

RISE UP!



COLUMBIA
RIVERKEEPER®

RIVER CURRENTS | 2021 Issue 1

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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with the latest from
Columbia Riverkeeper!**



Cathy Sampson-Kruse and her daughter, Annette New Dawn Sampson, at the Pendleton Roundup. Photo: Catching Violet.

RIVER NOTES

By Cathy Sampson-Kruse (Waluulapum, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation), Board Member, Columbia Riverkeeper

In 2013, I was arrested for blocking a mega-load truck shipment of equipment traveling through Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) ceded territory and bound for the Canadian tar sands. Before the arrest, I was known as a wife, mother, grandmother, social worker, and Tribal elder. After the arrest, an activist. As a proud Tribal member, I believe we have a sacred and moral obligation to uphold treaty rights. This includes taking a stand for our climate, water, and First Nations relatives in Canada.

Activism against dangerous fossil fuel development brought me to Columbia Riverkeeper in 2015, fifteen years after my brother, Don Sampson, joined the organization as a founding board member. I became part of the so-called "Thin Green Line." The term reminds me of the strength of sinew that my people use to make traditional dresses. That strong, thin green line on the West Coast has stopped over a dozen fossil fuel terminals and pipelines on the Columbia River alone. We as Native people, and many of our non-Native allies, do not see Oregon, Washington, Idaho, California, even up to British Columbia and Alaska, as different from us. So we have to stand together. I think that's how we get things done.

I admire people dedicating their lives to protect the sacred. They are all a constant reminder for us to keep up the good fight. Just the other day I had a wonderful talk with a beloved Puyallup elder and former Puyallup Tribe Chairwoman, Ramona Bennett. A pioneering activist on behalf of Indian fishing rights, she helped bring local "fish-ins" to national prominence and opened doors for women activists. Ramona had so many stories of our people's struggles and vigilance. Her final words of advice to me were to just keep going, in respect and love.

This newsletter features incredible stories of people rising up, in respect and love: Yakama Nation Tribal members taking a stand to protect sacred land and water along the Columbia; communities across the Northwest joining together to stop the world's largest fracked gas-to-methanol refinery; and a new organization amplifying Latina/o/x voices for environmental and social justice. Thank you for supporting Columbia Riverkeeper's work to unite people to protect clean water and our climate.

Kwaliism'chna~
We are still here.

Cathy Sampson-Kruse
Old Wey-ow'sux

THIS PLACE IS OUR HISTORY, OUR BEGINNING, OUR FUTURE



*By Elaine Harvey, Kah-milt-pa Band Member and Traditional Food Gatherer, and Bronsco Jim Jr., Kah-milt-pa Chief
As told to Simone Anter, Staff Attorney (pictured)*

We are from this place. Prior to being rounded up into the mix of Native peoples who make up the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, before we were called the Kah-milt-pa Band, before we were even Columbia River Indians, we were just people whose creation took place on NChi-Wana, the Columbia River.

Driving down I-84 on the Oregon side or SR-14 on the Washington side, you probably wouldn't even notice the place we're talking about. Sure, you'd see the John Day Dam, stretching across the Columbia River collecting its toll. Maybe you would notice some remnants of the old aluminum smelter site, though certainly not the contamination leached into the ground. If you were particularly astute one day, the wind turbines in the distance, sunlight glinting off of their rotating white blades, might catch your eye. Or perhaps the new pumped storage project, proposed by Rye Development and proclaiming in neon letters, GREEN DEVELOPMENT & JOBS, rattles through your mind. But by this time you have driven past the place, not even seeing the land, just what decades of development have left behind. What a shame to miss this sacred place.



Members of the Kah-milt-pa Band. Photo: Robert Davis.

Our stories talk to us about this land.

From the Columbia River all the way up to the ridge, we intimately know this place. We speak about the caretakers of all levels of the earth: like Porcupine, the chief of the four leggeds; or Beaver, who takes care of the water, even the little tiny critters amongst the ground who burrow into the earth; and their chief, White Weasel; or the chief of all birds, Golden Eagle. Our ceremonies are tied to these stories, tied to this particular area, and tied to the timing of the foods that grow and we gather here. The women in our band gather food for subsistence and ceremonies from the bottom near the river to the top of the ridge. Here we find some of our first foods, like celery or desert parsley, signifying the beginning, connecting with our ceremonies and all of the sacred foods that follow on and on through the seasons. First foods, colors, timing and animals weave the web of life-ways and obligations inextricably tied to place and what it means to be a Columbia River Indian.

We know the history of this place and our songs are still with us.

This land surrounds us with culture, with landmarks that have a meaning and a story. Ridges, like the one found here above the John Day Dam, the so-called “empty ridge” that Rye Development wants to excavate and put a 60-acre reservoir on, is one of the places where our spirits go to take our last departure. These ridges are sacred to us. Without them, some spirits don’t make it out of this world and are sent back. We tell the story of this ridge and how it stood above the flooding waters. This ridge is our history, our beginning, our future. How can it be called empty?

