place to gather. I remember walking into Tesoro's hospitality suite, an enormous room filled with giveaways. And there was no energy, just 20 people looking like they had to be there.

We got the leftovers: a barn on a freezing cold winter day. But when I walked into that barn, it was like a rock concert, with inspiring speeches from a longshoreman, a doctor, a local pastor, a climate activist. More than 1,000 people attended the hearing to oppose Tesoro. The combination of elevating local voices, appreciating all the knowledge that diverse communities bring to the table, and combining that with a strong legal case against Tesoro proved to be a winning game strategy.

### **You spent four months in Antarctica studying climate change. How did that experience influence you?**

I developed a deep understanding of climate science, which informs my work at Riverkeeper. I later decided I wanted to be an advocate instead of a scientist, but that science foundation sure helps.

We lived in a tent and worked 18-hour days in difficult conditions: strong winds, 40-below temperatures. Most things after that just feel tamer. This may sound funny, but it really gave me an appreciation for living things—vibrant greens, the smell of flowers, bird songs—after being in the most desolate environment on Earth.

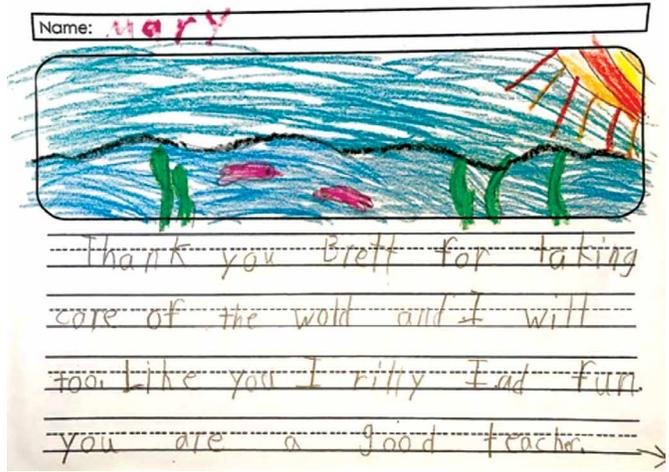
### **After the BP Horizon explosion and oil spill, you traveled to the Gulf of Mexico to experience first-hand the devastation and response effort. What did you take away from that experience?**

That was an emotional trip. It really shook me. I saw how local economies that depend on clean water were decimated. Fishing fleets docked. Bait shops empty. Restaurants shuttered. Families suffering. I saw how deeply the oil industry is woven into the fabric of everyday life. Sure, people were distraught and angry about the BP spill. But in conversations, nobody blamed or spoke about the oil industry. I was saddened that the oil industry was so powerful, so engrained, that people could not question it. A moment that is seared into my memory is standing on a dock discussing the cleanup, and looking out over the Gulf and seeing oil rigs dotting the horizon as far as the eye could see.

I also walked away with lessons from Big Oil's playbook. After the catastrophe, BP rushed in with claims trailers for



Brett VandenHeuvel, photo by Lynn Buchanan



people to sign away their rights. Five years later, I saw a similar scene unfold in Mosier after the oil-train derailment and explosion. Along with the first responders, Union Pacific Railroad’s lawyers and claims trailer appeared, too, with a slick public relations team in tow. Knowing that strategy shaped Riverkeeper’s and our allies’ playbooks. We held media events everyday for a week, elevated local voices, collected our own information and videos, and shared information with the public instead of listening to Union Pacific’s spin.

**In summer 2015 roughly 250,000 adult sockeye salmon, including 96 percent of the critically endangered Snake River sockeye run, died prematurely in the Columbia and Lower Snake because the rivers were too hot. How did that summer influence Riverkeeper’s playbook?**

That experience of watching sockeye die made us more aggressive. Sometimes our strategy is tied to whether we can succeed, or a new opportunity arises to effect change, and we seize the moment. But for the issue of hot water killing salmon, the situation is dire and that demands action—even if there are no easy solutions. I think we waited too long for a good opportunity and watching all those fish die jump-started new efforts to address hot water, like our lawsuit against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

**You’ve argued in court. You’ve testified before various government bodies. Do you get nervous or intimidated?**

Yes. Last month, Riverkeeper was invited to present at Yakama Nation Tribal Council, a huge honor. Let me set the scene. These are the highest elected officials of a sovereign nation. There are established protocols to follow. Many people on the council have been deeply involved in conservation and salmon issues their whole lives. The council table is the shape of an arrowhead and I stood at the point. I was definitely nervous!

