

COLUMBIA RIVERKEEPER®

RIVER CURRENTS | Summer 2014 Newsletter



This Issue:

**Riverkeeper Fights
to Keep Oil Out of
Our Rivers**

**Hanford Radiation
and Leaking
LNG Tanks**

**Eat Fish, Hold
the Pollution**

#LoveYourColumbia

Love Your Columbia: Take Action in Your Community

photo by Paloma Ayala

Columbia Riverkeeper is proud to announce a region-wide clean-up and restoration day called "Love Your Columbia." On August 23, 2014, hundreds of volunteers will convene at locations up and down the Columbia River to pick up litter, pull invasive weeds, and restore habitat to help our river. We're building partnerships throughout the basin to clean up the Columbia! This day of action is designed to create awareness, solidarity, and a cleaner river.

Riverkeeper is helping to organize individuals, community groups, and organizations interested in conducting clean-ups or restoration activities in their communities. Call Emily at 541.387.3030 or visit our website to find a clean-up in your community. Better yet, help organize your own Love Your Columbia event of any size.

Learn more at:
www.columbiariver.org/events/love-your-columbia-2014/

The Newest Riverkeeper!



Columbia Riverkeeper's Water Quality Director, Lorri Epstein, and her husband Josh are delighted to introduce Mason Samuel Epstein. Mason was born on February 27, 2014, at 12:33 a.m., measuring 8lbs 7 ounces, 22 inches. We're sure Mason will be in a pair of waders in no time!

Riverkeeper Happenings

There is never a dull moment on the Columbia! Here are some highlights.



Successful 2014 Earth Day River Cleanup
In celebration of Earth Day, Columbia Riverkeeper volunteers completed cleanup projects along the Columbia River at Mayer State Park. Helping rangers prepare the riverside park for the busy summer season, volunteers picked up trash, cleared brush, and removed invasive species. If you're in the Mosier area, we recommend stopping by this beautiful park. Thanks to all the community members who came out to help. You make a difference!

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Friend us! Follow us! Join us in the social media sphere on **Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn.**



In Court Over LNG

Riverkeeper's attorneys argued two cases regarding the proposed LNG terminal in Warrenton, Oregon. LNG export is simply a harmful and dangerous idea and we're standing up for a better future. It is exciting to get our day in court, and a real honor to represent our members and people who love the Columbia River. In the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, we argued that the U.S. Coast Guard improperly approved LNG supertankers in the Columbia. At Oregon's land use board of appeals, we helped defend Clatsop County's decision to reject LNG. Thanks to the Earthrise Law Center for great work.

Support our work to protect and restore the Columbia River.
Make a donation today at: www.columbiariverkeeper.org/donate

AVEDA Catwalk for Water a Big Success!

The Aveda Institute of Portland's (AIP) annual Catwalk for Clean Water—benefiting Riverkeeper—was fierce, fabulous, and fashionable. On April 17, students studying at AIP had the chance to show off their work to friends and family with a runway show themed around great artists including Dali, Monet, Warhol, and Picasso. Over 600 attendees thundered their appreciation as beat-based band Hustle and Drone kept time. We couldn't be prouder to team up with Aveda as they make their sustainability mission live and breathe.



Keep your coal, Gov. Mead!

Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead visited Longview, WA, on June 3 to sell his dirty coal, but local community members did not roll out the red carpet. Instead, 60 Longview-area residents protested Gov. Mead's visit, delivering a bucket of Powder River Basin coal that had spilled from uncovered coal trains.



Hanford Workers Sick After Exposure to Unknown Toxic Fumes

KING 5 TV exposed recent sickness among Hanford workers. The Hanford Advisory Board, of which Riverkeeper is a member, raised concerns to the U.S. Department of Energy about worker safety at the tank farms. It's obvious that problems still exist. Worker safety is paramount in Hanford's clean up. With additional oversight and accountability, clean up can be accomplished in a more safe and efficient manner.