Ours is a living culture and we are being cheated by progress. An unrelenting cultural extinction in the name of energy development. So when asked about a new industrial energy project proposal here, at our sacred site, please excuse our skepticism and a sincere No. No, there is no way to configure the project to avoid sacred sites. No, we do not want two massive 60-acre reservoirs dug into the sacred ground here. No, we do not support the Goldendale Energy Storage Hydroelectric Project. We continue to say No, even though history has shown that our voice falls on the deaf ears of progress.

When the John Day Dam was constructed, our fishing village was flooded. Unlike neighboring white towns, we were not provided with alternative housing or compensation, nor did we benefit from the new electricity generation. Our Mothers, Fathers, and Elders were told to leave and many were left homeless for the rest of their lives in the name of energy development progress.

Next, we experienced the wind turbines and the maze of private ownership and no trespassing signs and fences that came with them. One private owner in this area still honors the promises of his forebears, opening the gate of progress to allow us to gather on his land for our ceremonies, but aside from this we have experienced exclusion from gathering here in our home on this ridge down to the river. The next generation will be the first of our people to not be allowed to gather here.

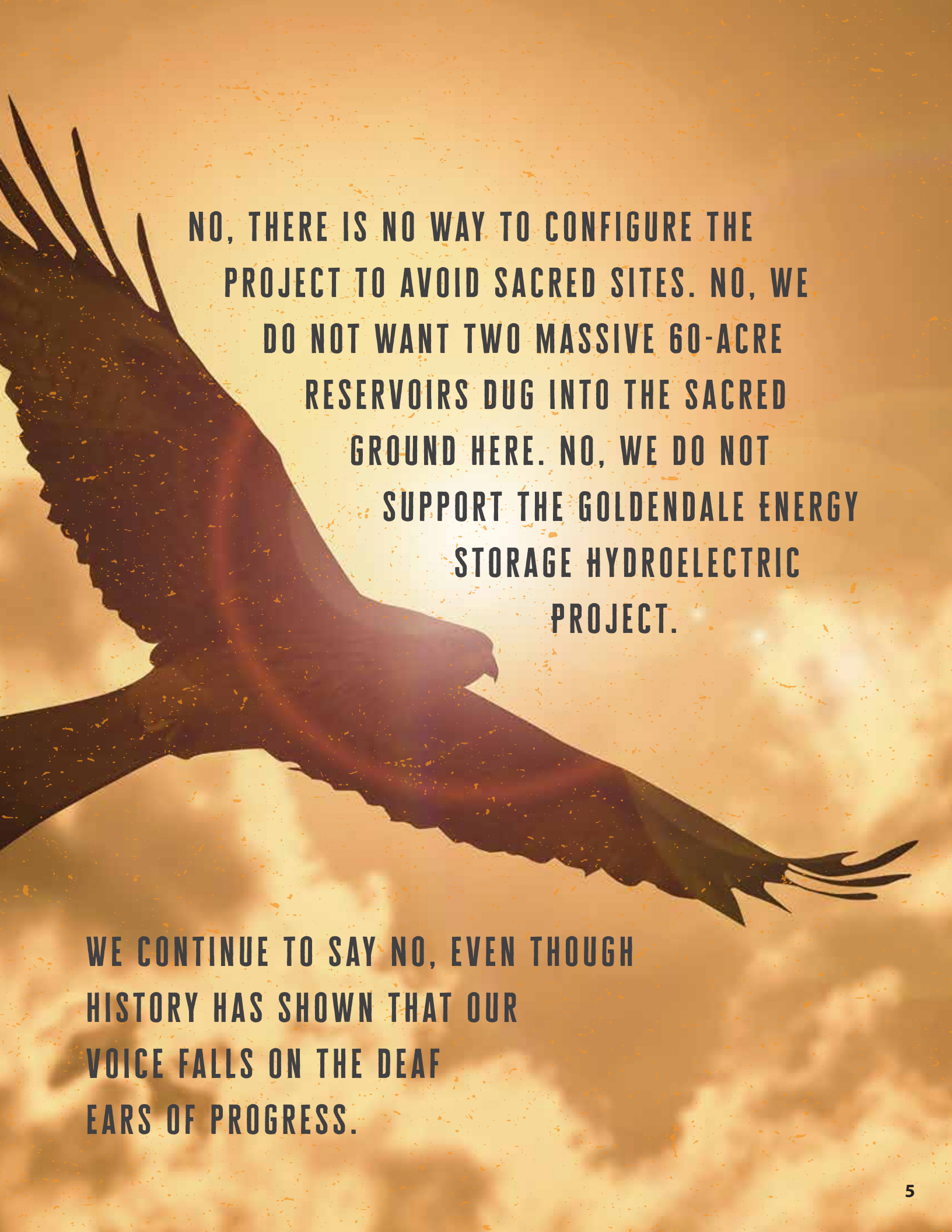
These projects focus on Yakama Nation ceded lands, our usual and accustomed lands. With each new project proposed, we are losing the habitats where our first foods grow and our treaty rights and spiritual ways are being eroded.

