

COLUMBIA RIVERKEEPER®

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Currents



CHALLENGE RISING TO THE CHALLENGE



Columbia Riverkeeper protects and restores the water quality of the Columbia River and all life connected to it, from the headwaters to the Pacific Ocean.

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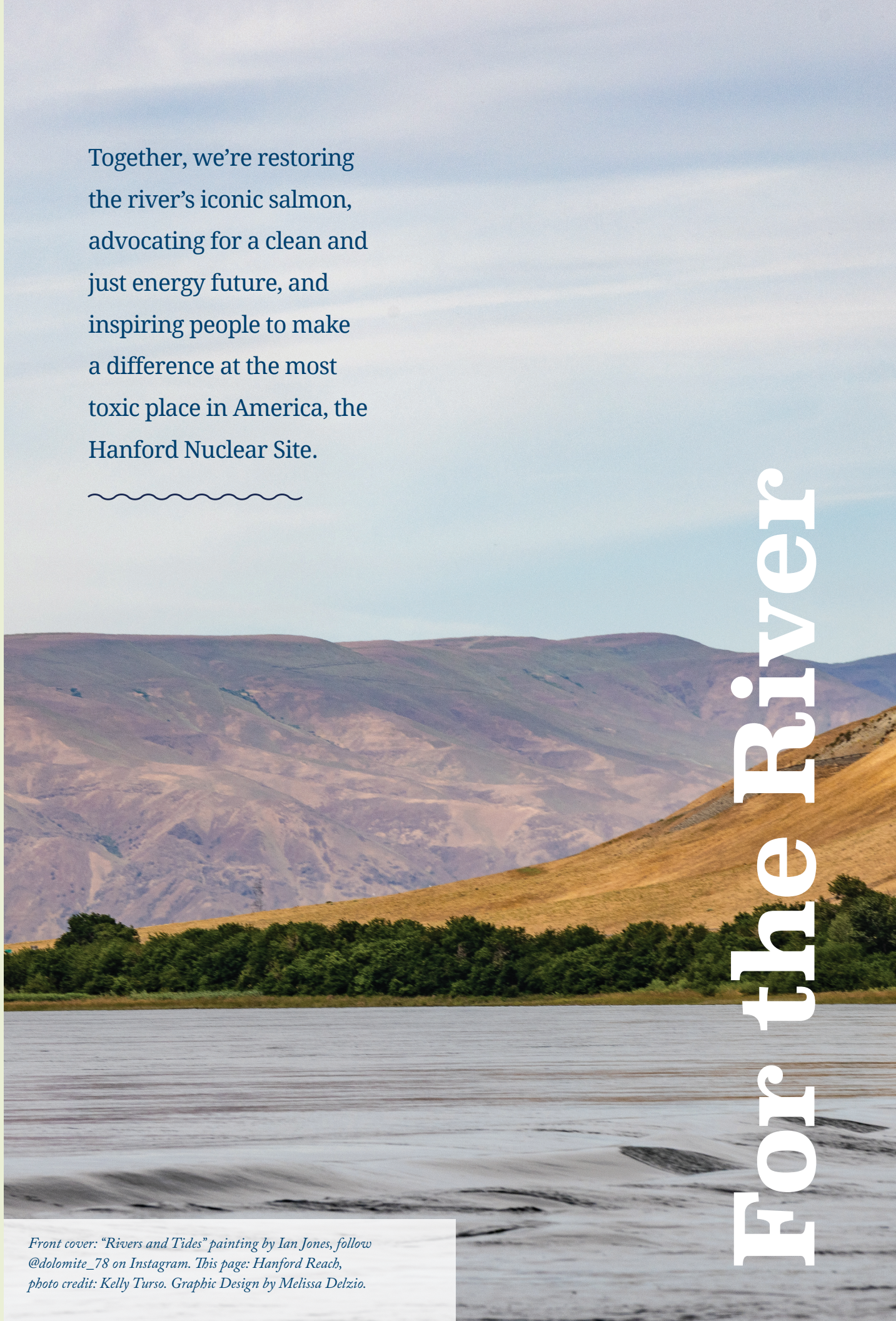
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Together, we're restoring the river's iconic salmon, advocating for a clean and just energy future, and inspiring people to make a difference at the most toxic place in America, the Hanford Nuclear Site.