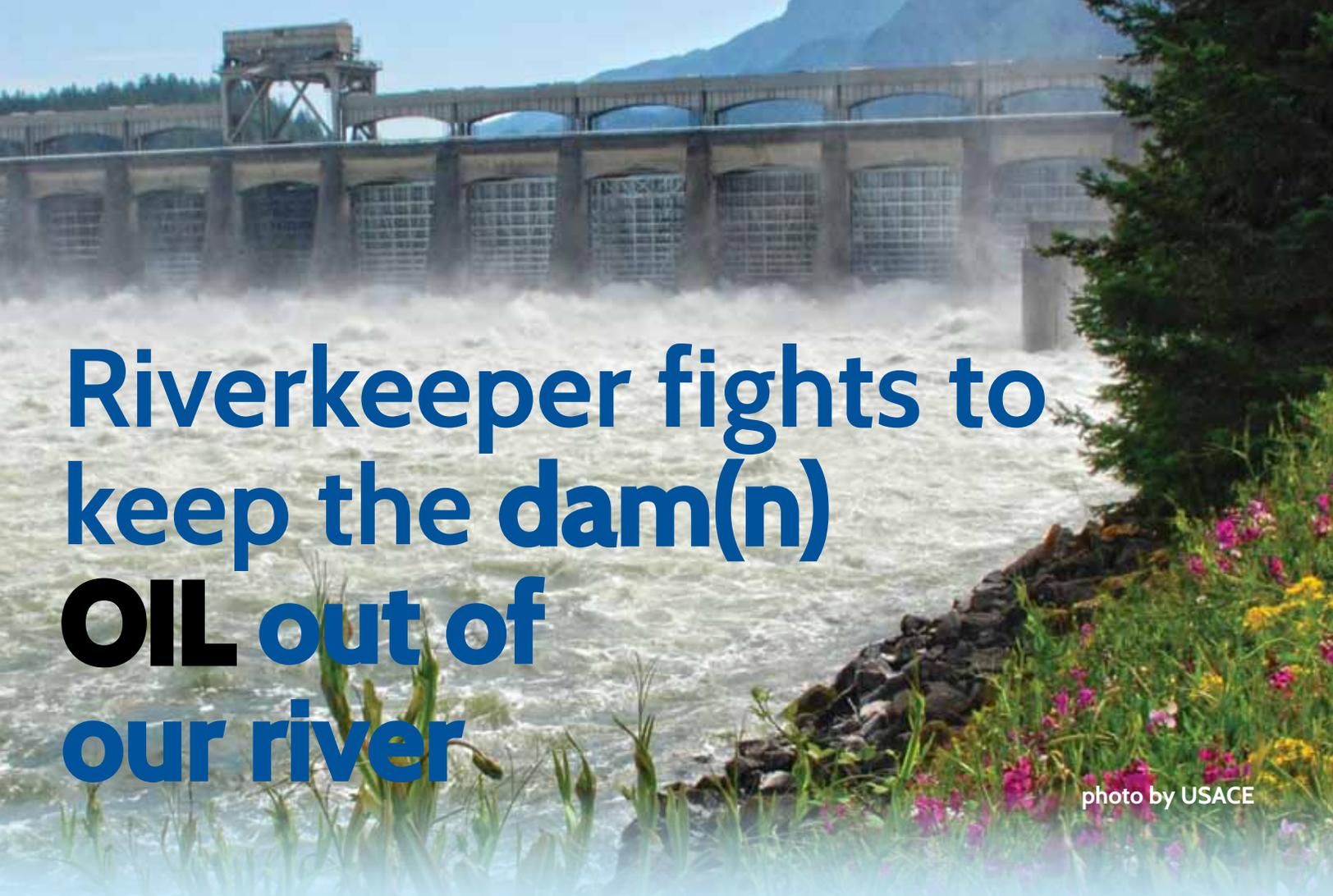
Riverkeeper and Allies Demand Prompt Action on a Generations-Long Problem

It's not every day that you see Hanford workers, health professionals, Columbia River advocates, and state agencies calling on the U.S. Department of Energy to redouble its efforts to clean up the Hanford nuclear site. In mid-April, over 100 Oregonians and Washingtonians joined together to ask tough questions about how to improve the clean-up at the Hanford site. Riverkeeper's Dan Serres helped lead a rally and press event to draw more attention to Hanford.

In coming months, the agencies will decide how much waste will be left behind in soils and groundwater near the Columbia River, and how future uses of the Hanford site and the Columbia could be impacted by those decisions. We'll be there to push for a cleaner Columbia.



