

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Columbia Riverkeeper Reveals Army Corps' Dirty Secret: Chronic Oil Pollution Seeping from Columbia & Snake River Dams**

HOOD RIVER, OR— Oil pollution spilling and leaking from hydroelectric dams on the Columbia and Snake River is a chronic problem. Columbia Riverkeeper discovered the long-term illegal pollution from dams, and today filed a lawsuit to hold the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers accountable for its pollution problem. According to the nonprofit watchdog organization, the Corps has a history of both acute spills and chronic leaks of oil and other pollution from dams including Bonneville, The Dalles, John Day, and Ice Harbor.

“The Columbia River is a treasure and we need to stop dirty oil pollution from the dams,” explains Brett VandenHeuvel, Columbia Riverkeeper’s Executive Director. “For years and years, the Corps has allowed oil pollution to flow into the Columbia River. There is no excuse for a federal agency to ignore clean water laws that protect people and wildlife from dirty oil and other pollution.”

Riverkeeper’s lawsuit describes dozens of oil spills and chronic oil leaks at the dams. For example, in 2011 and 2012 the Corps reported discharging over 1,500 gallons of PCB-laden transformer oil at the Ice Harbor Dam on the Snake River. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, PCBs cause cancer, as well as a variety of other adverse health effects on the immune system, reproductive system, nervous system, and endocrine system.<sup>i</sup> The oil from the Ice Harbor spill contained PCBs at levels 14,000,000% greater than state and federal chronic water quality standards.

“PCBs are highly toxic and don’t go away,” explains VandenHeuvel. “While the government banned the manufacture of PCBs decades ago, the PCBs are still showing up in oil coming from the Corps’ dams. We are very concerned about the impacts of toxic oil pollution on salmon and the families that rely on the Columbia and Snake Rivers for sustenance.”

According to the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA), “[s]pilled oil can harm living things because its chemical constituents are poisonous. This can affect organisms both from internal exposure to oil through ingestion or inhalation and from external exposure through skin and eye irritation. Oil can also smother some small species of fish or invertebrates and coat feathers and fur, reducing birds’ and mammals’ ability to maintain their body temperatures.”<sup>ii</sup>

“We are calling on the Corps to come clean,” states Lauren Goldberg, Staff Attorney for Riverkeeper. “The dams are part of a larger pollution problem on the Columbia River, and everyone—including the Corps—needs to do their part to make our rivers safe for swimming and fishing.”

Riverkeeper’s lawsuit alleges that the Corps has violated the Clean Water Act over the last seven years by discharging oil without a permit. “Because the Corps has skirted the law, the Corps fails to monitor and report pollution in a manner that enables the public to fully understand the extent and severity of the problem,” explains Goldberg.

Riverkeeper is represented by the legal team at Seattle-based Smith & Lowney PLLC, <http://www.smithandlowney.com/>.

### **About Columbia Riverkeeper**

Columbia Riverkeeper’s mission is to protect and restore the water quality of the Columbia River and all life connected to it, from the headwaters to the Pacific Ocean. The organization promotes a diverse coalition of people working to restore a Columbia River where people can safely catch fish and children can play without fear of toxic exposure.

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<sup>i</sup> U.S. EPA, Basic Information: Polychlorinated Biphenols,  
<http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/hazard/tsd/pcbs/pubs/about.htm>.

<sup>ii</sup> NOAA, Office of Response and Restoration, How Oil Effects Fish and Wildlife in Marine Environments,  
<http://response.restoration.noaa.gov/oil-and-chemical-spills/oil-spills/how-oil-harms-animals-and-plants-marine-environments.html>.