

EPA Announces Toxic Reduction Lead Grants to Reduce Toxics in the Columbia River Basin



COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN
RESTORATION PROGRAM

ABOUT THE COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN RESTORATION FUNDING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Congress amended the Clean Water Act in 2016, which required EPA to establish a Columbia River Basin Restoration Program. EPA was directed to develop a voluntary, competitive grant program for eligible entities to fund environmental protection and restoration programs throughout the Basin. Eligible entities include state, Tribal, and local governments, regional water pollution control organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and soil and water conservation districts. Funded work must be for the purpose of environmental protection and restoration activities within the Columbia River Basin and may include programs, projects, and studies.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) infused the Columbia River Basin Restoration Program (CRBRP) with \$79 million in funding to administer, of which over \$56 million is being awarded to Toxic Reduction Leads (TRLs). These lead organizations are leveraging an additional \$17 million in matching funds, for a total of almost \$74 million going towards activities to improve water quality in the Columbia River Basin.

State governments, Tribal governments, regional water pollution control agencies and entities, local government entities, nongovernmental entities, and soil and water conservation districts were eligible to apply for this funding as a Toxic Reduction Lead. The primary role of a TRL is to:

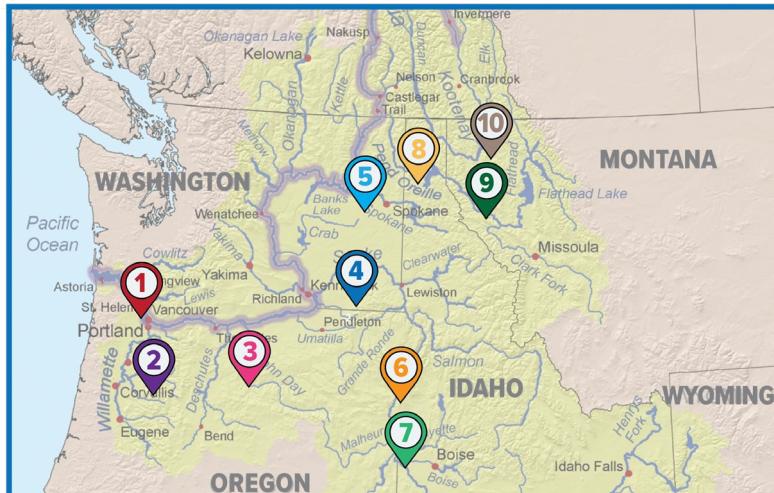
- Develop, implement, and manage a multi-phase or large-scale program or programs which leverage partnerships and include a comprehensive toxics reduction plan.
- Lead program and policy development and provide technical assistance.
- Award and manage subawards.
- Participate in the Columbia River Basin Restoration Program Working Group and provide periodic program updates at the bi-annual meetings.

To be eligible for funding, projects had to address at least one of the following categories as outlined in Section 123 of the Clean Water Act:

- **Eliminating or reducing pollution**, including strategies or projects to reduce the flow of toxics into streams of the Columbia River Basin.
- **Cleaning up contaminated sites**, including targeted small-scale clean-up actions.
- **Improving water quality** to reduce toxics in the Columbia River Basin.
- **Reducing runoff** through agricultural best management practices and/or sediment and stormwater runoff controls, including green infrastructure.
- **Protecting habitat** to reduce the impact of toxics on Columbia River Basin fish and wildlife.
- **Promoting citizen engagement or knowledge** by increasing engagement and communication with individual community members (such as local, state and Tribal environmental managers, and/or NGOs), creating bi-lingual outreach and education materials on the topic of toxics reduction, green chemistry pilot projects, and/or sharing success stories.

Additionally, EPA looked for proposals that:

- Improve community health, resilience, and/or sustainability; and
- Foster resilience and adaptation to changing environmental conditions.



