Ann Williamson, Deputy Director, Office of Environmental Assessment
Mike Cox, Manager, Risk Assessment Unit, Office of Environmental Assessment
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – Region 10
Greg Fuhrer, U.S. Geological Survey, Oregon Water Science Center
Columbia River Toxics Reduction Strategy & Draft State of River Report for Toxics
Northwest Power and Conservation Council
June 11, 2008
Spokane, WA

Ann Williamson and Mike Cox, EPA Region 10 Office of Environmental Assessment, will be presenting to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council on June 11, 2008, to provide an update on EPA's national commitment to the Columbia River Basin and a brief report on work efforts to develop the Columbia River State of the River Report for Toxics. Greg Fuhrer, USGS, will provide an update on USGS Columbia River monitoring work efforts.

EPA Region 10 has initiated an effort under the EPA 2006 - 2011 Strategic Plan to reduce toxic contamination in the Columbia River Basin. The Columbia River Toxics Reduction Strategy is focusing on reducing legacy chemicals such as DDT, PCBs, and dieldrin; mercury and other toxic chemicals still being released into the environment; and emerging contaminants such as PBDEs. EPA is providing the leadership to states, tribes, federal agencies, NGOs and others for a collaborative basin wide effort to connect and coordinate monitoring and toxics reduction actions. USGS is a key partner in this important work effort to provide leadership on monitoring needs.

Three examples of key efforts include EPA funding for increased monitoring of fish, water and sediment above Bonneville Dam; legacy pesticide collection events to remove and safely dispose of banned pesticides such as DDT; and a Columbia River State of River Report for Toxics that will be released in late 2008 to tell the story of the Columbia River Basin describing what we now know about toxics and a vision for future actions to better understand and reduce toxics.

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 10
1200 Sixth Avenue, Suite 900
Seattle, Washington 98101-3140

June 10, 2008

Mr. Bill Booth, Chair
Northwest Power and Conservation Council
P.O. Box 83720
Boise, Idaho 83720-0062

Dear Mr. Booth:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has provided periodic updates to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NWPCC) on the Columbia River Toxics Reduction Strategy. In January 2007, Mike Gearheard, EPA Region 10 Director, Office of Water and Watersheds, gave an introduction on the Columbia River Toxics Reduction Strategy. I met with all of you in August 2007, sharing a status report on that work and promised further information on the Columbia River State of the River Report for Toxics. The Columbia River Toxics Reduction Working Group has released a working draft of the Columbia River State of the River Report for review. This letter will provide some compelling information from that working draft which we hope will be helpful as the Council makes final decisions on the NWPCC 2008 Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program.

As we have previously discussed, EPA Region 10 has initiated an effort under the EPA 2006 - 2011 Strategic Plan to reduce toxic contamination in the Columbia River Basin. The Columbia River Toxics Reduction Strategy is focusing on reducing legacy chemicals such as DDT and PCBs; mercury and other toxic chemicals still being released into the environment; and emerging contaminants such as PBDEs. EPA is providing the leadership to States, Tribes, Federal agencies, NGOs and others for a collaborative Basin-wide effort to connect and coordinate monitoring and toxics reduction actions.

EPA is leading a Columbia River Basin Toxics Reduction Working Group, comprised of local, Tribal, State, Federal and other entities working collaboratively together to share information and lead monitoring and toxics reduction efforts in the Columbia River Basin. Jim Ruff, NWPCC, is an active participant on this workgroup. This group identified the need for the State of the River Report in 2005 and EPA began work on this Report in 2007. The Columbia River State of the River Report for Toxics is intended to be a first attempt to "tell the story" of the risks to the Columbia River Basin ecosystem, describe ongoing toxics reduction work efforts and recommend a future vision for toxics reduction in the Basin.

The working Draft Report is focused on four priority toxic contaminants, DDT, PCBs, mercury and PBDEs. These four contaminants were chosen since they are widely distributed throughout the Basin, may have adverse effects on wildlife, fish, and humans, and provide an opportunity to build on current reduction efforts. The working draft provides preliminary information on the presence of toxics in six indicators: salmon (juvenile and adult); resident fish, both native and introduced (e.g., sucker, bass, and mountain whitefish); sturgeon; predatory birds (osprey and bald eagles); aquatic mammals (mink and otter); and sediment dwellers (Asian clams). This information is a compilation of ongoing work in the Columbia River Basin.

For these four contaminants, the Report has identified the following information:

- DDT levels have declined in fish and wildlife but are still above levels of concern in some areas and there continue to be DDT fish consumption advisories. The primary source of DDT is agricultural soils in which DDT has accumulated over three decades of regular use until banned in 1972.

- Mercury levels have been increasing over the past ten years in osprey in the Lower Columbia River and in fish in the Willamette River. Studies prior to 1997 had shown neither increases nor decreases in sites in the Basin. There are areas of elevated concentrations of mercury in fish near or downstream of regional sources in particular the Willamette River and the Owyhee River and Brownlee Reservoir in the Snake River. High mercury in fish has been found in reservoirs because of higher methylation potential. Sturgeon from the Bonneville pool have much higher concentrations than sturgeon in the next two pools upstream or the estuary.

- PCB levels have in general declined in the Basin; however, PCBs persist at levels of concern in many locations. As data is collected on PCBs, new contaminated sites continue to be discovered. High levels of PCBs have been found in sturgeon in the Bonneville pool and juvenile salmon have been found to uptake more PCBs below Bonneville Dam.

- PBDEs (polybrominated diphenyl ethers) are a commonly used flame retardant found in textiles, furniture and electronics and have been shown to be rising in Spokane River resident fish. PBDEs have also been found in the Lower Columbia River in juvenile salmon and Asian clams.

We appreciate the opportunity to share this important information with you. We look forward to working with you, the other NWPCC members and your staff as we finalize the Columbia River State of the River Report on Toxics for public distribution in late 2008. Please do not hesitate to contact me, at (206) 553-1234, if you wish to discuss these efforts further.

Sincerely,

/s/

Elin D. Miller
Regional Administrator

cc: Bruce Measure, Vice Chair, NWPCC
Melinda Eden, Council Member, NWPCC
Rhonda Whiting, Council Member, NWPCC
Dr. Tom Karier, Council Member, NWPCC
Joan Dukes, Council Member, NWPCC
Dick Wallace, Council Member, NWPCC
Jim Yost, Council Member, NWPCC