

FACT SHEET

COEUR d'ALENE RIVER BASIN



JUNE 2001

UPDATE #8

Work Now Turns to Developing the Cleanup Plan

A Message from Chuck Findley
Acting Region 10 Administrator
to the Citizens of the Coeur d'Alene Basin

Over the past several months I have had the privilege of meeting with a variety of groups and individuals in the Coeur d'Alene River Basin. I have learned just how much people care about the quality of life in their communities and how concerned people are that EPA's work may affect that quality of life. I want you to know that EPA is listening, that we value your input and that we are trying to address your concerns. The following are some of the concerns I've heard and how they are being addressed:

Superfund Listing

People throughout the Basin have expressed serious concern about being part of a Superfund site. The concern I have heard most often is about the possible negative effects on the Basin economy due to the stigma and perceptions about Superfund. People have also expressed concern about how and when areas can be removed from the Superfund list.

I want to share with you EPA's goals:

- 1) Over the next few months we will clarify where we know contamination exists and needs to be cleaned up and where it does not. We want to give the Basin communities certainty and we want to narrow our focus to areas where cleanup action is needed. For example, based on existing information EPA has no reason to believe that mining contamination is present in the residential areas of the cities of Coeur d'Alene, Post Falls, and Harrison. No sampling has occurred or is planned for these areas and no cleanup is being proposed.
- 2) In communities where residential cleanup is needed, we want to get in, get cleanup done and get those areas off the Superfund list as soon as possible. We are also starting discussions about options for removing the Superfund designation from Coeur d'Alene Lake. We know this is major concern and we will keep you informed as we proceed. There are important issues that still need to be resolved among many parties. This will take some time. The public also has an important role, because removing, or "deleting" areas from a Superfund site is a legal action that is subject to formal public comment.

How Long Will Cleanup Take?

Since the progress report came out in April (see more information about the progress report below), I have heard

Community-Specific Meetings Coming to Your Town

Later this summer EPA will host meetings and workshops in the Basin to discuss specific cleanup work that may be proposed for different geographic areas. Watch for announcements of locations, dates, and times for these meetings in the near future.

concerns about the proposed "incremental approach" to cleanup and the length of time cleanup work will take.

I know people want cleanup to occur as quickly as possible and with as little disruption to the communities as possible. These are EPA's goals too. Our first priority will be to quickly complete cleanup work in the communities where human health risks exist. We plan to get the highest priority cleanup work done in the communities during the first several years.

Another top priority will be work that gets the "biggest bang for the buck" environmentally. We want to start with cleanup actions that will result in tangible and measurable environmental improvements, like returning fish populations and reducing waterfowl deaths.

Human Health Issues

Cleanup to reduce human health risks is our first priority. Recently I have heard concern about how the Basin Human Health Risk Assessment was conducted and the conclusions of the Risk Assessment.

EPA and the State of Idaho share the communities' goals of using the best science available and developing a sound and reasonable cleanup plan to minimize exposure to metals. Our fundamental goal is to prevent children – both current and future residents – from experiencing elevated blood-lead levels and the detrimental health effects that result. We stand behind the risk assessment and want to move forward with cleanup efforts.

The issue of health risks from metals contamination is one that both EPA and the State of Idaho take very seriously. The risk assessment process was developed and extensively peer-reviewed by national workgroups of leading scientists. The risk assessment was also specifically tailored to the conditions in the Basin.

Thank you for the opportunity to listen and learn about the issues that are important to you. It is critical that we keep the lines of communication open.

Chuck Findley

Preview of Cleanup Plan Now Available

EPA, the States of Idaho and Washington, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe and the federal Natural Resource Trustee agencies recently issued a progress report on their discussions about how to clean up metals contamination in the Coeur d'Alene River Basin.

This report comes after extensive studies in the Basin aimed at understanding where contamination exists, in what amounts, and what risks the contamination poses to people, plants and animals. The purpose of the progress report is to give people in the Basin communities a preview of cleanup actions that may be included in the proposed cleanup plan due out for public review this fall. No cleanup actions have been selected yet. The proposed cleanup plan will be subject to a formal public review and comment process. Final cleanup decisions are not made until the Record of Decision is issued.

The rest of this fact sheet gives a brief summary of the progress report and describes how you can weigh-in on the cleanup plan as it is being developed. The progress report is available on EPA's website: <http://yosemite.epa.gov/r10/cleanup.nsf/sites/cda>

What Does the Progress Report Say?

Generally.....

The governments agree that protecting human health should be the first priority and generally agree about work needed to protect people, particularly children, from exposure to metals in the upper Basin communities (east of Kingston). Discussions are continuing about how to protect human health in the lower Basin recreational areas near the lateral lakes and Coeur d'Alene River flood plain.