Stay up-to-date on all Columbia River happenings by joining our mailing list at www.columbiariverkeeper.org/stay-informed.



Riverkeeper fights to keep the dam(n) OIL out of our river

photo by USACE

by Miles Johnson, *Clean Water Attorney*

Dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers routinely spill and leak oil into the water. Oil is harmful to fish and wildlife, and anybody who enjoys the river. Riverkeeper's attorneys researched the history of oil pollution from the dams and discovered that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers—the federal agency that operates most of the dams—routinely reported spills, but there was very little pressure from sister agencies to fix the problem. That's where we come in. As a public-interest, watchdog organization, we are not

controlled by federal politics or big corporations. We answer to you, our members, who support our work. In 2013, Riverkeeper filed suit to enforce the Clean Water Act and stop the oil releases into our river.

Why are the dams leaking oil into the Columbia? The dams are giant engines in the middle of the river and, like other engines, they use oil to run smoothly. One major problem is that the turbines are actually designed to continuously leak small amounts of oil; those leaks, and leaks from other dam machinery, have worsened with age and neglect. Oil spills also

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happen during dam maintenance and when adding or changing oil. The Army Corps' lack of accountability and culture of tolerance for oil spills compounds these problems.

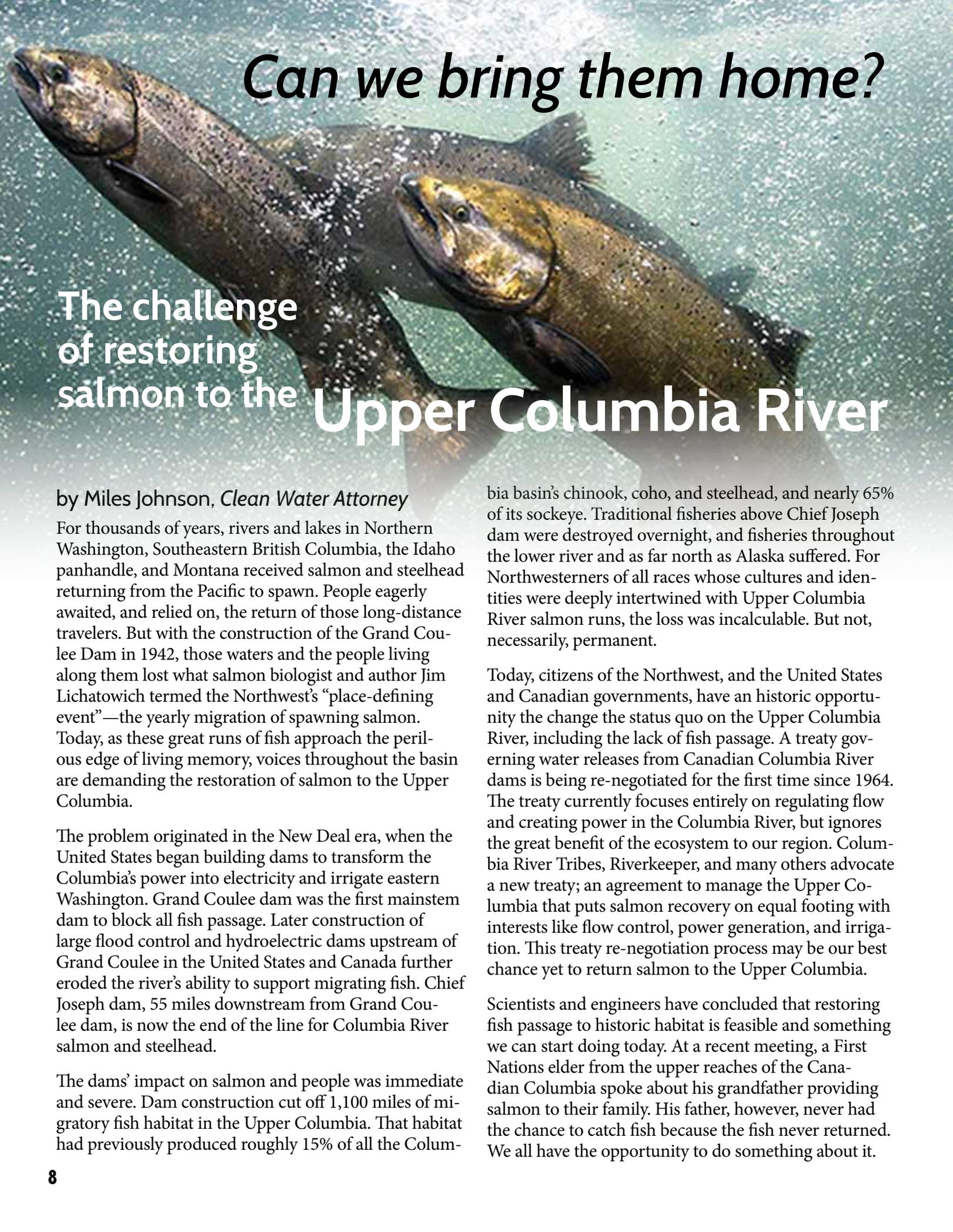
Additionally, the oil released from the dams sometimes contains extremely toxic chemicals called PCBs. PCBs were once used in a wide variety of products, including lubrication and cooling oils. PCBs accumulate in the bodies of humans and animals, where they can cause cancer and developmental disorders. In December 2009, the Army Corps spilled between 1,200 and 1,500 gallons of PCB-laden oil into the ground and the river at The Dalles dam. In 2012, the Army Corps spilled an estimated 1,680 gallons of PCB-contaminated oil from the Ice Harbor Dam into the lower Snake River. The concentration of PCBs in the oil spilled from Ice Harbor dam was 14,000,000% above the water quality standard.