For the River

Front cover: "Rivers and Tides" painting by Ian Jones, follow @dolomite_78 on Instagram. This page: Hanford Reach, photo credit: Kelly Turso. Graphic Design by Melissa Delzio.

Do you dream of finding solutions to the climate crisis? How about slashing greenhouse gas pollution by challenging one of North America's biggest fossil fuel infrastructure corporations? Columbia Riverkeeper turns your dreams into action—and results.

Our staff includes experts on environmental laws and community engagement. As a supporter, you are an important part of our team working to tackle the climate crisis. Your donations make so many important initiatives possible, building on two decades of victories and movement building.

Thanks to you, Columbia Riverkeeper and partners can:

- **Go head-to-head in court** with TC Energy, the company behind the Keystone XL pipeline and backer of the GTN Xpress pipeline expansion proposal.
- **Support rural communities and file creative legal challenges**, including one to prevent a refinery that would become one of Oregon's largest greenhouse gas polluters.
- Organize people in urban and rural river communities to **speak up for salmon, clean water, and a future free of fossil fuels**.
- **Engage and center** affected community members to inspire decisionmakers to take action.
- **Challenge** polluters, the fossil fuel industry, and the government in court.
- **Reveal** corporate secrets and pitch hard-hitting stories to regional and national reporters.
- **Advocate and lobby** elected officials for clean water, strong salmon runs, and a just transition from fossil fuels.

This issue of *Currents* brings you the latest on how we rise to the many challenges facing the Columbia, working in solidarity with Tribes and river communities. Together, we're restoring the river's iconic salmon, advocating for a clean and just energy future, and inspiring people to make a difference at the most toxic place in America, the Hanford Nuclear Site. You'll also get acquainted with one of my heroes: Columbia Riverkeeper Board President Emily Washines. Emily's vision, creativity, and optimism shine through in her interview with Pulitzer-nominated journalist and author Jacqueline Keeler.

For our team, rising to the challenge also means pausing to celebrate victories, to fish and play in the river, and to find peace in the sounds and smells of summer on the Columbia. See you on the river.

With gratitude,



Lauren

Lauren Goldberg, *Executive Director*

Leading Through Litigation

Mid-Year Legal Updates



By Miles Johnson, Legal Director

While some organizations shy away from holding governments and polluting corporations accountable, Columbia Riverkeeper believes that litigation is an important tool. Lawsuits complement our gritty grass-roots advocacy and savvy communications strategies to meaningfully improve water quality and river communities.

Here's how our legal work is rising to the challenges of this moment and creating a safer, more abundant future for everyone.

Restoring Abundant Salmon

Columbia Riverkeeper, along with other plaintiffs represented by the incredible team at Earthjustice, signed a historic agreement that opens the door for Snake River dam removal. Tremendous leadership from Columbia Basin Tribes led to this plan—called the Columbia Basin Restoration Agreement—but a long-running and successful litigation strategy helped, too. And as the plan was being negotiated with the Biden Administration, we created additional leverage by filing a notice of violations

Tremendous leadership from Columbia Basin Tribes led to this plan—called the Columbia Basin Restoration Agreement—but a long-running and successful litigation strategy helped, too.

against the federal government for illegally killing endangered Snake River sockeye salmon.

We expect the Biden Administration to honor its promises about salmon recovery and Tribal rights. If not, we'll return to court to protect salmon and the people who depend on them.

In related legal news, Columbia Riverkeeper continues to use the Clean Water Act to combat heat pollution from dams. Over the past decade, we won a series of cases that led to heat pollution limits for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (Corps) Columbia and Snake river dams. This spring, the Corps was supposed to announce a plan to meet those heat pollution limits in the Lower Snake River. Unfortunately—but unsurprisingly—the Corps' plan contains no meaningful solutions and won't change the status quo that is driving Snake River sockeye and other fish to extinction.

