

COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN RESTORATION ACT



The Columbia River Basin Restoration Act (CRBRA) is the first bill to authorize Congress to appropriate funds for toxin cleanup in the Columbia River Basin. Toxic pollutants, including mercury, DDT and PCBs, have been detected in the Columbia ecosystem, and have significant health, safety and economic impacts.

The Columbia River Basin encompasses a significant multi-purpose river system. The river irrigates six million acres of agricultural land, carries \$24 billion in cargo annually, and is the largest generator of clean hydropower in North America. The region is home to 8 million people and has historically been the largest salmon-producing river system in the world. However, it was the only major EPA-designated “large aquatic ecosystem” in the nation to receive no funding for toxics reduction.

The region currently spends millions on habitat restoration, and these investments must be protected with concurrent funding for toxics reduction. Studies conducted by NOAA have confirmed that species returning to restored habitat are being harmed by toxic runoff.

CRBRA creates a voluntary grant program driven by partnerships with stakeholders

The Columbia River Basin Restoration Act (CRBRA) creates a voluntary, preventative program to provide stakeholders with the tools and support to reduce toxins. Similar grant programs are already providing benefits for nine large aquatic ecosystems around the country, including Puget Sound and the Great Lakes. Collectively these areas receive over \$400 million annually for toxin reduction. The CRBRA provides equity for the Columbia River Basin, with \$30 million authorized annually for activities supporting reduction of toxics in the basin. PNWA participates in the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Columbia River Basin Restoration Working Group and the first round of grants funded through the program are anticipated to be announced in June 2020.

Toxics like PCBs and DDT have far reaching impacts on drinking water, salmon and other fish and wildlife, commercial fishing, wetlands, recreation and the economic viability of our region. Funding authorized for the CRBRA is intended to reduce pollution, address priority contaminated sites, improve water quality, monitor progress, reduce runoff and manage storm water, and protect habitat for multiple species including salmon. Allocation of funds will be driven by a stakeholder working group which will prioritize projects for EPA’s consideration as they evaluate grant applications. This federal funding is key to ensuring that we are able to reduce toxin pollution in the river basin, resulting in healthy people, fish, businesses and ecosystems in the Northwest.

PNWA supports funding for the Columbia River Basin Restoration Act

The CRBRA passed as part of the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act in December 2016, and had an authorization of \$30M included in the Water Resources Development Act of 2018. \$1M was included in FY2019 funding to kick start the program, and PNWA advocated for full funding of the program in FY2020. We greatly appreciate the efforts of our Northwest Congressional delegation to include funding for toxics reduction in the Columbia River Basin. The CRBRA will help protect people and wildlife from exposure to hazardous contaminants and avoid costly environmental cleanups and economic loss.