Thanks to your support and the support of thousands of others who want less oil in the river, Riverkeeper's lawsuit will force the Army Corps to get Clean Wa-

ter Act permits for eight Columbia and Snake River dams. Those permits will place enforceable requirements on how the Army Corps handles and disposes of oil, and limit the total amount of oil the Army Corps can discharge. The permits will also subject the Army Corps to oversight by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the main federal agency responsible for preventing pollution. Finally, Riverkeeper is pushing the Army Corps to keep careful records of the total amount of oil put into and removed from each dam—so the public will know how much oil actually reaches our river. Additionally, we think this case will help set national precedent that leaky dams must comply with the Clean Water Act.

Challenging the Army Corps is not easy. But when we see a problem, we take action. Our river deserves better than dirty oil. Thank you for your support to make this possible.



A photograph of two salmon swimming underwater. The water is clear and blue-green, with light filtering through from above, creating a shimmering effect. The salmon are dark brown with silvery scales and are swimming towards the left of the frame. The top salmon is slightly ahead and higher than the bottom one.

Can we bring them home?

The challenge of restoring salmon to the Upper Columbia River

by Miles Johnson, *Clean Water Attorney*

For thousands of years, rivers and lakes in Northern Washington, Southeastern British Columbia, the Idaho panhandle, and Montana received salmon and steelhead returning from the Pacific to spawn. People eagerly awaited, and relied on, the return of those long-distance travelers. But with the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam in 1942, those waters and the people living along them lost what salmon biologist and author Jim Lichatowich termed the Northwest's "place-defining event"—the yearly migration of spawning salmon. Today, as these great runs of fish approach the perilous edge of living memory, voices throughout the basin are demanding the restoration of salmon to the Upper Columbia.