Now the next phase of development is upon us, as the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) considers licensing Rye Development’s proposed pumped storage project. Moving forward with building the largest pumped storage project in the Pacific Northwest will be the final energy development project that will destroy this area. We have already lost so much. To us, the loss of this place will be a feeling akin to losing Celilo Falls when it was flooded and the despair that followed, knowing that our future grandchildren will never have the experience of being in this sacred place, stepping in the footsteps of the generations of the past who have led us to today.

Respect our voices.

When you ask the question, you must hear the answer, even if you don’t like it. FERC, Rye Development, Washington state: our answer is No, do not build this project on our sacred site.



A large eagle is shown in flight, its wings spread wide, against a background of intense orange and yellow flames or fire. The eagle is dark, almost black, and its wings are the central focus of the image. The text is overlaid on the right side of the eagle's wings and the background.

**NO, THERE IS NO WAY TO CONFIGURE THE
PROJECT TO AVOID SACRED SITES. NO, WE
DO NOT WANT TWO MASSIVE 60-ACRE
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SUPPORT THE GOLDENDALE ENERGY
STORAGE HYDROELECTRIC
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**WE CONTINUE TO SAY NO, EVEN THOUGH
HISTORY HAS SHOWN THAT OUR
VOICE FALLS ON THE DEAF
EARS OF PROGRESS.**

RISE UP:

A MUSICAL IN FIVE ACTS



By Lauren Goldberg,
Legal & Program Director

Miss live music and theater? I do, too. As I pondered how to share the thrill—the utter joy—of the recent victory over one of the biggest fossil fuel giants to threaten the Columbia River, songs from the blockbuster musical “Hamilton” played in the background. For my five- and eight-year-old daughters, an initial curiosity with “Hamilton” blossomed into a full-blown obsession during the pandemic: songs like “Aaron Burr, Sir” and “Washington on Your Side” play on repeat.

Which brings me to this article. I wrote a musical to capture a stunning victory for our climate and the Columbia: Washington state denied a key permit for a proposal to build the world’s largest fracked gas-to-methanol refinery. Seven years of community organizing, litigation, and coalition-building culminated in the state’s massive blow to the refinery and pipeline proposal. Well done, team!

This musical will premiere, and close, in your imagination. The budget: infinite. Conjure the world’s greatest actors; experience singers that move you to tears; gape as dancers use their bodies to evoke the mighty Columbia; and visualize costumes and sets worthy of Broadway. We’re talking “Lion King” meets “Phantom of the Opera” meets “Wicked.” Cue the orchestra.

ACT 1: A Small Town

Scene 1: (Setting: May 2014. Kalama, WA, population 2,600. The curtain rises. A spotlight drenches a lone fisherman, John Flynn, clad in flannel, blue jeans, and a ball cap).

JOHN: During the peak of spring and fall Chinook, bank fishermen stand shoulder-to-shoulder just upriver from the Port of Kalama office to the mouth of the Cowlitz River, all the way to the Longview Bridge. There’ll be rows and rows and rows of boats anchored up in hog lines, trying to catch a fish.

(The spotlight shifts to Sally Keely, mathematics professor and Kalama resident.)

SALLY: We can access Portland’s eclectic urban scene in the morning, kayak among the herons in the afternoon, and watch the sunset from our mountain perch in the evening. Cambria, my daughter, just said that at night she dreams about living in the lush forest among the mighty trees, and we do!

Scene 2: (Setting: August 2015. People in suits crowd the lawn at the Port of Kalama overlooking the Columbia. Gov. Inslee arrives at the ribbon-cutting ceremony announcing the proposed methanol refinery and pipeline. Two bald eagles perch in a tree nearby.)

GOV. INSLEE: This refinery will be a model for the rest of the world.

EAGLE 1: Hey, what’s the Governor doing promoting this fracked gas project?

EAGLE 2: Oh, he’s going to regret this in a few years.

ACT 2: Meth-a-what?

(Setting: Spring 2016. A news reporter and camera crew interview Columbia Riverkeeper Executive Director Brett VandenHeuvel.)

REPORTER: A company called Northwest Innovation Works proposes building the world’s largest fracked gas-to-methanol refinery. What is methanol and how does the company plan to use it?

BRETT: Methanol is a chemical used to make plastic or burned as a fuel. Northwest Innovation Works plans to ship the methanol to Asia.

REPORTER: The project backers claim the refinery is a win-win for our climate. Why all the fuss?

BRETT: A single refinery could consume more fracked gas than all other industrial uses in Washington combined. This translates to 5 million metric tons of carbon pollution each year for the next 40 years. Bottomline: This proposal is a disaster for our climate—and the Columbia.

ACT 3: Grassroots Activism Rocks

Scene 1: (Setting: April 2017. On the banks of the Columbia River in Kalama.)

(A high-energy, modern dance routine, led by Conservation Director Dan Serres and former Senior Organizer Jasmine Zimmer-Stucky, captures the passion and creativity of activists participating in an aquatic adaptation of the People's Climate March, a nationwide climate day of action. Two canoes piloted by the Cowlitz and Portland All Nations canoe families enter the Columbia's swift waters, represented by dancers in every shade of blue. The tribal canoes, followed by fishing boats and other small craft, carry signs promoting climate action.)