I started by talking about campaigns where we’ve partnered with Yakama Nation over the last decade—from stopping a proposal to ship Hawaiian garbage to Yakama Nation territory, to passing better laws to reduce

toxic pollution, to prevailing over the Tesoro oil terminal. Afterward, council members went around the table to express their appreciation of Riverkeeper’s work in solidarity with Yakama Nation. I smiled at my coworkers Simone and Dan, whose hard work helps build these strong relationships.

**Last year the Longview Daily News ran a feature story on Riverkeeper, “Columbia Riverkeeper: Stronger than ever?”, in which the president of the Cowlitz Economic Development Council shared his view that Riverkeeper is unwilling to accept any new development along the Columbia. How do you respond?**

That’s silly. He’s correct that we will absolutely draw the line on dangerous fossil fuel developments, including coal, oil, and fracked gas terminals. But that constitutes just a fraction of new development projects along the Columbia. Overall, protecting clean water, fisheries, and livability helps the economy thrive and is good for local jobs and our region. In Vancouver, for example, we partnered with 101 local businesses to promote small businesses over the oil terminal. Fortunately, our economy in the Northwest is not tied to big fossil fuel corporations.

**Did becoming a father to Gus and Mick, eight and six years old respectively, change your approach?**

They’ve taught me a lot. I’ve learned that the negotiating skills I use as an attorney are completely useless when up against a stubborn six year old. Somehow he always ends up with the popsicle and I’m always reflecting on what went wrong. They’ve taught me to slow down and discover new things with them: Simple things like worms after a rainstorm or the joy of jumping off a dock.

We talk about protecting the river and we’ll yell “booooo” when oil trains go by. But mostly I just want them to be curious and love being outside. I don’t want to burden them with adult problems. They will have plenty of time for that. And I want them to be kind and just. A lot of good can flow from kindness and justice. Maybe that’s the most important lesson they are teaching me.

# HOW WE WORK WITH TRIBAL NATIONS

By Brett VandenHeuvel, Executive Director

A newsletter about Riverkeeper's strategies would not be complete without discussing how we work with tribal nations.

Riverkeeper's approach to working with tribes is built on respecting the sovereign and adding value to the relationship. We understand that tribes are sovereign nations with complex social, economic, and natural resource policies that are well beyond the scope of non-profit organizations. Our staff prioritized learning from tribes about government structures, treaties, goals, and customs. We listen, we learn, and we confer with tribal nations on major policy actions.

We also focus on putting words into action by adding real value to the efforts of tribal nations in specific campaigns. Over the last decade, we have learned that two aspects of our work—legal advocacy and community organizing—provide the most value to our relationship with tribes.

## EXAMPLE 1: National leader on toxic pollution limits

Riverkeeper worked closely with the Umatilla tribes, the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC), and nonprofit Northwest Environmental Advocates to push Oregon to adopt the nation's most protective limits on toxic water pollution in 2011. Under the federal Clean Water Act, states set water pollution limits based, in part, on how much fish people eat, so estimating fish consumption matters. If a state assumes people rarely eat fish, it can allow more toxic pollution. Oregon assumed people ate only a cracker-sized amount of fish per day. This vastly underestimated the amount of fish that many Oregonians consumed and failed to protect all Oregonians from toxic pollution. In the end, Oregon revised its "fish consumption rate" to one-third of a pound per day—a huge improvement that places greater limits on toxic pollution discharges.

Over the course of this campaign, we developed a strong partnership with Umatilla and CRITFC. What worked? We listened. We recognized Umatilla's and CRITFC's long-term leadership and expertise on fish consumption. Once we were confident we could add value, Riverkeeper's attorneys coordinated closely with Umatilla and CRITFC's policy staff to advocate for more protective water pollution regulations. Together, we fought against industry loopholes. We partnered with the tribes' media teams to attend editorial board meetings together, draft op-eds, and coordinate messaging. Because the tribes did not want the new regulations to focus entirely on Native American fishers, Riverkeeper highlighted the impacts to non-tribal fishers, including recreational fishers, immigrants, and low-income people. We organized our members to submit comments and attend hearings to advocate for less pollution. Overall, we added value to the relationship by providing legal and organizing support, while respecting Umatilla's and CRITFC's strong leadership.

## EXAMPLE 2: Protecting salmon habitat from LNG supertankers

Marrying legal advocacy and grassroots organizing is a key strength of Riverkeeper. For example, when the Bradwood Landing Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminal threatened some of the most important salmon habitat in the Columbia River estuary, we partnered with CRITFC to stop the dredging. Our staff attorneys worked with CRITFC's legal and policy staff to identify flaws in applications, litigate land-use approvals, and push state agencies to evaluate the impacts of dredging on salmon habitat.

