

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 River 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 approximately \$22 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 Environmental Protection Agency (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 to reduce toxins in the environment.

CRBRA creates a voluntary grant program driven by partnerships with stakeholders

The Columbia River Basin Restoration Act (CRBRA) created a voluntary, preventative program to provide stakeholders with the tools and support to reduce toxins. 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, through a competitive grant process. Allocation of funds is driven by a stakeholder working group which prioritizes 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 which amended the Clean Water Act Section 123 to establish the Columbia River Basin Restoration Program. It had an authorization of \$30M included in the Water Resources Development Act of 2018. \$1M was included in FY2019 to kick start the program and the first round of fourteen grants awards were awarded in June 2020. PNWA supports full funding of the program annually, and participates in the EPA’s Columbia River Basin Restoration Program Working Group. On top of annual appropriations, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 provided an additional \$72M for the program. To date, the EPA has awarded 57 grants including 18 grants in 2023. In 2024, the EPA has \$15M available to focus on toxics monitoring grants. EPA anticipates announcing awards in July 2024. The EPA is also working on grant programs to address PFAS and 6PPD contaminants too.

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.