Columbia Riverkeeper responded to the Corps' plan with detailed legal comments, and we are ready to meet the Corps in court (again) to protect the progress we have made towards cold, clean water.

Columbia Riverkeeper is also challenging new Oregon rules that make it more likely for fish to be trapped and trucked around barriers like dams—rather than migrating naturally. We are working in solidarity with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Nez Perce Tribe, and in coalition with fish conservation groups represented by Crag Law Center. Upcoming decisions about dams in the Wallowa and Hood River basins would rely on Oregon's harmful new rules, so this litigation has big implications for migratory fish.



Stopping Fossil Fuels and False Solutions

In addition to tackling the GTN Xpress fracked gas pipeline expansion, we are using all our legal tools to fight the misguided NEXT diesel refinery proposal in the Columbia River Estuary. This includes challenging land use permits that allow industrial development in farmland and suing the Corps for not studying how the refinery's heavy construction traffic would impact a levee that protects nearby farms and homes. Terrific attorneys from Crag Law Center and Advocates for the West are representing us in these legal challenges.

In Portland, we are still working to end oil-by-rail at the Zenith terminal—and make sure the future is cleaner and safer for nearby communities. Columbia Riverkeeper is continuing to build the case that Oregon's Department of Environmental Quality should deny Zenith's pending Clean Air Act permit, or at least place meaningful limits on the amount of harmful air pollution that Zenith can emit. Detailed legal and factual research allows us to expose Zenith's lies, speak with authority to government officials, and prepare for litigation.

Board President Emily Washbines (far right) and Advancement Director Emily Kao (second from right) visit the White House with our partners for a ceremony celebrating the Columbia Basin Restoration Agreement.

Keeping Illegal Pollution Out of the River

Thousands of pipes discharge wastewater and contaminated stormwater runoff into the Columbia and its tributaries each day. Some of those pipes are completely unregulated, and some have Clean Water Act permits but may be violating their pollution limits. Through detailed research and on-the-ground investigations, Columbia Riverkeeper's staff attorneys figure out where Clean Water Act violations are leading to illegal pollution—then we go to court to stop it.

We recently reached a settlement in a Clean Water Act case against Douglas County PUD regarding oil pollution from Wells Dam in central Washington. After decades without a Clean Water Act permit, our settlement requires Douglas County PUD to reroute all discharge pipes into a centralized treatment system with a single outlet. These upgrades, which will cost nearly half a million dollars, will finally make it feasible to monitor and treat oil pollution from Wells Dam. The attorneys at Kampmeier and Knutsen PLLC and our Staff Attorney Simone Anter represented Columbia Riverkeeper in this case.

We are proud and excited to introduce a new addition to our legal team. Staff Attorney Teryn Yazdani joined Columbia Riverkeeper in April of this year and focuses primarily on enforcing the Clean Water Act and working with Tribes to advocate for clean water in agency rulemakings. Teryn's legal expertise, and her passion for clean water and environmental justice, will help make the Columbia River a cleaner, healthier place for everyone. 🐟

Our First Treaty

An Interview with Columbia Riverkeeper's Board President Emily Washine

By Jacqueline Keeler (Navajo/Yankton Dakota Sioux), Guest Author

Emily Washines, a Yakama Nation tribal member, historian, and founder of Native Friends, has worn many hats in her life. A graduate and former trustee of Central Washington University, she has been a board member of Columbia Riverkeeper since 2018 and board president since 2022. She is the first Yakama woman to serve in this position, bringing a unique perspective and relationship to the river her people have known from time immemorial.

Treaty

Jacqueline Keeler (JK): Before being on the board, tell us a little about your relationship with Columbia Riverkeeper.

Emily Washines (EW): I worked with Columbia Riverkeeper when I was at Yakama Nation Fisheries. I witnessed how they would work with us on different events and even extend help, yet still allow us to be in the spotlight.