Concurrently, we organized a huge community effort to influence decision makers. Our organizers helped train and support Clatsop County residents, who met with dozens of elected officials, conducted television interviews, tabled at the 4th of July parade and fairs, and knocked on thousands of doors. We partnered with incredible local leaders, including a librarian who now helps run local political campaigns and a commercial fisherman who is now an important spokesperson to protect the Columbia. In the end, we prevailed to defeat all the LNG terminals on the Columbia, which protects key salmon habitat and our climate. A win-win.

## EXAMPLE 3: A new vision for Hanford cleanup

Riverkeeper is partnering with Yakama Nation to engage Yakama citizens more deeply in cleanup decisions at the Hanford Nuclear Site. This includes educational events for tribal youth, a Hanford art contest, and a day-long event called the Hanford Journey on the banks of the Columbia adjacent to the nuclear site. The Hanford Nuclear Site is located on Yakama Nation ceded land. On June 14, 2019, elders, elected leaders and youth from Yakama Nation, as well Washington agency officials, elected officials, Hanford stakeholders, and media—gathered to share their vision about Hanford's future. Instead of more negative news about another leak at Hanford, we started reclaiming the Hanford Reach with a cultural celebration and inspiring stories.

How did this project and partnership come about? We were frustrated by the U.S. Department of Energy's narrow vision for the future of Hanford: a nuclear waste dump with a fence to keep people out for thousands of years. Yakama Nation had a different vision: people returning to a clean and healthy Columbia River after a thorough clean up of Hanford's nuclear waste. Riverkeeper is inspired by this vision and by Dr. Russell Jim's words, "If you would clean up the place to comply with the Treaty of 1855, we'd protect all future generations, not just the Yakama." Because Riverkeeper had built trust with Yakama Nation over the last two decades, we jumped right in and got to work planning a Hanford campaign together.



Tribal nations, Columbia Riverkeeper, and our coalition partners gathered for a press conference in Mosier, OR, following the 2016 oil train derailment, photo by Liv Smith.

## Conferring with tribes on legal and policy issues

Riverkeeper consistently confers with the Columbia River tribal nations on policy positions, strategies, and tactics. In so doing, we respect the difference between the goals of a non-profit conservation organization and the needs of a tribal nation. For river protection issues, it is unrealistic to think that every tribe will take the same position, or that Riverkeeper will always agree. It is imperative, however, that we confer with interested tribes before tackling issues. This builds trust, leads to better outcomes, and avoids unintended impacts. And, regardless of the outcomes, we demonstrate our respect for tribal sovereignty.

By regularly conferring with tribes, building relationships, and participating in events and celebrations when invited, we can establish the trust needed to carry us beyond day-to-day advocacy work. Ultimately, engaging with tribal nations should not be limited to times of threat, duress, or crisis. To effect lasting change, our focus should be on transformational relationships, rather than single-issue organizing.

## Riverkeeper's work with tribal nations

- Joined the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC) to challenge land-use approvals for a natural gas export terminal near Astoria (2008)
- Litigated alongside the Yakama Nation to stop the barging of Hawaiian garbage to Yakama ceded lands in the Columbia River Gorge (2010)
- Partnered with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (Umatilla) to push Oregon to pass the nation's most protective standards for toxic pollution (2011)
- Worked in solidarity with the Warm Springs, Umatilla, and Yakama nations to push Oregon to reject the Morrow-Pacific coal export terminal (2014)
- Partnered with CRITFC and member tribes on the Tesoro oil terminal adjudication, including coordinating expert witnesses (2017)
- Assisted Yakama Nation to engage tribal youth to push the federal government to clean up dangerous nuclear waste at the Hanford Nuclear Site (2018-2019)



"Every Drop Counts" by John Paul Strong.



Nichols planting, photo by Lorri Epstein.

## RIVER HAPPENINGS: THERE IS NEVER A DULL MOMENT ON THE COLUMBIA

### HANFORD JOURNEY ART CONTEST UNION GAP, WA, MARCH - APRIL

Columbia Riverkeeper and Yakama Nation's Environmental Restoration Waste Management Program (ERWM) sponsored an art contest to promote public awareness of and engagement in Hanford cleanup. More than 20 people submitted art, including several students from La Salle High School in Union Gap. John Paul Strong's (Yakama) drawing, "Every Drop Counts for Mind, Body, and Spirit," won first place and a \$300 prize. In describing his drawing, Strong writes, "The lifestyle we have to stay strong is fishing, hunting, and gathering roots and huckleberries . . . . There are also feathers around symbolizing the colors often found in our life dealing with mother earth." Strong's artwork became the logo for the Hanford Journey, a day-long event that honored the late Dr. Russell Jim, ERWM's founder, and inspired the next generation of Hanford cleanup advocates.

