Contact
Lorri Epstein
Water Quality Director, Columbia Riverkeeper
lorri@columbiariverkeeper.org | 541.399.0769
columbiariverkeeper.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STUDY SHOWS ALARMING LEVELS OF TOXICS IN COLUMBIA RIVER FISH

Data on Fish Consumed by Ethnic Communities Sheds Light on Environmental Justice Issue

Sept. 29, 2014 (Portland, OR) – Columbia Riverkeeper announces its Phase 2 results from the ***"Is Your Fish Toxic?" Study*** measuring toxic pollution in five different fish intended for the dinner table. Findings from these Columbia River fish show alarming levels of heavy metals, toxic flame retardants, cancer-causing PCBs, and endocrine disrupting chemicals.

"Fish advisories are not enough. We need immediate reduction and prevention of toxic pollution entering our river to protect the health of our communities," said Lorri Epstein, Water Quality Director with Columbia Riverkeeper.

Through interviews with participants, Riverkeeper found that ethnic, immigrant, and low income populations are eating fish with unsafe levels of toxic pollution. Contributing factors for increased risk include higher fish consumption rates, and fish-preparation styles. For example, the Cambodian American fisherman who provided shad for the study, fishes for his parents who cook the whole fish in soups and stews. Not removing internal organs, skin, head and tail increase exposure to toxic contaminants. Another fisherman from Kyrgyzstan eats carp twice a week, while the EPA would recommend limiting consumption to less than one fish meal per month based on the PCB levels found in his fish.

"The fact that some Columbia River fish are unsafe to feed your family presents a real environmental justice issue," said Epstein. "Posting warning signs is not the answer. Many people are unaware of the warnings or will continue to eat fish due to cultural and economic reasons. The top priority must be cleaning up our rivers. Our data show extremely high levels of toxic contaminants in these fish, and we need to consider the individual stories and families interwoven with the results of this scientific data."

Riverkeeper's testing revealed that sampled Columbia River fish contain unsafe levels of heavy metals like mercury and arsenic, PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), and toxic flame retardants known as PBDEs (polybrominated diphenyl ethers). These contaminants are known endocrine disruptors that can increase cancer risk and wreak havoc on hormone, reproductive and development systems in both human and animals.

Key findings:

- Walleye from the Multnomah Channel contained PCBs 175 times the EPA limit for unrestricted consumption.

- Shad caught near Bonneville dam contained endocrine disrupting flame retardants and heavy metals.
- Carp near Vancouver, Washington, contained PCBs 30 times the EPA limit for unrestricted consumption, mercury 3.5 times the EPA limit, as well as flame retardants and other heavy metals.
- Steelhead and shad, which spend part of their lives in the ocean, did not contain detectable PCBs but did have high levels of mercury as well as flame retardants.

Riverkeeper's data is consistent with previous scientific findings. The U.S. Geological Survey found comparable high levels of toxic contaminants in the Columbia River in everything from sediments, to resident fish to osprey eggs. The EPA released a report concluding that the Columbia River exceeds the safe level for PCBs, DDT, mercury, and flame retardants.

To read more information about this study visit bit.ly/isyourfishtoxic.

###

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. Representing a diverse coalition of members and interests, Columbia Riverkeeper works to restore a Columbia River where people can safely eat the fish they catch, and where children can swim without fear of toxic exposure. The organization is a member of Waterkeeper Alliance, the world's fastest growing environmental movement, uniting more than 200 Waterkeeper organizations worldwide and focusing citizen action on issues that affect our waterways, from pollution to climate change. For more information go to columbiariverkeeper.org.