



COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN  
RESTORATION PROGRAM

## ***The Columbia River Basin Restoration WORKING GROUP***

### **THE COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN IS A NATIONAL TREASURE**

The Columbia River Basin is one of North America's largest watersheds, spanning nearly 260,000 square miles. It includes parts of British Columbia, Canada, and seven U.S. states including significant portions of Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington.

The Basin provides vital environmental, economic, cultural, and social benefits to millions of people in the Pacific Northwest, including tribal, recreational, and commercial fisheries; agriculture; forestry; recreation; and electric power generation.

Human activities in the Basin have contributed to impaired water quality that can affect people's health and threaten fish and wildlife species survival. Tribal fish consumers, subsistence fishers, and other high fish consumers are more exposed to toxic contaminants in fish and wildlife and can suffer increased health risks, making toxic contamination in the Basin a significant public health issue.

### **EPA IS COMMITTED TO TRIBAL HEALTH PROTECTION AND BUILDING CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCE**

The Columbia River Basin Restoration Program is focused on reducing toxics in the Basin to better protect the health of high fish consumers, especially tribal fish consumers. EPA's commitment to tribal health protection is part of the EPA's federal trust responsibility to tribal governments. By working to quantifiably reduce toxics in the environment, and for tribal lands and waters and other underserved communities, the Columbia River Basin Restoration Program will directly and indirectly protect human health for people throughout the Columbia River Basin.

Climate change, both ongoing and future impacts, creates significant risks to human health, the environment, cultural resources, the economy, and quality of life. Climate change impacts are expected to create further challenges to protecting human health and welfare and the environment. Toxics reduction will provide climate resilience for human health and the Columbia River Basin ecosystem by reducing aquatic ecosystem and human health stressors in an environment increasingly stressed by severe climatic events.

### **A HISTORY OF COLLABORATION TO REDUCE TOXICS IN THE BASIN**

For years, EPA and many partners have been working together to reduce toxic contamination in the Columbia River Basin. In 2005, EPA convened tribal, federal, state, local, industry, and non-governmental partners to form

the collaborative Columbia River Toxics Reduction Working Group to share information, coordinate, and develop actions to identify, better understand and reduce toxics in the Basin.

The success of this Basin-wide collaboration to reduce toxics created the foundation for the 2016 amendment to the Clean Water Act, Section 123, creating the Columbia River Basin Restoration Program. The legislation directed EPA to:

1. Establish a Columbia River Basin Restoration Grant Program to support voluntary actions to reduce and assess toxics throughout the Basin; and
2. Establish a Working Group representative of states, tribal governments, and other entities in the Basin.

Congress recognized the success of EPA's ongoing Basin-wide partnership and information sharing to assess and reduce toxics across a large and diverse Basin, and directed EPA to establish the Working Group as a key component of the CWA Section 123.

### **COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN RESTORATION FUNDING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

*EPA's Columbia River Basin Grant Program provides funds for eligible entities seeking to pursue environmental protection and restoration programs throughout the Basin. Eligible entities include state, tribal, and local governments; regional water pollution control organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and soil and water conservation districts. Funded work must be for the purpose of environmental protection and restoration activities within the Columbia River Basin and may include programs, projects, and studies. In 2020, EPA funded 14 inaugural projects that address the following four priorities:*

1. Increase monitoring and access data from monitoring;
2. Reduce stormwater and agricultural runoff;
3. Reduce toxics through small scale cleanup of non-CERCLA (also known as Superfund) contaminated sites;
4. Promote citizen engagement, education, and involvement to increase pollution prevention actions.

*A second round of Clean Water Act Section 123 Columbia River Basin Restoration Funding Assistance will be awarded in 2022, based on the same priority areas.*

**COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN  
RESTORATION WORKING  
GROUP MEMBERS**  
**MARCH 2022**

- City of Vancouver
- Clark County
- Clark Fork Coalition
- Columbia Insight
- Columbia Riverkeeper
- Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde
- Eugene Water and Electric Board
- Hood River Soil and Water Conservation District
- Idaho Conservation League
- Idaho Power
- James Mc Atee
- Ken Bailey, Orchard View Farms
- Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
- Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership
- Missoula City-County Water Quality District
- Montana Trout Unlimited
- Nez Perce Tribe
- Oregon Association of Clean Water Agencies
- Pacific Northwest Waterways Association
- Port of Portland
- Port of Vancouver
- Salmon-Safe
- State of Idaho
- State of Montana
- State of Oregon
- State of Washington
- Walla Walla Watershed Council
- Yakama Indian Nation

## ABOUT THE COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN RESTORATION WORKING GROUP

In October 2020, EPA transitioned the Columbia River Toxics Reduction Working Group into the Clean Water Act Section 123 Columbia River Basin Restoration Working Group, creating the representative collaboration required by Act. The goal of the Working Group is to understand and reduce toxics across the Basin. The Working Group reflects the governmental, geographic, cultural, and economic diversity of the Basin and includes representatives from tribal governments, states, industry, utilities, non-governmental organizations, and others.



October 2019 Columbia R. Basin Toxics Reduction Working Group Meeting Attendees (Photo Credit: Peter Murchie)

The Working Group meets two times each year, led and coordinated by EPA. During these meetings, EPA and Working Group members collaborate to:

- Exchange information on implementation of CWA Section 123, Columbia River Basin Restoration Program,
- Share relevant information on toxics reduction around the Basin,
- Learn about new science and toxics monitoring efforts,
- Coordinate ongoing work across the Basin, and
- Create opportunities for cooperation and resource sharing.

Working Group meetings are open to the public, and anyone may participate. Meeting summaries and presentation materials are available on EPA's Columbia River website. The Working Group has developed a number of technical and informational products over the years (also available on EPA's website). These include:

- 2009 State of River Report,
- 2010 Columbia River Toxics Reduction Action Plan,
- 2014 Strategy for Measuring, Documenting and Reducing Chemicals of Emerging Concern,
- 2019 Status Report Update: Columbia River Basin Toxics Reduction,

- 2019 Story Map: Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons – Locations in the Columbia River Basin Where the Toxics Could Be Affecting Fish and Wildlife,
- 2020 Columbia River Basin Toxic Contaminants Reference List,
- 2020 Toxic-Impaired Waterbodies on 303d Lists in the Columbia River Basin,
- 2020 Contaminants of Concern Framework, and
- 2021 Columbia River Basin Restoration Program Story Map.

EPA will continue to share information with the Working Group on the status and successes of grants funded through CWA Section 123, and future grant opportunities.

EPA invited a broad and diverse range of entities from across the Basin to participate in the Working Group, including: Governors of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana; 16 tribal governments; local and regional government agencies; industry and utility associations; soil and water conservation districts; non-governmental organizations; and interested private citizens. Participation in the Working Group is voluntary. As of March 2022, 28 entities have joined the CWA Section 123 working group.

In addition to these members, more than 300 individuals from across the Basin are invited to attend and participate in Working Group meetings. EPA provides regular update emails to the Working Group and broader email list which includes updates on implementation of CWA Section 123, funding opportunities, information on peer reviewed research, educational opportunities, and other information. Anyone is invited to be included on the Working Group email list.



### For more information, please contact:

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Visit EPA's [Columbia River Basin website](#) and the [Columbia River Basin Restoration Program Story Map](#).