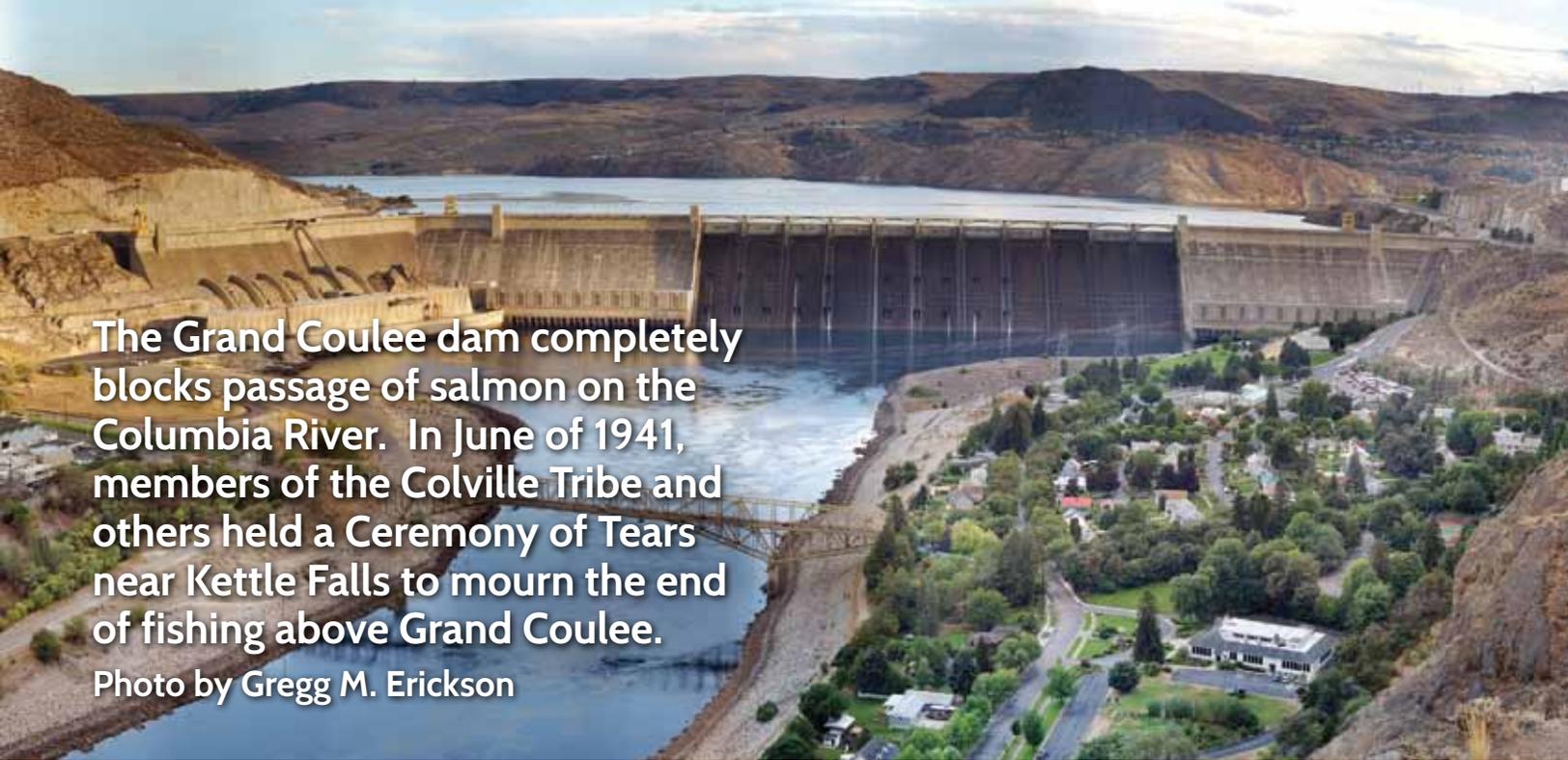
The problem originated in the New Deal era, when the United States began building dams to transform the Columbia's power into electricity and irrigate eastern Washington. Grand Coulee dam was the first mainstem dam to block all fish passage. Later construction of large flood control and hydroelectric dams upstream of Grand Coulee in the United States and Canada further eroded the river's ability to support migrating fish. Chief Joseph dam, 55 miles downstream from Grand Coulee dam, is now the end of the line for Columbia River salmon and steelhead.

The dams' impact on salmon and people was immediate and severe. Dam construction cut off 1,100 miles of migratory fish habitat in the Upper Columbia. That habitat had previously produced roughly 15% of all the Colum-

bia basin's chinook, coho, and steelhead, and nearly 65% of its sockeye. Traditional fisheries above Chief Joseph dam were destroyed overnight, and fisheries throughout the lower river and as far north as Alaska suffered. For Northwesterners of all races whose cultures and identities were deeply intertwined with Upper Columbia River salmon runs, the loss was incalculable. But not, necessarily, permanent.

Today, citizens of the Northwest, and the United States and Canadian governments, have an historic opportunity to change the status quo on the Upper Columbia River, including the lack of fish passage. A treaty governing water releases from Canadian Columbia River dams is being re-negotiated for the first time since 1964. The treaty currently focuses entirely on regulating flow and creating power in the Columbia River, but ignores the great benefit of the ecosystem to our region. Columbia River Tribes, Riverkeeper, and many others advocate a new treaty; an agreement to manage the Upper Columbia that puts salmon recovery on equal footing with interests like flow control, power generation, and irrigation. This treaty re-negotiation process may be our best chance yet to return salmon to the Upper Columbia.