2023 TOXIC REDUCTION LEAD GRANTEES

1 Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership	6 The Freshwater Trust
2 Urban Waters and Wildlife Partners	7 City of Nampa, Idaho
3 Oregon Department of Environmental Quality	8 Upper Columbia United Tribes
4 Salmon-Safe Columbia Partner Network	9 University of Montana Pesticide Stewardship Partnership
5 Washington Department of Ecology	10 Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation



BIPARTISAN INFRASTRUCTURE LAW FUNDING

The EPA Columbia River Basin Program received \$79 million in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) in 2021. This funding provides EPA the ability to grow the Columbia River Basin Restoration Program and significantly increase competitive grants to reduce toxics. This historic funding opportunity also allowed EPA to waive certain match requirements in support of the agency's environmental and Tribal priorities. EPA is very close to completing the awarding of all these BIL funds.

THE EPA'S COMMITMENT TO TRIBAL HEALTH PROTECTION

The Columbia River Basin Restoration Program is focused on engaging Tribes and other impacted communities in efforts to identify and reduce threats to their environment and community health. Tribal Governments in the Columbia River Basin are working to restore their watersheds and increase fish consumption to honor Tribal heritage and culture and Treaty rights. The EPA's commitment to reducing toxics in fish and water in the Columbia River Basin is key to the EPA's ongoing trust responsibility to Tribal Governments. Toxics reduction supports the resiliency of the Columbia River Basin ecosystem by reducing aquatic ecosystem and human health stressors.

1 Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership – School Stormwater Reduction Program (OR, WA)

The Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership's (LCEP) School Stormwater Reduction (SSR) program will work with community partners (e.g., school districts, schools, cities, counties, non-profits, students, teachers, parents, and community members) to design and build stormwater retrofit projects to reduce the stormwater pollution generated from schoolyards and school parking areas, to highlight green infrastructure approaches at a communities' most public places, and to engage and teach teachers, students, and community members about stormwater issues and solutions. The project's on-the-ground stormwater retrofit projects will green schoolyards by reducing toxic stormwater pollution, urban heat island impacts, and asphalt coverage. The LCEP School Stormwater Reduction program will target schools in overburdened communities that often lack tree cover, stormwater management, and deal with high environmental burdens. By focusing on overburdened communities, the School Stormwater Reduction program's on-the-ground stormwater management improvement projects create green infrastructure that provides multiple, long lasting, environmental and community benefits, and engage these school communities in environmentally beneficial projects.

Federal Amount: \$4,287,696; Match Amount: \$1,483,768; Total Award: \$ 5,771,464

2 Scaling Up: Urban Waters and Wildlife Partners (De)pave the Way on Toxics Reduction in the Upper Willamette (OR)

This project will enable Cascade Pacific RC&D and the Urban Waters and Wildlife Partners (UWWP) to further expand their flagship stormwater retrofit program, continue to provide technical assistance for improved stormwater management and the install twenty-four voluntary, green stormwater infrastructure facilities to reduce or eliminate pollution and runoff, improve water quality, and protect habitat while promoting citizen engagement and knowledge. This growing, regional collaborative is working together to address the impacts caused by urban development, including heat islands, flood and drought resilience, and heavily polluted waterways, by implementing voluntary green infrastructure and supporting programs that foster healthy humans, waterways, and wildlife. They will foster the sustainability of their shared work through embedding lessons learned and best practices in policy documents and working together to build local capacity for improved maintenance of green stormwater infrastructure. They will develop a strategic plan and comprehensive framework for toxics reduction, enabling partners to build on shared goals and invest in shared communications and toxics reduction strategies. UWWP will engage the public through stormwater education and targeted outreach efforts for pollution prevention and hazards reduction, including a new Catch Basin Cleaning Program at Lane County. Finally, UWWP will monitor both the effectiveness of their partnership and stormwater facilities, utilizing the monitoring results to inform project design and activities well into the future. This work is also intended to improve drinking water, and provide wildlife habitat, benefitting everyone.

