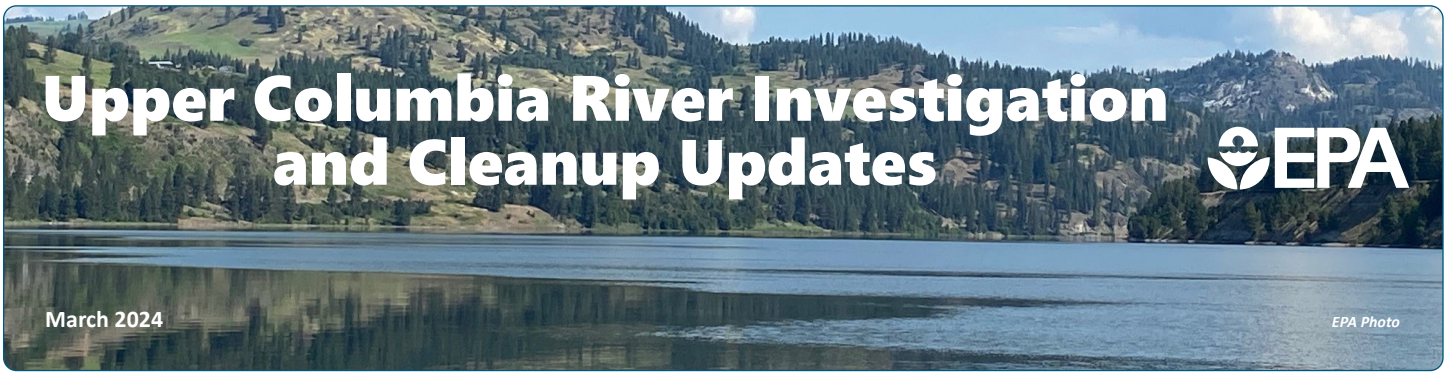


The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency continues to investigate the size and scope of contamination in the Upper Columbia River and affected upland areas. The current study area covers approximately 150 miles of the Columbia River, from the Grand Coulee Dam to the U.S.-Canada border, and contaminated adjacent uplands.

The Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study are underway as part of the 2006 Settlement Agreement between Teck Cominco Metals Ltd., Teck Cominco American Incorporated (together herein referred to as "Teck") the U. S. Department of Justice (DOJ), and EPA. The Remedial Investigation establishes the nature and extent of contamination and includes findings from human health and ecological risk assessments. The Feasibility Study develops, screens, and evaluates cleanup actions to address risks identified in the river, lakes, or uplands. The Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study are funded by Teck through the current settlement agreement. There is currently no settlement agreement for funding of the cleanup.

The **Human Health Risk Assessment** was completed in 2021. Lead in residential soil is the primary concern for people's health and the environment. EPA found that upland soils contain lead in concentrations that pose potential risks to residents in some areas. Public beaches and the river are safe for recreation, except for Bossburg Beach.

EPA completed several rounds of cleanups on properties with the greatest contamination and potential risk to people's health.

- In 2022, EPA completed soil cleanups at 15 residential properties in Northport, with assistance from the Washington Department of Ecology.
- To date, EPA has cleaned up 59 residential and common use properties in Northport, and Teck has cleaned up 18 additional properties and one tribal allotment.
- EPA has prioritized cleanups on residential properties that pose the greatest risk and anticipates that more than 150 residential properties could be eligible for cleanup in the future.

Two **Baseline Ecological Risk Assessments** are also underway.

1) The Upland Baseline Ecological Risk Assessment evaluates risks to plants and wildlife exposed to contaminants such as zinc, cadmium, and lead in upland areas above the river. Preliminary findings indicate that cadmium, lead, and zinc present the greatest and most widespread risk to plants, invertebrates, mammals, and birds exposed to soil in the upland area. Most impacted areas are remote and relatively steep.
2) The Aquatic Baseline Ecological Risk Assessment, expected in spring 2024, will evaluate risk to plants, wildlife, fish, and other organisms in and along the river from contaminants such as zinc, copper, cadmium, mercury, and lead found in sediment and slag. Comprehensive surface water sampling was completed by Teck throughout the Upper Columbia River area, including areas where irrigation water is drawn from the river, to assess concentrations of metals during various river conditions. All water samples were below human health and ecological surface water screening levels.

How is the Upper Columbia River contaminated?

Historic discharges of wastes and emissions from smelter operations have contaminated portions of the Upper Columbia River. Decades of smelter processes and facility operations have caused releases of hazardous substances, granulated slag, liquid effluents, emissions, and accidental spills in and around the river.