Scientists and engineers have concluded that restoring fish passage to historic habitat is feasible and something we can start doing today. At a recent meeting, a First Nations elder from the upper reaches of the Canadian Columbia spoke about his grandfather providing salmon to their family. His father, however, never had the chance to catch fish because the fish never returned. We all have the opportunity to do something about it.



The Grand Coulee dam completely blocks passage of salmon on the Columbia River. In June of 1941, members of the Colville Tribe and others held a Ceremony of Tears near Kettle Falls to mourn the end of fishing above Grand Coulee.

Photo by Gregg M. Erickson

The River ReConnect mural along the Columbia River in Trail, British Columbia is an artistic vision of hope for salmon restoration. The Grand Coulee dam blocks salmon from reaching Trail, so this mural is the only salmon they have.



Hanford Radiation and Leaking LNG tanks: A day in the life of a Riverkeeper

by Dan Serres, *Conservation Director*

Touring a Hanford nuclear waste site and visiting a leaking liquefied natural gas (LNG) tank makes for an interesting day. My job could be called many things, but it is not dull. In April, I traveled to Eastern Washington to tour one of the Hanford site's most dangerous facilities and explore the area surrounding a recent LNG accident that prompted a large evacuation near Plymouth, Washington. While LNG development and Hanford cleanup seem unrelated, they share a common denominator: Hanford and LNG tanks both pose a risk to the Columbia River and the people who live, work, and fish nearby.

The Plutonium Tour

As a member of the Hanford Advisory Board (HAB), I joined two dozen colleagues to tour one of Hanford's

most dangerous facilities, the Plutonium Finishing Plant (PFP). The PFP was the final stop for processing plutonium "buttons"—the hockey-puck-sized pieces of plutonium used to arm nuclear weapons. Plutonium production generated massive quantities of nuclear waste, and the area around the PFP remains highly polluted.

During our tour, I heard fellow HAB members' stories about nuclear waste problems at the PFP: they spoke of fire risks, radioactive releases, unintended liquid waste discharges, and other problems that complicate the clean-up of the PFP. Standing in the sun, in North America's most contaminated nuclear site, I was unnerved by the blowing dust, the radioactive buildings, and the knowledge that plutonium and other dangerous chemicals polluted the soil beneath our feet.



Dan Serres on the
lower Columbia River

Thank you for supporting **Columbia Riverkeeper**. Each time I travel to Hanford or the lower Columbia, I see firsthand the importance of having a public-interest watchdog organization asking questions and demanding answers. **We couldn't do it without you.**



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Plutonium Finishing Plant. U.S. Department of Energy.

At the same time, I was inspired by the workers and activists who have devoted decades to accomplishing a thorough clean-up of the Hanford site. I'm proud of Riverkeeper's work as a watchdog organization to push for faster and more thorough Hanford clean-up, and seeing the problems first hand helps me educate our members and advocate more effectively. Weeks after our visit, I was jarred by news that the clean-up of the PFP was shuttered because of an accident. The accident generated a loud bang, an open flame, and prompted Hanford's clean-up workers to call on the U.S. Department of Energy demanding better safety protections.

At Hanford, the PFP is one of many sites where highly radioactive, long-lived nuclear pollution lingers. This waste will pollute the Columbia River unless clean-up efforts succeed in preventing nuclear and chemical contamination from percolating through Hanford's soils and groundwater toward the Columbia River.

Thank you for your support of Riverkeeper's work to clean up Hanford's nuclear waste. Each time I travel to Hanford, I see firsthand the importance of having a public-interest watchdog organization asking

questions and demanding answers. We couldn't do it without you.

This product was funded through a grant from the Washington State Department of Ecology. While these materials were reviewed for grant consistency, this does not necessarily constitute endorsement by Ecology.