That balance really impressed me. With the coal export proposal that was proposed at Boardman, Columbia Riverkeeper was by our side on the banks and on the social media accounts we didn't have, making sure they were highlighting and commenting and tagging us in those. It resulted in wider coverage and awareness, and the coal export ended up not going through.

JK: I know that a lot of your work, particularly with your Native Friends project, looks at bridging that relationship with non-Native folks to build healing from historical and ongoing trauma. How did you first come up with the idea for Native Friends, and how does this approach impact your work with Columbia Riverkeeper?

EW: Yeah, it's really in the foundation of one of our teachings that we have as children: to speak for the resources that can't speak for themselves. Do we speak up for our plants? Do we speak up for the resources? I wanted to have a more optimistic view of that just at the heart, even if others didn't always understand it. One of the plants and resources I continue to speak out for is the wapato, a wetland potato that returned to the Tribe after a 70-year absence. And, of course, different fish.

I thought it blended nicely with my other project to connect with descendants of the military militia

One of the plants and resources I continue to speak out for is the wapato, a wetland potato that returned to the Tribe after a 70-year absence.

that fought against my relatives in the 1850s Yakima War. When you're reaching out to people that don't know you, maybe if they had a site called Native Friends, they would know I'm not coming from some intense argumentative space, but I want to come from a space of learning and curiosity.

JK: With the salmon and the first foods you mentioned, how is that taught to Yakama women through your mother and your grandmothers? How is that expressed culturally?

EW: Well, there are a couple of different ways. For example, when I danced and wore my regalia, I wasn't allowed to carry a knife case until I could prove I could cut fish, deer, and elk. So when I have that knife case on my belt, I'm so proud of it because I passed all of my mom's tests. It wasn't just that you could filet it, you needed to be able to filet it well. [laughs] That speaks to the importance and connection to these milestone moments regarding fish.

Left: Emily Washines. Photo by Kelly Turso.

We are taught that when humans were going to come, the animals, fish, plants, and berries were told, 'Hey, you're currently walking around and speaking for yourself, but there's going to be humans, and you're no longer going to have a voice. But they will always agree to speak for you.'

That was technically our first treaty. As Yakama, it is with the resources. And that's why we always say we promise to protect the resources for those not yet born. We promise to speak for those that cannot speak for themselves. Who's going to step forward to sacrifice their life for others? Salmon was the first to step forward. So we honor that and continue to honor it in different ceremonies. In our first food ceremonies that we have with salmon, we recognize that we've taken that life in order to make ours stronger. Our lives are intertwined with salmon.

JK: How does that inform your work, activism, and fulfilling that first treaty?

EW: The ceremonies are very intense for people unfamiliar with it. Not giving too much detail, but just enough for people to understand, but you stand these little kids before people, and you tell them you've taken a life. And now you're going to explain to the people, either fellow Tribal members or your family, what you did and how you did it. And from a Western society, it could look very much like a court proceeding or something, being asked to say that.

But if you recognize the elements that are going into this, part of it is ensuring that's the teaching and the way that we want them to treat the fish. Is there something that they could have done better? Or is there something that could have been more helpful if they had had a certain tool?

How is the community going to respond or support that? I think having this checks-and-balances process with our first food ceremonies helps our community have a voice and ensures that we're carrying out the teachings in the way that our ancestors wanted us to.

In each generation, we continue to assert our voice about cleanup, whether from Tribes specifically or environmental groups that are basically watch-dogging the federal government's steps and actions.

JK: What was it like representing Columbia Riverkeeper in DC when the Biden administration held the ceremonial signing of the Columbia Basin Restoration agreement? What was the sense from Tribal leaders at that event? Was this a surprise, or was it the result of consultation?

EW: It was a very celebratory moment. In 2022, the Biden administration promised to look at a better strategy to restore salmon. The administration acknowledged that a dam removal study is essential to that goal. In late 2023, they agreed to this Columbia River Basin agreement.

Being able to go to a White House signing, seeing four Tribes have a seat at the table, witnessing that, and supporting that was key. I mean, there were so many years when Tribes weren't allowed a seat at the table regarding our own salmon recovery.

