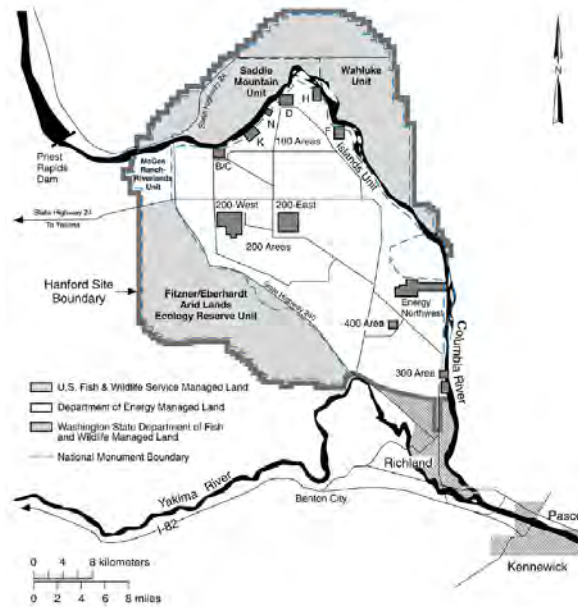


Hanford Natural Resource Trustee Council



FACT SHEET: Hanford Natural Resource Damage Assessment

Since 1943, activities on the Hanford Site in south-central Washington have resulted in the widespread release of over 400 radiological and other contaminants into the terrestrial and aquatic environments. Clean-up of the site began in the 1980s and will continue for several more decades. While clean-up efforts continue, the Hanford Natural Resource Trustee Council (HNRTC) is conducting a natural resource damage assessment (NRDA). The HNRTC includes the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) through U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the States of Washington and Oregon, the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), and the Nez Perce Tribe, and operates in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Commerce through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The goal of the NRDA is to restore, replace, or acquire the equivalent of trust natural resources injured as a result of the release of hazardous substances. This Fact Sheet describes the process that the HNRTC is undertaking to achieve this goal.



Mule Deer

Credit: Dan Landeen, Nez Perce Tribe



Chinook Salmon

Credit: NOAA

Hanford

The Hanford Site is located in the Columbia Basin, near the city of Richland in south-central Washington. The site covers 586 square miles and is surrounded primarily by agricultural lands. The last free-flowing stretch of the Columbia River, known as the Hanford Reach, passes through the Site. The portion of the Site designated as the Hanford Reach National Monument is home to one of the largest tracts of native shrub-steppe habitat remaining in Washington State. DOE, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife all manage portions of the Hanford Site.

The Hanford Site has unique terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems that are home to forty species of mammals, over two hundred species of birds, and a large variety of amphibians, reptiles, and invertebrates. Rare plant surveys conducted by The Nature Conservancy confirm the Site is a critical area for the conservation of rare shrub-steppe, riparian and aquatic plants. At least 725 individual plant species have been identified on site – thirteen of which are listed by Washington State as threatened or endangered. The adjacent Columbia River supports a number of economically and culturally important fish species including the Chinook salmon, coho salmon, steelhead, white sturgeon and Pacific lamprey.

Historically, the lands making up the Hanford Site were home to several mid-Columbia Indian Tribes and bands, including ancestors of the present-day Wanapum, Yakama, Nez Perce, Cayuse, Walla Walla, and Umatilla people. The Site continues to have tremendous cultural and religious significance for local Tribes.

The Challenge

In 1943 the United States established the Hanford Site as the Hanford Nuclear Reservation to produce nuclear materials for national defense. In addition to producing the materials needed for nuclear weapons, the Site activities produced significant quantities of wastes containing hazardous chemicals and/or radioactive materials. The Federal government managed these wastes by storing them on land and by releasing them into ponds and ditches. Over time, many of these reactors and facilities have leaked contaminants onto the land and into the air and water, including into the Columbia River. The production facilities, which included nine nuclear reactors and associated processing facilities, are now closed and are being decommissioned and cleaned up by DOE, which is currently the Federal agency responsible for overall management of the Site.

Work is underway to clean up the contamination that is a legacy of these nuclear operations. In May 1989, DOE, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Washington State signed the Hanford Federal Facilities Agreement and Consent Order, commonly known as the Tri-Party Agreement (TPA). The TPA outlines legally enforceable milestones for Hanford cleanup and compliance with federal and state environmental laws over several decades. In November 1989, EPA placed the Hanford Site on the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) National Priorities List.

Cleanup work addresses, but is not limited to, more than 50 million gallons of high-level liquid waste in 177 underground storage tanks, 2,300 tons of spent nuclear fuel, about 25 million cubic feet of buried or stored solid waste, and about 270 billion gallons of groundwater contaminated above drinking water standards and spread out over approximately 80 square miles. Cleanup also addresses more than 1,700 waste sites and approximately 500 contaminated facilities.

Natural Resource Restoration

The HNRTC, formed in 1996, is a collaborative working group authorized under CERCLA and chartered to address



Shrub steppe at Hanford
Credit: Jen Kassakian, IEC

natural resources impacted by Hanford releases of hazardous substances. Under CERCLA, natural resources Trustees have the authority to conduct an NRDA with the goal of making the public “whole” for injuries to natural resources and associated losses of the services they provide. Generally, this means restoration of natural resources and the services derived from those resources to the condition that would exist had the releases not occurred. An important means of accomplishing this goal is through identification and implementation of appropriate primary and compensatory natural resource restoration projects.

Cooperative Assessment

In addition to acting as a Trustee through DOE, the U.S. Federal government is the party responsible for discharges and releases of hazardous substances at this site. The U.S. government and the other Trustees have agreed to follow a cooperative assessment process in pursuing this NRDA and will cooperatively develop assessment and restoration plans.

The NRDA Process and Public Involvement

In 2007, the HNRTC decided to proceed with the injury assessment phase of the NRDA. As part of this phase, the

HNRTC is preparing an Injury Assessment Plan (IAP). The IAP will describe injury assessment activities that will inform the HNRTC’s evaluation of the extent to which natural resources and associated services in and around the Hanford Site have been affected by the release of hazardous contaminants. In later phases, the HNRTC will quantify any identified injuries and will establish the type and scale of restoration necessary to compensate the public for the harm to natural resources and associated services.

Both the IAP and any subsequent detailed work plans for specific studies will be made available for public review. The release of the Injury Assessment Plan is anticipated in 2012, and public comments will be solicited for a period of at least 30 days following its release. Public input and review of HNRTC plans is important to ensure the assessment is responsive to the public’s needs and adequately restores the resources that have been impacted.

Additional Information

For more information on the Hanford NRDA, to access key documents, to identify contacts, or to sign up for updates and alerts on important milestones, please visit www.hanfordnrda.org.