The primary facility known to have contributed to hazardous substance contamination to the Upper Columbia River is the Teck Metals Ltd. (Teck) facility located in Trail, British Columbia, Canada on the Columbia River, approximately 10 river miles upstream of the international boundary. The former Le Roi smelter located on the Columbia River in Northport, Washington, also contributed to hazardous substance contamination.

Residential properties where soil is contaminated with lead and arsenic may pose a health risk to current and future residents, especially young children and pregnant mothers. Health risks may result from direct contact with contaminated soil or incidental ingestion of soil from yards, gardens, and play areas.

High levels of zinc, cadmium, and lead contamination found in upland soils are a threat to invertebrates, small birds, and mammals. River sediments and riverbanks are contaminated with levels of slag and metals including lead, arsenic, zinc, cadmium, chromium, copper, and mercury that exceed Washington State Freshwater Sediment Management Standards.

Why is EPA proposing to add the Upper Columbia River to the National Priorities List?

EPA proposes to add the Upper Columbia River as a Superfund site on the National Priorities List. NPL sites are areas where there are known releases of hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants. Upland soils are contaminated with lead, arsenic, zinc, cadmium and other metals. Sediments in the river are contaminated with slag and metals, including lead, zinc, cadmium, copper, and mercury. There is a significant quantity of slag remaining in the river system. Levels of metals found in the Columbia River surface water are below drinking water standards.

The NPL provides a prioritized list of sites that warrant further investigation and may require cleanup, and also ensures funding is available, if needed, to conduct cleanup. Listing a site on the NPL is a two-step process: first, a site is proposed to the NPL and, following a public comment period, a decision is made whether to place the site on the NPL. The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, or Superfund, grants EPA the authority to clean up contaminated sites that are determined to pose a risk to people's health and/or the environment. Listing on the NPL would:

- Assist EPA in securing comprehensive and timely cleanup of the river and adjoining uplands; and
- Provide EPA access to critical federal funding.

How to submit public comments on the proposed listing

EPA invites you to comment on the proposed listing during the 60-day public comment period. EPA will consider all comments submitted during this 60-day period and publish a response to the comments.

How do I submit a comment on this proposed listing?

- Visit www.regulations.gov and use docket number EPA-HQ-OLEM-2024-0068 to submit a comment.

Information on the public comment period, how to submit public comments, and the closing date can be found at epa.gov/columbiariver/upper-columbia-river-study-area. If you have further questions, please contact **Julie Congdon** at 206-553-2752 or congdon.julie@epa.gov.

Do you fish in Lake Roosevelt and the Upper Columbia River?

A fish advisory exists for the Upper Columbia River and Lake Roosevelt. If you eat fish from these areas, please follow the recommendations in the advisories available online. Copies are available in:

English – https://bit.ly/3toyGDq

Russian – https://bit.ly/4aq7g0C

Spanish – https://bit.ly/41xDVNu

Selling or buying land or a home in the Upper Columbia River Valley?

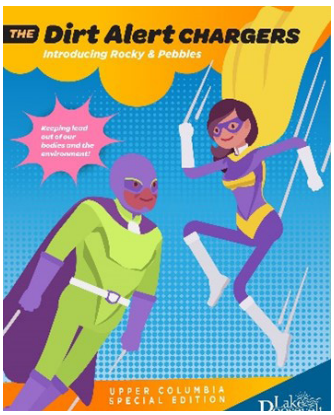
Potential buyers have the right to know about known soil contamination, and sellers in Washington state are required to disclose information about their property. Learn more online by visiting apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications

How to protect you and your family from lead contamination

There are simple, healthy actions that you a your family can do to decrease contact with arsenic, lead, or other harmful chemicals th be in dirt. For more information, visit ecology.wa.gov/DirtAlert

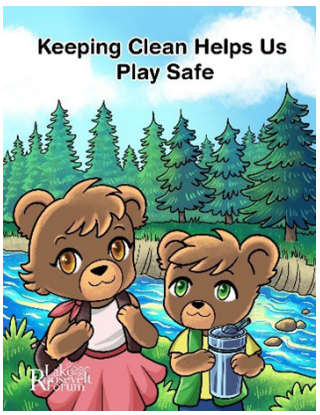
Children's Activity Books about the Upper Columbia River.

The Lake Roosevelt Forum received a Washington Department of Ecology grant to develop educational materials to help educate children about playing it safe around legacy contaminants, particularly lead in soil. The read-along coloring book and activity book are now available.



For ages 9-14 (grade 4-8). Educates youth about mining, milling,and smelting of heavy metals in the Upper Columbia Valley and into Canada. Introduces science concepts about both fate and transport of heavy metals, lead exposure risks and ways to reduce health risks from lead exposure.