Scene 2: (Setting: July 2019. On the banks of the Kalama River.)

DYLAN HAVIV (10 years old): I think it's really dumb. I don't want a big, giant methanol plant in my backyard. And I don't think anyone wants a big, giant methanol plant in their backyard. Why isn't it super easy to just say no? Everyone in my generation knows that the age of fossil fuels is over. Money should not be the bottomline. Humans should be the bottomline. And it's just kind of sad that we're having to tell the adults that.

ACT 4: Inslee Sees the Light

Scene 1: (Setting: September 2017. Columbia Riverkeeper office.)

MILES JOHNSON (Columbia Riverkeeper Senior Staff Attorney): We won in court! The Washington Pollution Control Hearings ruled in favor of our coalition! The state must redo its environmental review for the refinery and pipeline to consider the full climate impact.

Scene 2: (Setting: May 7, 2019. Gov. Inslee stands center stage at a podium to deliver an address after signing a bill banning hydraulic fracking for oil and natural gas. Two familiar eagles perch in a tree.)

GOV. INSLEE: I cannot in good conscience support continued construction of a liquefied natural gas plant in Tacoma or a methanol production facility in Kalama. In the early days of both projects, I said they could help reduce greenhouse gas emissions as we transition to cleaner energy sources, but I am no longer convinced that locking in these multidecadal infrastructure projects is sufficient to accomplishing what's necessary.

EAGLE 1: Well it sure took him long enough to see the light!

EAGLE 2: I called this years ago.

Scene 3: (Setting: November 2020. Zoom.)

MILES: We won in court again! A federal judge ruled in favor of our coalition! The federal government must redo its environmental review for the refinery and pipeline to consider the full climate impact.



Peaople's Climate March
Photo: Rick Rappaport

Act 5: You Saved Kalama from a Calamity!

NARRATOR: Over 25,000 people signed petitions asking Gov. Inslee and the Washington Dept. of Ecology to reject the Kalama methanol refinery. In videos fueled by social media, through “kayaktivism” events, and at rallies across the Pacific Northwest, people rose up to demand action: protect our climate and the Columbia from the Kalama methanol refinery.

Scene 1: (Setting: Fall 2020. A cozy apartment. Kate Murphy, community organizer for Columbia Riverkeeper, sits on her couch, a ukulele in hand. Kate strums the ukulele, hums, and bursts into song, channeling the voice of Joni Mitchell.)

*Well Kalama's real pretty on the river side,
If you haven't seen it yet, you should take a ride.
The rivers flow by on the north and the west,
The people of Kalama are truly the best.*

*But Kalama has a problem they can't solve alone,
We have to stop it from becoming a disaster zone.
Northwest Innovation Works has a bad plan,
To build the world's largest fracked gas-to-methanol plant.*

*Let's save Kalama from a calamity,
Let's work together, to save the birds and bees,
Protect the water and the air they breathe,
To keep for all the critters and our families.*

Scene 2: (Setting: January 19, 2021. A large computer screen. Washington Dept. of Ecology Director Laura Watson delivers a monologue.)

DIRECTOR WATSON: Today, the Washington Dept. of Ecology denied a shoreline conditional use permit for a proposed methanol facility in Kalama. This proposal has been the subject of intense interest and controversy, both because of its potential effect on the local economy and its potential environmental impacts.

(The chorus breaks into Kool & The Gang's “Celebration.” Celebrate good times, come on!)

Scene 3: (Setting: February 2021. The stage transforms into stacks of squares with an actor appearing in each—what we used to call the opening for “The Brady Bunch,” now known as life on Zoom. The virtual victory party!)

LINDA LEONARD: We did it!

LINDA HORST: What an amazing ride. I can't believe it.

(The actors bursts into song: “We Saved Kalama From a Calamity!”)



Photo: Steven Patenaude

Scan the QR code or visit
bit.ly/kalama-calamity to hear
Kate Murphy's complete rendition
of the Kalama Calamity song!



WHAT'S NEXT?



By Brett VandenHeuvel,
Executive Director

Columbia Riverkeeper has an ambitious goal: we will protect our land, water, and climate by defeating every new and expanded fossil fuel infrastructure project. Thanks to our incredible members and partners, we've had great success. But our work is not done.

HERE ARE OUR TOP FOSSIL FUEL PRIORITIES FOR 2021:

Northwest Innovation Works methanol (Kalama, WA). Almost there! We achieved a major victory when the Washington Dept. of Ecology denied a key permit. The company has appealed. Our staff attorneys and experts will work with our partners at Earthjustice to help defend Washington's good decision in state court. We must also defend our federal court victory, which invalidated a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dock-building permit.

Zenith Energy (Portland, OR). This project is tricky because Zenith converted an existing shipping terminal to export tar-sands crude oil. Zenith now seeks to expand. We are pressuring Portland to deny new building permits and suing Zenith for starting construction without permission. It is not acceptable to ship tar sands through Portland and down the Columbia.