Federal Amount: \$5,546,005; Match Amount: \$1,848,608; Total Award: \$7,394,613

3 Columbia River Basin Restoration Funding Assistance Program – Toxic Reduction Lead Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (OR)

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) will fund activities to safeguard waterways from pesticides and mercury, remediate orphaned brownfield sites in communities historically impacted the most by toxic pollutants, and implement actions to address per- and polyfluorinated (PFAS) compounds (known as “forever chemicals”) to improve the health of Oregon’s natural resources and those who depend on them. Oregon DEQ is excited to further develop diverse partnerships to advance innovative toxic reduction or prevention activities at the state and local level. With the Toxics Reduction Lead grant, DEQ and its partners will leverage federal funding to implement key programs designed to protect human health and the health of Oregon’s land, air, and water resources. The Pesticide Stewardship Partnership will provide education, outreach, and technical assistance in three counties and multiple river basins. DEQ and partners from the University of Oregon’s Resource Assistance for Rural Environments and the Oregon Department of Agriculture will provide technical assistance to rural communities and agricultural producers to reduce toxics in stormwater. Finally, the grant will fund remediation of contaminated land at up to 10 brownfields sites in historically disadvantaged communities.

Federal Amount: \$6,000,539; Match Amount: \$2,000,180; Total Award: \$8,000,719

4 Salmon-Safe Columbia Partner Network: Mobilizing Water Quality Protection Actions across the Inland Northwest Project (OR, WA, ID, MT, WY)

This proposal will scale up Salmon-Safe’s successful, EPA-supported interior Columbia Basin work by establishing the Salmon-Safe Columbia Partner Network to engage new Tribes, farmers, ranchers, developers, and other land managers in voluntary actions to protect water quality. The project will provide one-year to six-year subawards to partners across the interior Columbia River Basin—from hop farms in the Yakima Valley to ranches in upper Snake River tributaries to large-scale commercial development in Spokane—to deliver outreach, certification, and technical assistance to over 5,000 farmers and other large-scale land managers in key watersheds. In addition to helping create a healthier watershed for the entire population of the Columbia River Basin, farmers will benefit from certification by expanding connections to higher value markets in return for reducing runoff and improving habitat and water quality.

Federal Amount: \$6,344,510; Match Amount: \$2,120,000; Total Award: \$8,464,510

5 Columbia River Basin Restoration Program – Toxics Reduction Lead Washington Department of Ecology (WA)

The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology), with support from Washington State Department of Agriculture and others, will develop a comprehensive strategy to reduce toxics in the Columbia River. Consistent with Ecology’s Strategic Plan and existing programs designed to protect, preserve, and restore Washington’s waters, Ecology will use this funding to develop a plan that identifies and prioritizes toxics reduction efforts across the Basin. Development of this plan will include meaningful engagement with Tribal governments. Funds will also be used to develop a regional plan specific to the Spokane River, as well as for focused, on-the-ground implementation activities in the later years of the performance period following completion of the strategic plan or for “shovel-ready” projects identified during the development of the strategic plan. Implementation activities will be funded through subawards for projects that: eliminate or reduce toxics in the environment, improve water quality, protect the environment, clean-up eligible contaminated sites, or increase community knowledge and engagement.

Federal Amount: \$6,909,000; Match Amount: \$2,303,000; Total Award: \$9,212,000



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“EPA’s funding for the Estuary Partnership’s School Stormwater Reduction program will create transformative, long-lasting, environmental benefits at more than a dozen schools and for hundreds and thousands of students over the years. The Estuary Partnership is thrilled to be able to lead this work, to collaborate with our partners, and to benefit students, schools, and water bodies throughout the lower Columbia River Basin.”

– Elaine Placido, Executive Director, Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership



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COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN RESTORATION PROGRAM VISION STATEMENT

The EPA Columbia River Basin Restoration Program, through the implementation of Clean Water Act Section 123, will be a catalyst for basin-wide toxics reduction work efforts, enabling communities to access unimpaired watersheds with healthy fish and wildlife and quantifiable toxics reductions in fish, wildlife, and water.

ABOUT THE BASIN

The Columbia River Basin includes 17 federally recognized Tribes, covers 260,000 square miles, areas of MT, ID, WA, and OR and smaller portions of WY, NV, and UT. The Basin provides benefits including commercial fisheries, agriculture, forestry, recreation, and electric power generation. Human activities have contributed toxic contaminants to the environment that contribute to human health and ecosystem risks. Throughout the Basin, fish have accumulated contaminant levels that when eaten are harmful to people and wildlife. Toxics in fish are a primary health concern for Columbia River Basin Tribal people and other high fish consumers.