View the activity book online, download and print it at lrf.org/documents/education/LRF-Dirt_Alert_Activity_Book.pdf



For ages 5-8 (grade K-3). Introduces children to the history of mining, milling, and smelting in the Upper Columbia Valley, health concerns related to exposure to lead in soil; and how to stay healthy by keeping clean both indoors and outdoors.

View the coloring book online, download and print it at lrf.org/documents/education/LRF-Keeping_Clean_ Coloring_Book.pdf

For More Information

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Website: https://www.epa.gov/columbiariver/upper-columbia-river-study-area

Contacts:

- **Bonnie Arthur,** Remedial Project Manager**,** arthur.bonnie@epa.gov, 206-553-4072
- **Robert Tan,** Remedial Project Manager**,** tan.robert@epa.gov , 206-553-2580
- **Brandon Perkins,** NPL Coordinator, perkins.brandon@epa.gov, 206-553-6396
- **Kristin Ching,** Community Involvement Coordinator, ching.kristin@epa.gov, 206-553-2806
- **Julie Congdon,** Community Involvement Coordinator, congdon.julie@epa.gov, 206-553-2752

Stay Connected: *If you would like to receive information about this site in the future, please email Julie Congdon at congdon.julie@epa.gov and indicate if you prefer updates to your email or mailing address. If you need materials in an alternative format, please contact* ***Julie Congdon*** *at 206-553-2752.*

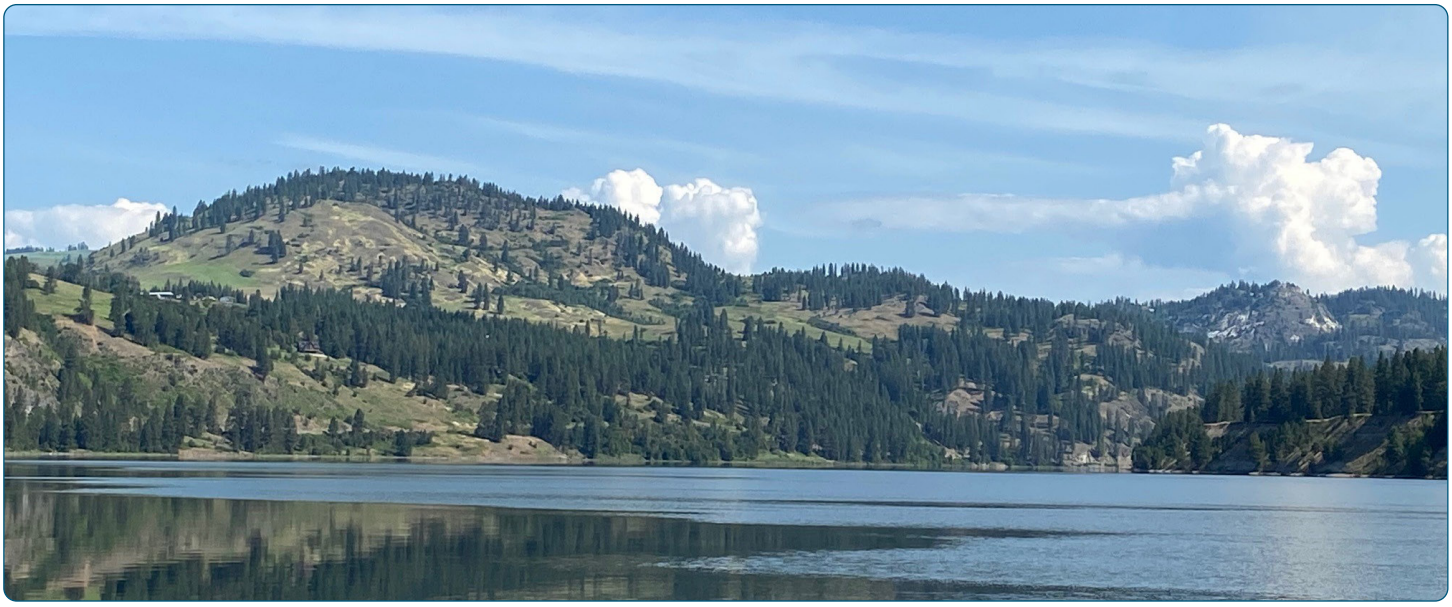
Washington Department of Ecology

Website: Upper Columbia River/Lake Roosevelt Website: apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/site/12125

Contacts:

- **Charles Gruenenfelder**, Project Manager, charles.gruenenfelder@ecy.wa.gov**,** 509-724-1405
- **Erika Beresovoy**, Public Involvement**,** erika.beresovoy@ecy.wa.gov, 509-385-2290

Upper Columbia River Investigation and Cleanup Updates



United States Environmental Protection Agency

1200 Sixth Avenue, Suite 115, 12-D12
Seattle, Washington 98101-3140
March 2024