More leaking tanks: the view from Plymouth, Washington

Not far from Hanford, I detoured to explore the recent LNG tank explosion and leak in Plymouth, Washington. Located close to the Columbia River in Eastern Washington, the Plymouth LNG tanks are a gas storage facility owned by Williams Northwest Pipeline. Williams is the company proposing two new pipelines that would export LNG from Coos Bay and Warrenton, Oregon. The explosion and fire breached a tank holding LNG, which is natural gas cooled to a liquid form at minus 260 degrees F. In response to the fire and leak, emergency responders evacuated a 2-mile radius around the Plymouth LNG facility, including over 1,000 agricultural workers and local residents. Fortunately, the breach in the tank was

small enough that leaking LNG repeatedly froze and plugged the hole in the tank.

Arriving a week after the incident, I was struck by the open terrain surrounding the LNG tanks at Plymouth. Although the tank that ruptured has the capacity to store more gas than the entire state of Oregon uses in a day, the access roads and public lands around the tanks were open and unrestricted.

As I pulled off Highway 14, the smell of natural gas from an odorizing station near the tanks permeated the air. Walking up the access road,



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I was jarred by a large green sign that identified the area as a public hunting zone, although the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife appropriately urged hunters not to discharge weapons within 100 yards of any equipment.

The Plymouth explosion justified the objections of residents threatened by proposed LNG development in the Columbia River estuary and along pipeline routes. Oregon LNG intends to build a massive, new industrial LNG export terminal in Warrenton, Oregon, at the mouth of the Columbia. The incident in Plymouth re-enforced many of the concerns raised by local activists about how schools, businesses, and residences would be forced to evacuate in the case of an LNG release.

As I left Plymouth, I was reminded of the incredible activists throughout Oregon and Washington who have prevented Oregon LNG, Bradwood LNG, and other projects from establishing new fossil fuel export terminals on the Lower Columbia River. I am grateful for a decade of their hard work and hopeful that the lessons we have learned will help us to keep the Columbia River Estuary, and all of Oregon, free of dangerous LNG export terminals.

What Happened at the Plymouth LNG Facility?

This April, an explosion and fire caused a large LNG storage tank at Plymouth, Washington, to rupture. Because the leak released flammable natural gas in a vapor cloud capable of drifting over miles, local residents were forced to evacuate. As the LNG vapor cloud expanded, local emergency responders evacuated a 2-mile radius near the site. Many nearby residents remained in shelters overnight because of the ongoing risk of a large gas fire and explosion.

According to the Tri-City Herald:

First responders had to wait for the natural gas to dissipate before entering the facility to investigate. That happened slowly, because the gas is cooled to minus 260 degrees. It froze as it leaked, plugging the hole, until the ambient temperature warmed the ice plug, allowing the liquid to continue to leak and vaporize...The cycle of freeze, thaw and vaporize repeated itself over and over again.

The incident at the Williams Northwest Pipeline Plymouth LNG storage facility has quietly faded from the headlines, despite its powerful implications for new LNG export proposals on the Oregon Coast. In Plymouth, Williams' LNG facility stores roughly 1 billion cubic feet of gas, much less than the total capacity of LNG export proposals in Warrenton and Coos Bay.

The Plymouth LNG incident demonstrates that a large LNG leak would endanger residents within miles of an LNG storage facility. The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission is investigating the leak at Plymouth, but the implications from the incident are clear: communities with existing or proposed LNG facilities such as Portland, Newport, Warrenton, and Coos Bay, should be ready for large-scale evacuations in the case of a major leak or fire.

What Does the Plymouth Incident Mean for LNG Exports on the Lower Columbia?

For years, Columbia Riverkeeper and our allies have demanded a detailed review of the public safety implications of building a large LNG export facility close to homes, businesses, and fishing grounds. In the wake of the Plymouth LNG leak and fire, Riverkeeper and our allies are pushing public officials to analyze the safety risks of building a large LNG facility so close to the people of Warrenton and Astoria.

Because Oregon LNG's terminal proposal is so large, the potential risk from a leak and fire extends beyond Warrenton, into the Columbia River shipping channel and into the City of Astoria. Riverkeeper is calling on the U.S. Coast Guard, the State of Oregon, and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to take a hard look at the public safety and environmental impacts of Oregon LNG's proposal.