We're on the 50th anniversary of basically being reaffirmed as co-managers of our own fishery resources—the Boldt decision. And then, of course, you have the Belloni decision prior to that, so it's a long time to some people, but it's a very short time frame in terms of this decades-long fight for our resources.



Josephine Buck (right), a cultural specialist with Yakama Nation's Hanford cleanup agency, leads a boat tour during the 2024 Hanford Journey, an event co-hosted by Yakama Nation and Columbia Riverkeeper. Guest author Jacqueline Keeler (far left) was one of over 100 people who attended the event. Photo by Kelly Turso.

Jacqueline Keeler's most recent book is "Standoff: Standing Rock, the Bundy Movement, and the American Story of Sacred Lands" from Birchbark Books. She has contributed to *The Nation*, *Salon.com*, *The Daily Beast*, the *San Francisco Chronicle* and many other publications. She has been interviewed on *PRI's The World*, *BBC*, *MSNBC* and *Democracy Now*. She is the editor of "Edge of Morning: Native Voices Speak for the Bears Ears" from Torrey House Press.

JK: Can you discuss the Hanford nuclear waste legacy and its impact on Yakama Nation and other Tribes' homelands? You talked about that initial treaty and the relationships based on respect for all other life and with the land and water. But is there anything in your tradition to speak to monitoring something so toxic for tens of thousands of years?


EW: Well, I think the overall perspective is to try to protect the resources the best we can. I wasn't around in the 1940s, and even the people who were around in the 1940s had very limited options to protect the land. We were living on that land and forcibly removed. The choice was taken away from us.

But in each generation, we continue to assert our voice about cleanup, whether from Tribes specifically or environmental groups that are basically watch-dogging the federal government's steps and actions. And ensuring all the T's are crossed and I's are dotted so that we can have the best plan within the timeframe available and we're not cutting corners or trying to make it a nuclear repository. Just throwing up our hands and saying, 'Oh, you know

what, just bring all the nuclear waste here.' Which was something proposed, and [the late Yakama leader] Russell Jim was very adamant about not having that.

With programs like the Hanford Journey, we're ensuring we continue his work. That it wasn't in vain or done for nothing, that we're continuing along this path to protect or work on cleanup of Hanford and ensure that, you know, others are aware of this area and can revisit this area.

It's really great when you can go beyond a written document to talk about the importance of a place, do a tour, and look at the area. When we did this a few years ago, the boat tours were a newer element, and everybody loved them, so we made sure to continue them.

This year, they're going to launch at White Bluffs. Each year, we launch at a different spot so people can see different elements of it. We partner with Yakama Nation Environmental Restoration Waste Management, which was run by Russell Jim, who wanted to ensure that Tribes always had a seat at the table regarding what's happening in our backyard. 

Taking on the Gas Industry

Rising to the Challenge



By Audrey Leonard,
Staff Attorney

People often ask me how I find hope in this line of work—constantly reminded of the harsh realities of the climate crisis and the powerful entities that stand to profit from it. Some days, it's easier than others.

Doing place-based climate work presents a unique duality: we understand the necessity of large-scale change, as well as the importance of preventing local harm. Over the last year, Columbia Riverkeeper's tenacity against the fracked gas industry has paid off.

Public Utility Commission Advocacy

Columbia Riverkeeper recently took our expertise and recommendations for fracked gas infrastructure to the Washington and Oregon public utility commissions—the state agencies that regulate gas

utility companies—and achieved excellent results.

The Oregon Public Utility Commission rejected all three of Oregon's gas utilities' long-term plans as “unreasonably optimistic” about future gas demand as the region moves away from reliance on fracked gas and toward electrification. We also saw major wins in our effort to cut off demand for TC Energy's proposed GTN Xpress pipeline expansion project. For example, as a result of our advocacy, the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission criticized Cascade Natural Gas' investment in the controversial GTN Xpress project. At a hearing in March, Oregon's Commission referenced the potential risks associated with the GTN pipeline, comparing it to coal power plants. These are huge wins for ratepayers and the climate.

