

COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY NEGOTIATION HEADS FOR CONCLUSION

THE HEALTH OF THE WATERSHED HANGS IN THE BALANCE

On April 19, the U.S. government held a listening session on the Columbia River Treaty. A 1964 agreement that guides how the U.S. and Canada co-manage the international Columbia River Watershed and share its benefits. This online event came just prior to the 17th round of formal negotiations and was the first since 2019.

Active negotiations about the treaty's "modernization" began in May 2018. Recent statements by both countries suggest that an initial framework or agreement in principle on an updated treaty could emerge within months.

A significant majority of those who spoke at the listening session called for urgent improvements to the treaty with a vital focus on "Ecosystem-based Function," the health of the river, as a new primary purpose, co-equal to its original purposes of hydropower production and flood risk management.

The Columbia River Treaty primarily concerns the management of three large dams and their reservoirs in Canada and Montana's Libby Dam, whose reservoir stretches across the border. The management of these dams, which are part of the much larger interconnected hydro system, plays a significant role in shaping downstream river conditions.

The dams also block anadromous salmon and steelhead from reaching their ancestral habitat. In Canada and Northwest Montana, the construction of these dams inundated nearly 500 square miles of ecologically, culturally, and agriculturally rich lands and displaced more than a dozen communities.

We now have a rare opportunity to adjust and improve the treaty as well as its management for the sake of the river and its human and other biological communities.

In addition to a new treaty purpose, the treaty's governance systems should be expanded to ensure that Ecosystem-based Function is effectively implemented. The United States and Canada need to agree on international mechanisms to make this happen in the modernized treaty.

Currently, each country appoints an "Entity" to represent it in treaty implementation. The U.S. Entity includes only the Bonneville Power Administration (for hydropower production) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (for flood control). **There is currently no VOICE FOR THE RIVER** on the U.S. Entity—and this must change.

We must urgently advocate that a new member or members be added to the U.S. Entity, a federal agency with a focus on the environment and/or Tribal nations/entities, one(s) that ensure Ecosystem Function will be effectively represented and implemented as a new primary purpose of the Columbia River Treaty.

You will find more information about the treaty, its history, and the primary issues in the current negotiations as well as videos of Sierra Club's "Ethics and Treaty Project" and its "One River, Ethics Matter" conferences at www.riverethics.org.



Paige Kenney and Morton Alexander also helped us to table at the Pride Festival the Portraits with Salmon effort.

WE NEED MORE SPOKANE RIVER STORIES

Again, we issue a call for more Spokane River Stories. If you have a short-short story, anecdote or poem, or something more visual, like a photograph or original artwork that centers on the Spokane River, we'd love you to submit it. We will publish them either on our website or in our newsletter, Nature's Advocate.

Submit to spokaneriverstories@gmail.com



Contact Sierra Club's Spokane River Team for further questions:

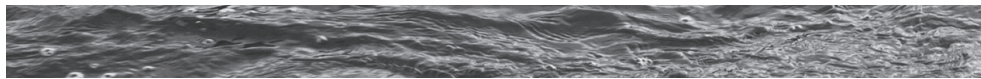
John Osborn john@waterplanet.ws

John Allison jdallison@eahjlaw.com

Tom Soeldner waltsoe@gmail.com

Rachael Osborn rdpaschal@earthlink.net

Erin Dascher erindascher@gmail.com



OUTINGS:

The Upper Columbia River Group—Sierra Club seeks people who would like to co-lead one or more Outings. Do you have knowledge of outdoor areas in this region? Maybe you know how to identify plants or wildlife or birds. Perhaps you are an amateur geologist or wildlife photographer. If you think that you'd like to help us expand our Outings schedule, drop us a line! Contact Carolyn Leon at lonestar4@aol.com

Our most recent Outing was at Slavin Conservation Area on the West Plains on May 20, 2023. It was led by Carolyn Leon and Dr. Erin Dascher of the Geosciences Department at Eastern Washington University. Dr. Dascher was able to provide expert commentary on the wetlands at Slavin.

Our next Outing will be announced at our meetup site: www.meetup.com/exploring-the-inland-northwest-with-sierra-club/events/293263052/



Slavin Conservation Area.



PRIDE FESTIVAL JUNE 2023

The Upper Columbia River Group was pleased to table at the Spokane Pride Festival 2023 on Saturday, June 10. We collected about 50 signatures and spoke to many other interested attendees. Instead of swag, we gave our free Portraits with Salmon shown on the front page.



Sisters Whitney and Olivia Longie, UCRG-Sierra Club volunteers, handled the Portraits with Salmon record keeping at the Pride Festival.

UPPER COLUMBIA RIVER GROUP

Executive Committee

Morton Alexander

mortonalexander@sisna.net

Fred Christ

fredchrist@msn.com

Erin Dascher

erindascher@gmail.com

Kathy Dixon

sotiriabellou2014@gmail.com

Lora Langford

lora_langford@yahoo.com

Carolyn Leon

lonestar4@aol.com

Monica Lowney

monicalowney14@yahoo.com

Rachael Paschal Osborn

Spokane River Project

Barbara Rasero

Fran Dixon Zabawa

Newsletter & Layout Editors

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Upper Columbia
River Group

WE NEED A VOICE FOR THE RIVER

WE HAVE PROVEN THAT WE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD. UNFORTUNATELY, WE HAVE NOT LEARNED TO CHANGE OURSELVES WHEN IT COMES TO OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NATURAL WORLD.