Global Partners (Clatskanie, OR). Like Zenith, Global Partners converted an existing facility (here, a corn-to-ethanol refinery) into an oil-by-rail terminal. Global Partners seeks to expand greatly. Riverkeeper and allies continue to watchdog Global Partners' pollution permits and will challenge any plans to expand.

Perennial Wind-Chaser (Hermiston, OR). It's maddening that Oregon is bending over backward to allow construction of a new fracked-gas power plant when we must focus on clean energy. We are suing the Oregon Dept. of Energy to prevent a deal that will saddle us with dirty fossil fuel energy for decades.

Industrial rezone at Port Westward (Clatskanie, OR). Imagine another Port of Vancouver—over 800 acres of industrial development, including fossil fuel terminals—in the heart of the Columbia River estuary. That's what the Port of Columbia County proposes: rezoning high-quality farmland adjacent to the Port's existing Port Westward property for a massive industrial buildout. Stopping the rezone is a big deal and a long-term commitment for Riverkeeper. We will protect farmland, adjacent salmon habitat, and water quality if successful.

Clean energy policies. We will work with partners to pass better policies to promote clean energy and center frontline Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities that are disproportionately impacted by the fossil fuel industry. This includes work at Oregon and Washington legislatures (100%-clean and energy-affordability bills), state agencies (new rules on greenhouse gases in both Oregon and Washington), and cities and towns along the Columbia.

People ask me, "Don't you get tired of the constant fights?" No. This is an amazing job. I'm inspired by our passionate members who give generously and make their voices heard. From courtrooms to grange halls, from big rallies to quiet moments on the river, it's an honor to stand together to protect this place we love.

Photo: Ale Blakely



DREAMING TOGETHER: BECOMING COMUNIDADES



By Jamie Melton,
Communications Coordinator

The mission of Comunidades is ambitious: to amplify voices for environmental and social justice while increasing Latina/o/x engagement and leadership in Columbia River Gorge communities. Founded in 2018 by Columbia Riverkeeper Senior Organizer Ubaldo Hernández and community volunteers, Comunidades is now an independent organization fiscally sponsored by Riverkeeper. I met up with Comunidades' first full-time staff member, Program Director Lisa Muñoz, and Ubaldo to reflect on the organization's efforts to engage the collective activism and leadership of the Latina/o/x communities in the Gorge.



Ubaldo Hernández
Senior Organizer,
Columbia Riverkeeper



Lisa Muñoz
Program Director,
Comunidades

How did Comunidades come together?

Ubaldo: Starting a new organization from scratch is a lot of dreaming, work, and patience. You need to dream with others to see your dream grow. Comunidades grew organically through conversations and goals identified among Latina/o/x community members in the Gorge who wanted to engage in and organize around protecting natural resources. The group started after Riverkeeper hired me to organize Latina/o/x communities to protect the river, and this expanded and crossed into social injustices experienced by our communities.

Today Comunidades' goals are to build a coalition of communities that engages on issues that affect our lives: toxic pollution, pesticides, health equity, housing access, workers' rights, racial discrimination, and social justice. Our vision is to take a grassroots approach, centered on the voices of our communities, advocating to reduce environmental and social injustices.

Can you share a story or example about how Comunidades has impacted people's lives?

Lisa: Comunidades started "Voces del Noroeste," a weekly, online community-journalism show featuring voices from across the Pacific Northwest, after leading community journalism training in 2020. The pandemic is such an isolating experience for many. Comunidades offered stipends to 30 Latina/o/x storytellers to develop

journalism skills. People were eager to share stories and grow their communication skills—and it's been amazing to witness how folks are sharing their stories in creative ways.

Ubaldo: In early 2020 I had a friend voice concerns about losing his home of over a decade, located in a trailer park, to developers in White Salmon. To respond, Comunidades coordinated weekly Saturday meetings for the residents, mostly farmworkers, empowering them to know their rights and use their voices to incite change. I invited the mayor and city council members to a few meetings so they could talk to residents directly. We coordinated legal representation and offered public testimony training to those who needed it. People ultimately lost their homes. But the city council updated zoning codes to preserve affordable housing options in White Salmon, preventing further displacement and houselessness.

How did your upbringing influence your path to Comunidades?

Ubaldo: I came to the U.S. from Mexico having worked as a press operator for a worker's union. I started as a farmworker while learning English so I could expand my career options. I then worked in the print industry, restaurants and breweries, and graphic design. I got to experience firsthand how these industries impact the environment—immense water wasting in breweries,



Artist Hampton Rodriguez designed social justice comics for Comunidades to share on social media.

“

“My experience of direct exposure to pollution through working, combined with witnessing and enduring workplace discrimination, racism, and classism, all influenced my decision to advocate for our communities and form Comunidades.”

– Ubaldo Hernández

ink pollution and paper production from print, and the detrimental effects from toxic pesticides on agricultural workers—which are all still impacting communities today. My experience of direct exposure to pollution through working, combined with witnessing and enduring workplace discrimination, racism, and classism, all influenced my decision to advocate for our communities and form Comunidades.