### NICHOLS NATURAL AREA SPRING PLANTING PARTY + SCHOOL GROUPS HOOD RIVER, OR, SPRING 2019

Powered by donuts, coffee, and plentiful sunshine, volunteers in March made great strides in the restoration of the Nichols Natural Area, adding 175 native plants at the former industrial site along Hood River's waterfront. In late spring, more than 600 students from local schools visited Nichols during field trips led by Riverkeeper Water Quality Director Lorri Epstein and Community Organizer Ubaldo Hernández. A big thank you to everyone who donated to our Nichols Natural Area campaign in 2018, raising over \$30,000 to engage river communities in a high-profile habitat restoration and environmental education project. Special thanks to Dirt Hugger and KickStand Coffee for donating compost and treats for our volunteer work party.

### OIL TRAIN COMMUNITY FORUMS PORTLAND, OR, AND VANCOUVER, WA, SPRING 2019

Riverkeeper Conservation Director Dan Serres presented at a series of five community forums on the Zenith oil terminal, located in Northwest Portland, and the Global Partners oil terminal, located in near Clatskanie, OR. Zenith Energy and Global Partners want to expand rail shipments of heavy tar-sands crude through Portland and Columbia County. Zenith started shipping tar-sands crude to China in 2018. Mile-long trains transporting oil to Portland travel along the Columbia River, increasing the risk of a devastating tar-sands oil spill. Community members packed the forums, co-hosted by multiple climate justice and environmental groups. They learned and asked questions about expanded tar-sands shipments, and how to engage with decision makers like the City of Portland to protect public health and clean water.



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Tar sands train unloading at Zenith, photo by Dan Serres.



Kalama rally on land and water, photo by Alex Milan Tracy.

**SANDY RIVER VOLUNTEER + LEARN EVENT  
TROUTDALE, OR, APRIL 27**

In celebration of Earth Month, volunteers joined Riverkeeper and the Sandy River Watershed Council on the Sandy River Delta for a morning of habitat restoration, river cleanup, and learning about traditional ecological knowledge from Clifton Bruno, an enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation. Volunteers collected 90 pounds of trash and spread mulch to protect recently planted trees. A special thank you to the East Multnomah County Soil and Water Conservation District for supporting the cleanup and education event.

**RIVERKEEPER HOSTS DEPT. OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY TALK ON TOXIC CLEANUP SITE  
HOOD RIVER, OR, MAY 15**

For more than 40 years, the U.S. government dumped toxic pollution in and along the Columbia's shorelines at Bradford Island, located near Bonneville Dam. Community members packed Riverkeeper's office to learn about the cleanup and opportunities for public engagement from Bob Schwarz of the Oregon Dept. of Environmental Quality. Tribal people and diverse communities use the Bradford Island area for subsistence and recreational fishing despite advisories warning not to eat resident fish. To learn more about the Bradford Island cleanup, visit [bit.ly/CleanUpBradfordIsland](http://bit.ly/CleanUpBradfordIsland).

**NO METHANOL CAMP OUT AND RALLY  
KALAMA, WA, MAY 18**

Community members in Kalama hosted a rally featuring diverse voices standing up to the world's largest fracked gas-to-methanol refinery proposal. Speakers included: Cambria Keely, student activist and lifelong Kalama resident; Rev. Kathleen Patton, pastor from Cowlitz County; Charlene DeRosier, owner of Camp Kalama RV Park and Campground; Dr. Annemarie Dooley, volunteer with Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility; and Dakota Case, a Puyallup Water Warrior. The crowd celebrated Gov. Jay Inslee's recent decision to oppose the proposed fracked gas-to-methanol refinery, and called on the Washington Department of Ecology to deny key permits for Northwest Innovation Works.

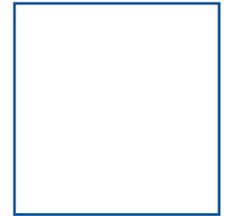
Share your stories about the Columbia River:

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For more information, contact Sandy Wright, development director, at [Sandy@ColumbiaRiverkeeper.org](mailto:Sandy@ColumbiaRiverkeeper.org) or 971-645-5535.