By Tom Soeldner

For all the changes—what we have chosen to call “progress”—that the human community has made in the NW, and more specifically made with reference to the Columbia River and its watershed over the last one hundred years, we find ourselves today depleted in the natural resources—the salmon and lamprey, the floodplains, clean and fast-flowing rivers and all the life that depends on them, the things that are the very source of our way of life and wealth. And we are threatened by climate change and its uncompromising challenges. All of this is largely due to the shape of what we call “progress.”

The longest and best keepers of our region’s natural resource wealth, Native American tribes, have again and again been robbed and sidelined when it came to the resources they have stewarded for millennia. It is past time for us to listen to the tribes and trust them when it comes to restoring the natural blessings of the river. They do the best work for this river because they have the history and the heart for it as well as being second to none with the science. We need their voice and other voices which represent the river and its health in any decisions and any future governance of the Columbia River system. **WE NEED A VOICE FOR THE RIVER.**

We have proven that we can change the world. Unfortunately, we have not learned to change ourselves when it comes to our relationship with the natural world; we have not learned to honor its wisdom. We have not learned to find our place within it. The United States and Canada—we all—need “Ecosystem-based function” as a third primary purpose for any treaty and any governance for the Columbia River and its watershed.

And let us be clear: these are not narrowly conceived domestic issues for the United States. These are about how we here decide to live together, U.S. and Canadian people and governments and corporations, in a world imperiled by our desire for control. Changing ourselves is the change that will most surely benefit all the stakeholders in the watershed, as well as their children and their children’s children. ■

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Upper Columbia River Group—Sierra Club is seeking nominees for service on our Executive Committee.

The successful candidates will have an interest or background in environmental activism and enjoy the give and take of working with other activists. Some of our members have special expertise, but many are simply interested folks who love the outdoors and are willing to work on sub-committees and attend our monthly meetings. Usually, work on our Executive Committee runs to about five hours a month. Currently, our members work on behalf of the health of the Colville Forest and the Spokane River as well as the Columbia River watershed; other concerns include toxic sludge, climate change, and more. We are currently ramping up the educational hikes that we call Outings. We table at various local events, most recently at the Wild and Scenic Rivers Film Festival on May 25 and at the Spokane Pride Festival on June 10.

The Sierra Club was established in 1892, the oldest and largest environmental organization in the United States and Puerto Rico. The Sierra Club is a volunteer-driven non-profit organization.

If this volunteer opportunity sounds attractive to you, or if you know someone you’d like to nominate, **please contact Kathy Dixon at spokaneriverstories@gmail.com** ■



Deb Abrahamson looks out over the Spokane River as it passes by Spokane tribal grounds. “Before Grand Coulee Dam was built, this was a fast-moving river” – and a river full of salmon. The U.S.-Canada Columbia River Treaty affects all of us in the entire Columbia River watershed.

To include tribal voices and the health of the river in treaty negotiations, please weigh in at **columbiarivertreaty.state.gov**.

To see the video from which these still shots were taken, go to **www.sierraclub.org/washington/upper-columbia-river/water-life-its-sacred**



UPPER COLUMBIA RIVER GROUP

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Spokane, WA 99210

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Explore, Enjoy, and Protect the Planet.

CLEANING UP THE SPOKANE RIVER

OUR WORK CONTINUES

Sierra Club and the Center for Environmental Law & Policy (CELP) have waged a 10-year legal battle to get a mandated cleanup plan for the cancer-causing PCBs polluting the river. Finally, we have one. In December 2021 a federal judge approved the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) agreement to issue a **Total Minimum Daily Load (TMDL)*** for PCBs in the Spokane River in accordance with the demands of the federal Clean Water Act. The Spokane Tribe of Indians intervened in support of our federal lawsuit.

Our settlement with the EPA comes after decades of inaction by the State of Washington. From protecting flows to cleaning up pollution, the State has been a derelict trustee of the Spokane River. Increasingly, tribal sovereigns are stepping up where state sovereigns are failing.

The EPA is currently busy with the research and study which will result in a legal TMDL for PCBs in the Spokane River by September 2024. This will set legal limits for the affected waters while still permitting a very low amount of this cancer-causing pollutant. Sierra Club continues to monitor that work via its Spokane River Team (SRT). In addition to its own oversight

of the process, our SRT has engaged a PCB water quality expert who has familiarized himself with the history and current status of the work and will review the final TMDL when it is issued.

There remains reason for some concern, however, since the EPA plans to hand off implementation of the TMDL to Washington State's Department of Ecology (WaDOE). In the past, WaDOE has proposed "variances" for polluters whereby they could take extended periods of time with no real end in sight to meet their obligations under the Clean Water Act. We think giving a completed TMDL to WaDOE for implementation is a mistake and, as in the past, will likely lead to further delay in cleaning up the river.

For example, WaDOE has also supported the establishment and the work of the Spokane River Regional Toxics Task Force, which the federal court determined was not a legal alternative for issuing a TMDL for PCBs. Now that the EPA will set a TMDL, the work of this task force is "wrapping up." However, WaDOE is now interested in a new "community-based advisory group" to continue a collaboration that has served to delay cleaning up the river in the past. We think WaDOE already has sufficient tools to engage the public and all interested parties in the work of implementing an EPA TMDL.

The Spokane River is, and always has been, the center of human activity in the region, — below is a picture of the folks crossing the river at the June 12 Pride Parade.



Your local Upper Columbia River Group—Sierra Club will keep you advised of developments as cleanup efforts proceed. Watch future newsletters and signup for notifications via our Facebook Page. To contact the Spokane River Team, send an email to erindascher@gmail.com.

** ("The objective of a TMDL is to determine the loading capacity of the waterbody and to allocate that load among different pollutant sources so that the appropriate control actions can be taken and water quality standards achieved. The TMDL process is important for improving water quality because it serves as a link in the chain between water quality standards and implementation of control actions designed to attain those standards.")*