Lisa: Both my lived experience growing up in the Hood River Valley and professional experience studying science, specifically biochemistry, drew me to Comunidades. I grew up on an orchard in Odell with parents who were farmworkers. I got to be outside a lot, and my parents loved being outside as well. Constantly being in nature was a blessing, but there were a lot of injustices that I was exposed to. Family fears of discrimination and pesticides meant I was aware of social and environmental injustice at a young age. When the opportunity to apply for Comunidades’ program director arose, I jumped at the chance because of my love for my community.

How does Riverkeeper support Comunidades’ growth?

Lisa: Riverkeeper is officially our fiscal sponsor, providing structural support to create a foundation and example of the level of work that we want to achieve. Riverkeeper provides administrative and fundraising support, like administering and giving feedback on our grant

applications, and strategic communications efforts. It’s always helpful to have advice from an established nonprofit.

How does Comunidades differ from and complement other organizations doing environmental work in the Pacific Northwest?

Ubaldo: Simply put, we are Latina/o/x-led and not filtering decisions and voices through white leadership. We create our own perspectives, rules, words, and style to create community access to knowledge and resources to achieve justice and engage with the environment. We talk about how we feel, what we see, and we really treat all of our members as the leaders and decision makers that they are.

What excites you most about the work you are doing?

Lisa: Everyone else’s excitement. All of the volunteers who spend so much time and effort to move things forward instills excitement within me. Our volunteers are our leaders and the people doing the work.

How can Columbia Riverkeeper members support Comunidades?

Ubaldo: You can dream with us as a community to protect our natural resources and advocate for social justice issues. We invite you to look eye-to-eye with us in doing the work by listening and learning.



Stay in touch with us on our bilingual Facebook page, Facebook.com/ComunidadesPNW or by signing up to receive our email updates at bit.ly/ComunidadesPNW or by scanning this code:



A BOLD MOVE FOR SALMON



*By Miles Johnson,
Senior Attorney*

Arguing about the four dams on the Lower Snake River has been a Pacific Northwest pastime since before the first load of concrete was poured at Ice Harbor Dam. On the surface, the debate pits cultural and economic icons—salmon and salmon fishing—against powerful interests that use the Lower Snake to make hydropower and transport agricultural products.

But for many, the argument can't be boiled down to fish survival rates, kilowatt hours, or acre-feet of irrigation water. It's also about what the dams represent, and what removing them would admit about our past and portend for the future of the Northwest. The fate of these four dams has been called one of the most complex environmental, social, and economic problems in our nation's history.



"We view restoring the lower Snake River—a living being to us, and one that is injured—as urgent and overdue."

**- Shannon F. Wheeler, Chairman
of the Nez Perce Tribe**

For the first time in a generation, a serious proposal by Idaho Congressman Mike Simpson could end the impasse—not just by removing four dams, but by honoring the rights and interests of Tribes and charting a course toward economic prosperity and truly clean energy in the Northwest. Like any first draft, the proposal needs a lot of revision. But we can't let this historic opportunity slip through our fingers.

With Snake River salmon approaching extinction, the communities and species that depend on them are also at risk. It's time to act.

Below, we explore the problem, the potential solutions, and how Columbia Riverkeeper is working to restore rivers, salmon, and the communities that depend on them.

THE SNAKE RIVER

The Snake River is the Columbia's largest tributary. The Snake and its feeder streams—many of which are mighty rivers in their own right—drain most of Idaho and Northeast Oregon. Historically, the Snake River produced between one third and one half of the Columbia's salmon, including millions of Chinook, steelhead, coho, and sockeye. These fish sustained native cultures and abundant wildlife. The headwaters of the Snake, high in the Idaho mountains, are still some of the best salmon breeding areas in the Lower 48, insulated from development and the worst effects of climate change. Nevertheless, Snake River salmon and steelhead populations have collapsed. Some scientists say they could go extinct in the next 20 years.

For salmon and steelhead, the trouble starts when the Snake River leaves the Idaho mountains. The Snake flows roughly 150 miles through eastern Washington to join the Columbia near the Tri-Cities. In the 1960s and '70s, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built four dams on the Lower Snake River to create navigable water for barges and generate electricity. As scientists, Tribes, and fishermen all warned, these four dams decimated the Snake River's salmon and steelhead. The dams transformed the Lower Snake River into a series of warm, shallow lakes where predators, dam turbines, and hot water kill too many migrating salmon.

The situation is dire: Snake River salmon are close to extinction. But there's still time to restore the Snake's and Columbia's once-mighty salmon runs. Other dam removals in the Columbia Basin and the Pacific Northwest have resulted in dramatic and immediate improvements in salmon survival. There is every reason to believe the same would be true in the Snake River.



A MOST INCREDIBLE CREATURE

In the liberal-leaning Pacific Northwest, it may surprise some that Rep. Simpson—a dependably conservative Republican—is leading the charge for Lower Snake River dam removal. But as Rep. Simpson’s long-running concern for Idaho’s salmon shows, a desire for healthy and harvestable runs of salmon unites most Northwesterners regardless of political boundaries, party affiliations, or which side of the Cascades they call home.