6 *Mid-Snake Toxics and Runoff Reduction Program (ID, OR)*

The Freshwater Trust (TFT) proposes to establish and support a Coordinating Committee of funders and implementers to target and implement high impact irrigation upgrades on agricultural fields that reduce the runoff that fuels dangerous methylmercury production in the Snake River. Methylmercury threatens human health, and the anoxic conditions that lead to methylmercury production threaten whole ecosystems. Reductions in agricultural runoff that fuels anoxic conditions can be easily achieved by converting surface irrigated fields to sprinkler irrigation systems. Since sprinklers can be expensive, it is important to fund projects on fields where they will generate the greatest runoff reductions. This program is designed to reduce the human health impacts caused by poor water quality, including those impacts to Tribes throughout the watershed who rely on the Snake River for cultural, subsistence, spiritual, ceremonial, and economic purposes. This approach will also help producers achieve better irrigation flexibility in the face of drought.

Federal Amount: \$5,599,735; Match Amount: \$1,866,578; Total Award: \$7,466,313

7 *City of Nampa Columbia River Basin Tributaries Water Treatment and Quality Improvements to Indian Creek and Mason Creek (ID)*

In partnership with regional stakeholders, the City of Nampa's Columbia River Basin Tributaries Water Quality Improvements Project will utilize a free water surface wetland and a retention facility to capture and infiltrate stormwater runoff. This innovative, constructed wetland will reduce and eliminate toxics, improve water quality, reduce runoff, and promote citizen engagement through the process of "Measure – Treat – Implement – Educate." This permanent project will also serve as a pilot to help determine viable treatment options for all of Canyon County through the development of a regional online repository titled "One Water, One People" and will be carried out with support from the City of Caldwell, Idaho Transportation Department, and Idaho Department of Environmental Quality.

Federal Amount: \$2,655,359; Match Amount: \$885,120; Total Award: \$3,540,479

8 *Upper Columbia United Tribes – Toxics Reduction Lead (MT, ID, WA (Member Tribes))*

The Upper Columbia United Tribes (UCUT) will develop and facilitate a portfolio of on-the-ground projects to address pathways that contribute and transfer toxins into and through the Upper Columbia River Basin. The UCUT program will include two major areas of emphasis: a Toxics Reduction Strategic Plan and series of subawards designed to achieve the measurable and meaningful reductions of toxics outlined in the plan. The comprehensive Toxics Reduction Strategic Plan will be developed within the first two years of the project and will include immediate development of the subawards to partners for the implementation of the plan. Year two proposed subaward programs will focus on three areas: agriculture best management practices and buffers projects, lead fishing gear trade-out projects, and historic and legacy mine inventories. Year three proposed subaward programs will include education and outreach projects with a focus on new and emerging chemicals of concern and legacy contaminants. Year four subaward programs will seek pilot projects to implement remediation actions to reduce the likelihood of existing or future inputs of toxics into surface waters from the highest risk abandoned mines. Through this project, UCUT projects that Tribal and regional communities, along with their children, will see first-hand that collaboration and action lead to healthier watersheds and shared environment.

The 25% match requirement was waived in support of the agency's environmental and Tribal priorities under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Federal Amount: \$5,597,772; Match Amount: \$0; Total Award: \$5,597,772

“City of Nampa Public Works is excited to be working with EPA for this innovative and impactful project, using a constructed wetland to improve water quality of our local Indian Creek waterway and thereby improve water quality in the Columbia River Basin.”

— City of Nampa, Idaho



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9 Reducing Toxics in the Upper Columbia through a new Pesticide Stewardship Partnership Program (MT, ID)

This project will build on the successful Pesticide Stewardship Partnership Program (PSPP) in Oregon. The University of Montana will develop and implement a comprehensive and collaborative PSPP for the Upper Columbia River Basin of Montana that will focus on reducing or eliminating pollution to improve water quality while engaging and educating the public on ways they can help reduce toxics. Work addressing these priorities will include targeted water quality monitoring for pesticides, implementation of actions to reduce pesticides in both urban/residential and agricultural areas (e.g., green infrastructure, agricultural best practices), and monitoring for successful implementation. All of these activities will improve water quality by preventing toxics from entering the environment. Stakeholders will engage in sampling, education and outreach, and lead actions to improve Montana’s waters. This project will also work in collaboration with Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and Kootenai Tribe of Idaho to address risks to human health from consumption of pesticides in fish. Clean water is critical for all people and all aquatic ecosystems, and this project will create a lasting legacy for future generations to come.