GTN Xpress Legal Challenge

Columbia Riverkeeper is currently in court to prevent the GTN Xpress fracked gas pipeline expansion from coming to fruition. The expansion would result in the pollution equivalent of adding 754,000 cars to

the road each year for 30 years. And because of its route through arid Idaho, eastern Washington, and eastern Oregon, the pipeline presents local safety risks when coupled with frequent (and increasingly severe) wildfires.

GTN Xpress received federal approval last October and permission to begin construction this April. We haven't given up. In a recent court filing, the gas company admitted that the project is not financially viable without spreading the costs to more customers or renegotiating higher rates for the new gas. We've been saying this project was a bad deal from the start. Now, the company itself says it will not begin construction for the expansion until it can ensure profitability. In turn, we asked the federal agency to withdraw construction authorization.

More good news: Our victories at the public utility commissions have laid the groundwork for Cascade Natural Gas to walk away from its investment in GTN Xpress. Even Cascade's customers—from Bellingham to Bend—are now calling on the company to ditch its risky investment in the interest of lower rates, safety, and the climate.

“[H]ope is not like a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky, ...hope is an ax you break down doors with in an emergency.”

— Rebecca Solnit,
Not Too Late

Proposed Diesel Refinery

A big part of our job is bringing truth to light when a proposal seems too good to be true. That sums up NEXT Energy's proposed “renewable” diesel refinery in the Columbia River Estuary. By relentlessly exposing NEXT's greenwashing, we've demonstrated how the refinery will do more harm than good. If built, NEXT's refinery would be one of the largest greenhouse gas polluters in Oregon.

The proposed site of NEXT Energy's diesel refinery is dangerously close to the Columbia River Estuary and farmland.

Aerial view of Columbia River Estuary around Port Westward. Photo by Paloma Ayala.

In partnership with local farmers, Columbia Riverkeeper has worked to show regulators why putting a fracked gas-fired diesel refinery in the estuary and destroying over 100 acres of wetlands is a bad idea. Despite regulators continuously buying into NEXT's false promises, NEXT has yet to secure several major permits for its facility. On top of this, recent forecasting shows the U.S. is already on track to over-produce renewable diesel in 2025. We'll keep asking regulators to take off their rose-colored glasses and protect the Columbia River, farmland, and our climate.

Finding hope, against the odds.

So how do I find hope in this work? I find hope in my colleagues who have been doing this work much longer than I have—developing new tactics in response to moving targets and building on decades of victories. I find hope in the communities, Tribes, and partner organizations we work alongside—realizing that everyone brings something unique and important to the table. I find hope in small victories, beating the odds, and rising to the challenge. 🌱

History-Making (or Breaking) Decision for Hanford Cleanup



By Simone Anter (Jicarilla Apache and Yaqui), Staff Attorney & Hanford Program Director

The other day I found myself in a high school environmental science class. Among models of clean energy infrastructure and a bubbling fish tank filled with Chinook salmon fry, 20 young faces glowed in the PowerPoint light. Eyes wide, one student offered an answer to my question, “How can pollution move?” A tentative voice made the answer no less true: “With water?” Exactly.

Pollution at the Hanford Nuclear Site, both toxic and radioactive, is not passive. It’s active, moving through the environment in water, soil, plants, animals, and people. Active pollution requires active clean up to ensure that it remains contained at the very least, and, better yet, reduced or eliminated.

Active cleanup requires active public participation. This means public scrutiny over stamped-and-approved government cleanup plans. Most of these plans rely heavily on “monitored natural attenuation.” That’s engineering jargon for waiting and watching for hundreds of years until pollution breaks down. Other plans, on closer inspection, just make more plans for future plans. It’s the nesting doll of cleanup—a plan within a plan within a plan.

History-Changing Decision for Cleanup

Recently, the U.S. Department of Energy (Energy), Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology), and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)—collectively known as the Tri-Party Agreement (TPA) agencies—came to a historic settlement. It was the result of four years of closed door, so-called holistic negotiations,

where the federal government and state debated and decided the future of Hanford. No Tribes were involved, nor was the public.