Whether we should restore salmon has never really been part of the debate; the U.S. has spent \$17 billion on this effort. But the “how” has long evaded consensus. Now, with a healthy dose of political courage and a strong sense of urgency, Rep. Simpson is proposing the one thing that scientists believe could reverse Snake River salmon and steelhead’s march towards extinction.

Rep. Simpson’s proposal—sometimes called the Columbia Basin Fund—is not just about dam removal, nor was it created in a vacuum. The proposal draws on more than 300 conversations with Tribes, states, federal agencies, businesses, utilities, and other stakeholders who were asked to imagine “what if” the four Lower Snake dams were gone. The result is a proposal as broad and diverse as, well, the Columbia Basin.

Dam removal and big infrastructure spending were clearly not Rep. Simpson’s first choice. A former opponent of Snake River dam removal, the Congressman’s response to pro-dam interests has evolved. Perhaps he recognizes that we’ve tried everything else; our current path leads to extinction for Snake River salmon or court-mandated restrictions on the dams that could upend current river uses without providing durable solutions. Neither is acceptable to Rep. Simpson. His approach is to start a region-wide conversation about charting a future for the Pacific Northwest that puts everything on the table.



A PATH TO DAM REMOVAL

The outline that Rep. Simpson put forward is best understood as an invitation to deal, not a deal in and of itself. In broad strokes, he proposes: removing the four Lower Snake River dams; stopping litigation about the dams for 35 years; funding to replace hydroelectricity with clean energy; investing in affected communities and agricultural economies; making states and Tribes the primary fish and wildlife managers in the Columbia Basin; and keeping the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) responsible for a fixed share of fish and wildlife mitigation costs while helping BPA maintain its financial footing in a changing energy market.

To be clear, there's plenty not to like. Rep. Simpson—a long-time critic of our nation's bedrock environmental laws—would make removal of all other dams in the Columbia River Basin significantly more difficult, and also provide safe harbor for dams and agricultural interests that violate the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act. Columbia Riverkeeper does not take such suggestions lightly; they jeopardize the integrity of the entire Columbia River ecosystem, our nation's fundamental environmental protections, and the ability of Riverkeeper and our allies to continue protecting clean water and critically endangered salmon and other species. What's more, the proposed environmental rollbacks reach far beyond the Lower Snake River and the issues created by removing these four dams.

Despite its flaws, the proposal is the first serious attempt by a federal or state elected leader to initiate a region-wide conversation about Snake River dam removal in more

than two decades. It is simply too good of an opportunity to dismiss out of hand because the first draft needs significant revisions.

STARS ALIGNING

Why, after so many years of gridlock, is Lower Snake River dam removal a realistic goal right now? Take your pick of the following:

- Barge shipments on the Lower Snake River have declined to their lowest levels in history, as many agricultural producers and others find alternative means to get their goods to market.
- The very visible plight of beloved Southern Resident Orcas, which depend on Columbia Basin Chinook salmon, has galvanized Puget Sound communities and leaders.
- The shift in electricity markets that have made solar and other renewable energy sources cost competitive or cheaper than hydropower, which has greatly increased in price.
- Public acknowledgement by federal scientists that, left unaddressed, the combination of dams and climate change will cause the near-term extinction of some Snake River salmon and steelhead runs.

One final reason is purely practical: the Northwest congressional delegation is at the apex of its political power. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR), Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), and Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR) all chair powerful committees that could shape and bring forth a comprehensive plan to remove Lower Snake River dams—if they decide to act.