Federal Amount: \$6,635,202; Match Amount: \$2,212,030; Total Award: \$8,847,232

10 Montana Waters: Clearly Connected – Reducing Stormwater and Septic Leachate Toxic Pollution in the Headwaters of the Columbia River Basin (MT)

The Montana Department of Natural Resources Conservation and the Western Montana Conservation Commission seek to reduce toxic pollution in the headwaters of the Columbia River Basin by eliminating or reducing pollution, improving water quality, reducing runoff, and promoting citizen engagement and knowledge through stormwater and septic leachate toxic reduction subaward programs and associated education and outreach efforts. The work will increase the capacity for local governments, agencies, and watershed groups to tackle some of the most pressing nonpoint source pollution issues. As Montana rapidly develops, proactively addressing stormwater and septic leachate pollution is integral to protecting Montana’s pristine water resources, which are so important to Montana’s ecology, recreational activities, economy and culture. The Western Montana Conservation Commission will prioritize funding for projects in communities that have been previously overlooked or left out of environmental decision-making processes, including Tribal, rural, and low-income areas. Engaging with these communities to learn about their needs, priorities, and values while providing them with the tools to address toxic pollution and improve the health of their communities is the primary goal of this work.

Federal Amount: \$6,998,075; Match Amount: \$2,332,692; Total Award: \$9,330,767

For more information, please contact Michelle Wilcox (USEPA Region 10) at (360) 753-9469 or wilcox.michelle@epa.gov or find us on the EPA website at <https://www.epa.gov/columbiariver>.

“Salmon-Safe Columbia Partner Network will build a market-based movement of partnering organizations and conservation districts and Tribes working together to inspire water quality protection actions far into the future.”

— Dan Kent, Salmon-Safe, Co-Founder & Executive Director

“EPA’s support for our partnership magnifies the strength of each individual partner and keeps us on the path towards even better stewardship of our local water resources.”

— Amy Chinitz, Springfield Utility Board



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“The barrier to change here is not lack of producer interest in these projects nor lack of money. It’s simply not anyone’s job to solve the bigger funding, timing, and coordination barriers that currently inhibit project adoption at speed and scale. We’re excited EPA is giving us the opportunity to demonstrate a better pathway forward that can benefit so many communities.”

— Tim Wigington, Vice President of Finance and Policy, The Freshwater Trust

“We are excited to focus on our work in the Columbia River and know that it is an important resource to the people and wildlife of Washington State. With EPA’s help, we plan to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy that will ultimately reduce and eliminate toxics in the Columbia River. Other agencies, Tribes, and partners in the Columbia River watershed will benefit from pass-through funding and long-term capacity to provide technical assistance and expertise to the region.”

— Dr. Rachel Malison, University of Montana

“With the pressures of rapid development, this work is timely to bolster the resilience of Montana’s communities, strengthening their capacity to reduce toxic pollution from stormwater and wastewater and empowering them to conserve Montana’s beautiful water resources for future generations.”

— Casey Lewis, Western Montana Conservation Commission, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

“Our children and our fish and wildlife relatives need us to act to address the toxics impacting our watersheds and therefore our collective future, this project offers hope, it offers an opportunity to develop a path forward while demonstrating that meaningful measures can be taken that will reduce the toxic loads entering our shared waters.”

— Marc Gauthier, Wildlife Program Manager, Upper Columbia United Tribes

“Despite the enactment of the Clean Water Act in 1972, the threat of pesticide contamination in lakes and streams remains a concern today. To date, there has been no comprehensive pesticide monitoring program in western Montana. This project will address Montana’s pesticide concern through a comprehensive Pesticide Stewardship Partnership Program (PSPP) which leverages community-led, citizen-based partnerships to engage multiple stakeholders, producers, agencies and the general public to reduce pesticides and toxics in the upper Columbia River basin over the next 5 years.”

— Dr. Rachel Malison, University of Montana