Identifying actions to protect people's health is fairly straightforward because we can draw on the work already done in the Bunker Hill "Box" communities. Deciding what to do to improve environmental conditions is more difficult because of the large amount of contamination in the Coeur d'Alene River system and the large geographic area involved. All parties agree it will be technically challenging and will take many years to meet some environmental standards, including the water quality standards for metals in streams, rivers and lakes.

Specifically.....

Cleanup to Protect People's Health

Based on technical evaluations and community input, the agencies and tribe are considering the following cleanup actions to reduce exposure and protect people's health:

- Removing and replacing residential soils containing more than 1,000 parts per million lead;
- Placing a barrier of sod/grass over yards with lead concentrations between 700 and 1,000 parts per million lead to prevent exposure and dust;
- Residential lead paint abatement;
- Covering or removing soil with more than 700 parts per million lead at formal recreational areas in the upper Basin, providing clean "oases" for recreation in the lower Basin near the river flood plain, and capping or removing soil at contaminated recreational areas along the Spokane River in Washington;
- Treating or providing an alternative source of water for homes with contaminated wells;
- Health education/intervention and a local program to safely manage remaining contamination and protect clean yards over the long-term;
- Indoor dust assistance such as a vacuum loan program and possible interior cleaning if needed;
- Educating fishermen about possible risks associated with eating fish caught from certain areas of the Basin.

Improving the Environment

The progress report outlines several priorities for environmental improvements in the Basin:

1. **Reducing Dissolved Metals in Rivers and Streams:**
The levels of dissolved zinc and cadmium in the Basin river system exceed state and federal water quality standards. In some areas, the amount of dissolved metals are between 10 and 100 times the allowable

levels. Some of the fish native to the Basin, including bull trout and cutthroat trout, are very sensitive to dissolved metals, specifically cadmium. The dissolved metals in the Basin are from mine tailings that wash downstream and are deposited as sediments in the bed, banks and flood plains of the rivers. Besides flood plain sediments, dissolved metals also come from mine adits, waste rock and tailings piles and tailings impoundments.

The long-term goal is to reduce the dissolved metals to levels that meet the water quality standards and support native fish populations. This will take many years to achieve. The agencies and Tribe are discussing shorter-term actions that will result in the most benefit to the river system.

2. Reducing Lead in Wetlands and Flood plains

The flood plain of the lower Coeur d'Alene River is contaminated with lead that washed downstream over the years from upper Basin mining activities. The lead in the flood plain harms wildlife in the area. Waterfowl, including Tundra Swan and ducks, swallow the lead which is known to cause toxic and lethal effects.

The governments agree the earliest work should focus on reducing waterfowl mortality in heavily used areas. The longer term cleanup goal for the flood plain is to protect wildlife, plants and fish from exposure to metals.

3. Reducing Lead in Surface Water

Lead continues to move down the Coeur d'Alene River and the Spokane River. The major sources of the lead are contaminated river banks and riverbed sediments.

This is a particularly challenging issue. Additional studies, including pilot projects are now underway to help with the cleanup decision-making process.

Coeur d'Alene Lake

EPA studies indicate that Coeur d'Alene Lake and adjacent beaches are safe for recreation including wading, swimming, sunbathing, boating, etc. While water in the lake meets federal safe drinking water standards, the water exceeds more stringent standards for metals intended to protect fish and other aquatic life.

Current cleanup discussions are focusing on strengthening the implementation and enforcement of the 1996 Lake Management Plan. Based on existing information, no active cleanup (e.g. dredging or covering) is planned for the lakebed sediments. Enhancing the Lake Management Plan will continue the improvements in lake water quality and help ensure that the metals in the lakebed sediments do not move into the water column and contaminate the lake and downstream areas.

Spokane River

Several public beaches on the Spokane River in Washington are contaminated with metals above Washington State standards.

Proposed cleanup actions to protect human health include removing and covering contaminated shoreline sediment at the beach sites. Dredging or covering of sediments is also being evaluated and long-term monitoring is planned. The state of Washington's goal is to allow unrestricted access to recreational areas, clean up areas important for fish spawning, and minimize the potential for contaminants to move downstream. The Spokane Tribe is also planning to conduct testing and to evaluate human health risks related to Tribal uses.

Next Steps

The governments are now working on developing the Proposed Plan which will describe the preferred cleanup alternative for the Basin. This plan is scheduled to be available for public review and comment this fall.

UPDATE #8

COEUR D'ALENE RIVER BASIN UPDATE - JUNE 2001



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EPA's Webpage address

<http://yosemite.epa.gov/r10/cleanup.nsf/sites/cda>

Contacts

If you have questions or need more information, please call Marianne Deppman, EPA's Community Involvement Coordinator, at 206-553-1237 or toll free at 1-800-424-4372 or Dick Martindale, EPA's Community Liaison, in Coeur d'Alene at 664-4588.