The events in Plymouth demonstrate how a small community would have to react to a large LNG leak and fire. Clearly, the emergency response burden falls on small-town fire departments and other local first responders. Those agencies would be responsible for evacuating a huge area, encompassing most of Warrenton and

parts of Astoria, in the case of an accident at the proposed Oregon LNG terminal.

Since 2005, Clatsop County residents have fiercely opposed Oregon LNG. The accident at Plymouth reinforces the importance of winning the fight against Oregon LNG – a fight we can win by persuading our state and federal agencies to support Clatsop County's rejection of Oregon LNG. Thank you for your longstanding support of Riverkeeper's fight to protect our region from LNG. Together we can preserve family farms, salmon habitat, and safe communities.



Plymouth LNG tanks visible below Public Hunting sign.

Eat Fish, Hold the Pollution

Why Washington should protect human health with new limits on toxic pollution

by Brett VandenHeuvel, *Executive Director*

Now that my one-year-old has a few teeth, he can eat salmon like you wouldn't believe. He loves it. Our family eats Columbia River salmon about once a week, especially in the summertime. I catch a few (very few) and buy fresh from Native American fishermen here in the Gorge. Washington's limits on how much toxic pollution can be discharged into our waterways assumes people only eat 6.5 grams per day. That's 0.014 pounds of fish, barely a nibble. As a

result, Washington's clean water laws aren't designed to protect people who regularly eat fish or shellfish.

Washington, I'm embarrassed to say, has the nation's weakest "fish consumption rate," which controls the amount of pollution allowed in the Columbia River, Puget Sound, and all of our waterways. Under the Clean Water Act, the theory goes that if your state's residents eat few fish, than industry can dump a lot





Columbia Riverkeeper is working to reduce toxic pollution in fish through:

1. Better laws: Working with Columbia River tribes, Riverkeeper pushed Oregon to adopt the nation's most protective limits on toxic pollution. We spent many days in Salem butting heads with industry lobbyists and educating decisionmakers.

2. Cracking down on illegal pollution: Riverkeeper's Clean Water Attorney is dedicated to identifying (thanks for your help!) and stopping illegal pollution. Sometimes a letter works, sometimes we must go to court.

3. An ounce of prevention: The best way to solve pollution problems is to prevent new sources of pollution. We are taking a stand against dirty oil and coal now because we know how hard it will be to clean up the mess later.

Take Action Today!

Tell Washington leaders to make healthy fish a priority in our state by adopting accurate water quality standards to reduce toxic pollution. Reject industry loopholes.

Call Governor Inslee at 360.902.4111 and Ecology Director Maia Bellon at 360.407.7001. More info is available on our website's "Toxic-free Fish Campaign" page.

of pollution into the water. If people eat a lot of fish, industry can dump less. Oregon, to its credit, decided to protect its residents by increasing Oregon's fish-consumption rate to 175 grams per day, 2500% more protective than Washington. There are numerous studies showing that Washingtonians eat a lot of fish, particularly Native Americans. Fishermen, crabbers, localvores, foodies, and my one-year-old all consume more than 6.5 grams per day. Isn't it time for Washington to limit toxic pollution so we are not sacrificing their health?

Industrial polluters caution against catching up with Oregon and call the fish consumption rate "an arbitrary number." As a Clean Water Act expert who understands the direct connection between the fish-consumption rate and the amount of toxic pollution going into our river, I know this is wrong. As a father serving my kid salmon tonight, I am deeply disturbed that politics and greed are interfering with science and human health.

The Seattle Times Editorial Board and industrial polluters recently raised the radical loophole that, regardless of the fish-consumption number, Washington could simply raise its acceptable cancer risk from 1 in a million to 1 in 100,000. In other words, create a state policy to let cancer ravage 10 times more people than the law currently allows. It stuns me that educated people would even say this publicly. The slogan "Cancer Risk, We Don't Care" would not work well at the Pike Place Market or Vancouver restaurants.

We can do better than this industry loophole. It's time to get to work on reducing toxic pollution. Washington is a state of innovators. Today, Governor Inslee has the opportunity to reduce toxic pollution and stand up for Washingtonians. It's the right thing to do.

It's not easy to take on big polluters and we could not do it without your support!

Thank you. Our members make a difference every day by alerting our staff to river issues, contacting decisionmakers, and providing necessary funding for our lawyers and scientists.



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Coal train in the
Columbia River Gorge