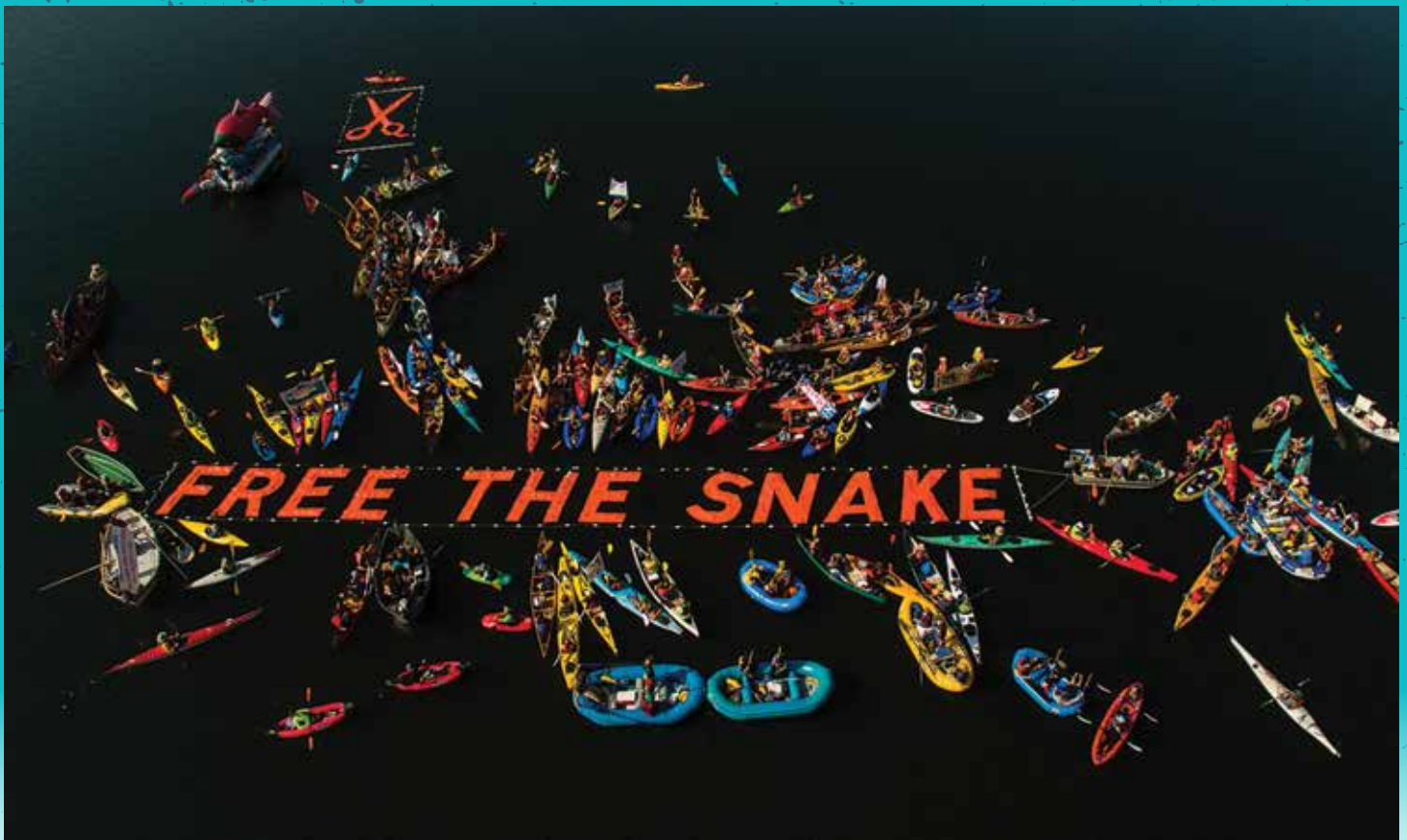


Photo: Moonhouse

COLUMBIA RIVERKEEPER'S ROLE IN DAM REMOVAL AND SALMON RECOVERY

In our view, we must unite around solutions to remove the four Lower Snake River dams and reinvest in regional transportation, irrigation, and energy infrastructure. Working together, we can honor Tribal rights and interests and secure a future that includes salmon, agriculture, and clean energy.

That's why we are asking you to reach out to Northwest members of Congress and governors, and ask them to engage on this important issue. With our region's progressive leadership, we can both seize this historic opportunity and refine the proposal to ensure that it meets the needs of our region without damaging the bedrock environmental protections that we all value and enjoy.

Advocating for Lower Snake River dam removal is not the only way Riverkeeper is working to protect Columbia Basin salmon from the effects of dams and hydropower. Riverkeeper and our allies are using the Clean Water Act to do something groundbreaking and unprecedented: hold the Columbia and Snake river dams legally accountable for the heat pollution that is killing endangered salmon. Columbia and Lower Snake River dams create stagnant reservoirs that soak up the sun's warmth, making the

river too hot for salmon in the summer. But the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (also called the "Corps," the federal agency that owns and runs the dams) has long ignored the problem.

Riverkeeper won lawsuits to close this legal loophole by:

- Requiring the Corps to apply for Clean Water Act discharge permits;
- Requiring the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to publish a plan to reduce the dams' heat pollution; and
- Supporting the Washington Dept. of Ecology's decision to make compliance with EPA's temperature plan a condition of the Corps' Clean Water Act discharge permits.

The result of all this legal wrangling should be improvements to the operation or configuration of the dams that limit their impact on river temperatures and salmon.

Uncertainty about the future of salmon and Snake River dams abounds. We promise this: Riverkeeper will keep advocating for healthy, harvestable runs of Columbia Basin salmon—in the media, in the courtroom, and in Congress. Salmon, and the species and cultures they support, are simply too important to the Pacific Northwest to do anything else.



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RIVER CURRENTS | 2021 Issue 1

Take a stand for clean water and our climate

Here are five ways you can support
Columbia Riverkeeper's work:

- 1** Make a special donation today online or in the enclosed envelope.
- 2** Sign up for monthly donations. It's easy and helps our long-range planning.
- 3** Contribute through your donor-advised fund.
- 4** Make a tax-effective donation of stocks, bonds, or IRAs.
- 5** Leave a legacy by adding Columbia Riverkeeper to your will or trust.

To discuss how you can support this work, Alex Smith, Membership Specialist, at alex@columbiariverkeeper.org or 541-387-3030.