At the center of the holistic negotiation were Hanford’s 177 underground storage tanks, holding a stew of the most toxic, radioactive waste in North

Active cleanup requires active public participation. This means public scrutiny over stamped-and-approved government cleanup plans.

America. Under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act (NWPA), Hanford’s tank waste is considered high-level waste because it comes from irradiated nuclear fuel. Legally, high-level waste must be vitrified (i.e., turned to glass) and disposed of in a deep geological repository. Under the settlement, the door is wide open to reclassify this high-level waste, immobilize it in grout, and ship it to another community for shallow burial.

What Does Hanford’s Future Look Like?

I’m not sure what the future of Hanford holds. I am certain about the present reality: Hanford’s toxic and radioactive waste, transported via groundwater plumes, reaches the Columbia River. These plumes emanate from the central plateau, from the leaking tanks. I am certain that waste does not change its definition when it leaks out of the tanks into the soil. I am also certain that the liquid, sludge, and saltcake left within the tanks is waste that is not easily pumpable, making it fairly impossible to completely empty, remove, and grout all of the waste and send it off-site.

What I am not certain about is if the TPA settlement leaves the door open for landfill closure of the tanks, meaning they will be grouted in place, forever breaking down in the soils and leaching radioactivity. I’m not certain that grout is an effective immobilization for this waste. Experts have described grout as becoming

Columbia Riverkeeper has three major concerns about the holistic settlement.

1. There is an opportunity to redefine high-level waste under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act (NWPA) allowing for more shallow means of disposal.
2. It signifies a departure from Ecology’s own stated “as good as glass” principle, which acknowledges that glass is a preferable way to immobilize high-level and tank waste.
3. It shows a fundamental failure to pursue the most robust and long-lasting cleanup plans to ensure the health and safety of people and the environment for generations.

a peanut butter sludge, not effectively immobilizing all of the contaminants present. Tests have only successfully grouted three gallons of tank waste, a far cry from the millions of gallons left in the tank. What about the communities in Utah and Texas that are slated to receive Hanford’s grouted waste? Do they know the risks? Are they properly informed? Have they consented? Have Tribes?

The fact is that money spent on grout is money not spent on efforts to vitrify, still the most stable and durable way of immobilizing waste. Cleanup money is hard to come by. Even Hanford’s historic budget of more than \$3 billion falls short of proposed estimates needed. It’s time for the government to invest in meeting its commitments to Tribal Nations who have been disproportionately impacted by Hanford.

I think back to my classroom presentation and the ease with which these bright students grasped the concept of contaminants traveling through groundwater and how to clean that groundwater. I am hopeful knowing that these young people are the next generation fighting for cleanup. I will continue to do my part to reduce the burden that they are inheriting, too, by fighting for a cleanup of Hanford that is thorough and just. 🌊



Take Action:
Sign our petition to ensure the public involvement of the Hanford cleanup



Hanford Nuclear Site, photos by Kelly Turso.

Advocate for a Just Transition



By Kelly Campbell, Policy Director

The Columbia River has been at the center of the region’s economy and energy systems since time immemorial. It has always been a place where communities have come together to share ideas and goods, and harvest life-giving salmon and other sustaining foods. The river has been a place of abundance, connection, and energy. In the past 150 years, the river and those who call it home have borne the brunt of the extraction of energy from the Columbia. Industrial discharges, dams, and the Hanford Nuclear Site are just a few examples of how an extractivist attitude has harnessed the energy of the Columbia in ways that have caused devastating harm to the river and people who depend on it.

Today, as we face climate chaos, those of us who were raised to understand this extractivist mindset as “normal” must embrace new paradigms to ensure that a life-sustaining Columbia River is here for future generations. Our challenge: apply the principles of a just transition to a clean energy future to the Columbia Basin.

What is a Just Transition?

The phrase “just transition” has been thrown around in recent years and definitions abound. About 10 years ago, a colleague in the environmental justice movement introduced me to the Movement Generation’s “Strategy Framework for a Just Transition,” and suddenly it all clicked. Here was a framework that explained both our current reality and a vision of where a just transition from fossil fuels would take us. It begins with the premise that transition is inevitable, justice is not. I was intrigued.

The strategy lays out the tenets of our current extractivist economy, which is based on exploitation, consumerism, extraction of resources, and a colonial mindset of hoarding wealth and power, propped up by militarism. It outlines a way out of this economy by “stopping the bad” and “building the new” to create a living economy that centers on cooperation and is supported by regenerative resources, caring and sacredness, ecological and social well being, and deep democracy.

The just transition framework values include driving racial justice and social equity, shifting economic control to communities, democratizing wealth and the workplace, advancing ecological restoration, re-localizing most production and consumption, and retaining and restoring cultures and traditions.

An Energy Vision for the Columbia

As we transition to a living economy and clean energy future in the Columbia Basin, we must examine and learn from the mistakes of the past. This means a shift in power of who makes decisions, a shift from a colonial, extractivist mindset to a living economy mindset, a shift in the questions we ask, the values we hold, and the vision we seek.

Some of the campaigns Columbia Riverkeeper is best known for fit squarely in the “stopping the bad” framework outlined in the just transition strategy framework by preventing new fossil fuel infrastructure along the Columbia River.

A just transition shifts power, putting those most impacted at the center. For the Columbia River Basin, this includes Tribal Nations and Indigenous peoples who have

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been the stewards of the river since time immemorial. Their knowledge will be invaluable in creating a just transition to the living economy. Columbia River Tribes are not just “stakeholders” to be consulted, but sovereign nations that should hold significant decision-making power in determining what the just transition looks like for the region.

We are fortunate that the four Columbia River Tribes that make up the Columbia Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC)—the Nez Perce, Umatilla, Warm Springs, and Yakama Tribes—have developed a fantastic resource for a just transition along the Columbia.

The CRITFC Energy Vision for the Columbia River Basin looks at the four major challenges facing the region: salmon and steelhead near extinction, the climate crisis, the need for renewable energy, and the importance of properly siting new energy projects. The report includes a series of specific recommendations that lead to a “vision of a Columbia Basin electric power system that supports abundant and sustainable fish and wildlife populations, protects tribal treaty and cultural

resources, and provides clean, reliable, and affordable electricity.” One main takeaway is an emphasis on maximizing energy efficiency as a way to address the climate crisis and support healthy fish and wildlife populations. The vision provided by CRITFC is a guidebook for a just transition in the region and beyond.

Our Role in the Just Transition

A just transition challenges Columbia Riverkeeper and other organizations to reimagine our roles in shifting power and leadership to those most harmed from the current economy. Are we centering racial justice in our work? What is our theory of change? How do we connect to broader social justice movements? These are all important questions organizations like Columbia Riverkeeper must grapple with as we determine how to use the power and privilege we have towards creating the just transition. Operating from a just transition framework comes from a place of hope and a belief that another world is possible, that there is a place for us there, that we can build it. It’s a place of creativity, abundance, and joy. A place like the Columbia River. ☪

Read an extended version of this article, which includes our efforts to apply a just transition framework.



Download full CRITFC report or review the highlights:

CRITFC.org/Energy-Vision



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Donating stock, bonds, or other appreciated assets can be a tax-efficient way to support Columbia Riverkeeper.

If you have held an appreciated asset for more than one year and donate to Columbia Riverkeeper, you may avoid capital gains taxes and be eligible to take a tax deduction for the full fair-market value of the asset.

Columbia Riverkeeper will receive the full value of the appreciated asset and use the funds to power victories for clean water and our climate.

It's a win-win!

This information is not intended as tax, legal, or financial advice. Consult your personal financial advisor or attorney. While donating stocks or appreciated securities are a great option for many people, they may not be the best giving strategy for everyone.

Fishing on the Columbia River, photo credit: Paloma Ayala.

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