



Response to Comments

Draft Cleanup Action Plan for Northport Waterfront

Public comment period held May 2 – June 1, 2022

Facility Site ID: 96239, Cleanup Site ID: 14874

Toxics Cleanup Program

Washington State Department of Ecology
Spokane, Washington

June 2022

Document Information

This document is available on the Washington Department of Ecology's [Northport Waterfront cleanup site page](#).¹

Related Information

- Facility site ID: 96239
- Cleanup site ID: 14874

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¹ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/site/14874>

² <https://ecology.wa.gov/Spills-Cleanup/Contamination-cleanup/Cleanup-sites>

³ <https://ecology.wa.gov/About-us/Accountability-transparency/Our-website/Accessibility>

Toxics Cleanup in Washington State

Accidental spills of dangerous materials and past business practices have contaminated land and water throughout the state. The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) Toxics Cleanup Program (TCP) works to remedy these situations through cleanup actions. TCP cleanup actions range from simple projects requiring removal of a few cubic yards of contaminated soil to large, complex projects requiring engineered solutions.

Contaminated sites in Washington are cleaned up under the [Model Toxics Control Act](#)⁴ (MTCA, Chapter 173-340 Washington Administrative Code), a citizen-mandated law passed in 1989. This law sets standards to ensure toxics cleanup protects human health and the environment and includes opportunities for public input.

Public Comment Period Summary

Ecology held a comment period May 2 through June 1, 2022, for the draft [Cleanup Action Plan](#)⁵ for the Northport Waterfront site. More information is available in the [public notice](#)⁶ we mailed to the surrounding community.

We held an online public meeting at 6 p.m. on May 17 that seven people attended. The [presentation slides](#)⁷ are posted on our website. Thank you to everyone who attended and asked questions. We also presented and answered questions at the Stevens County Commissioners meeting on May 9.

Ecology appreciates the comments we received from six people. We address them in the Response to Comments section that begins on Page 4. We finalized the draft Cleanup Action Plan with some additional detail added to the Site Background section by the Washington State Office of the Attorney General.

Site Background

Ecology is directing and funding cleanup of smelter-related metals contamination on Northport's waterfront area next to the Town Park. The site includes permanently and seasonally exposed areas of the Columbia River bank and shore next to the park and around the boat launch.

The Le Roi Smelter (also known as the Northport Smelter), which handled copper ores between 1901 and 1911, and lead ores between 1916 and 1921, was just south of the Northport waterfront. Le Roi Smelter operations deposited clinker and granular slag wastes on the waterfront.

⁴ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Spills-Cleanup/Contamination-cleanup/Rules-directing-our-cleanup-work/Model-Toxics-Control-Act>

⁵ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/document/111416>

⁶ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/document/111581>

⁷ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/document/112426>

In the Cleanup Action Plan, we proposed to remove and cap contamination, and encourage recreation in cleaned up areas. We will plan work near the shoreline when water levels are lowest and in stages that will not risk impacts to the site or Columbia River due to rising water. Excavated soil, sediment (beach sand and gravel), and slag (smelter waste) will be taken to a permitted landfill for disposal.

The estimated cost of cleanup is \$4.9- to \$5.4-million. The Eastern Washington Clean Sites Initiative funds this project. The money comes from a voter-approved tax on hazardous substances. Funds are used to clean up properties where the responsible party couldn't be found or can't pay cleanup costs.

Response to Comments

The comment letters are printed verbatim. Ecology's responses follow the comments. Four comment letters (pages 4–5) shared similar concerns, so we provided one response to all of them. The rest of the letters are in alphabetical order based on the commenter's last name.

Index of comments received

Everyone who submitted comments is listed in Table 1 in alphabetical order by their last name, followed by the date we received their comments and the page on which their comments are printed as received. Contact information (postal and email addresses and phone numbers) has been omitted.

Table 1. Index of comments received

Name	Organization	Date received	Page
Lee Helle	None	May 4	4
Justin Hotchkiss	FarNorth Charters	May 15	5
Jack Mitchell	None	May 15	5
Jael Regis	Northport Historical Society	May 24	7
Marc Schneider	None	May 17	5
Mindy Smith	None	May 31	8

Lee Helle, received online May 4

Northport cleanup sounds Great! However perhaps there is a lesson to be learned from past efforts to clean up the river.

A few years ago the EPA cleaned up the area known as the black sand beach upriver from Northport, the black sand was trucked out and replacement sand hauled in to replace it.

The next spring when the river was full and running strongly as it does every year, most of the replacement sand went down river.

This time after removing the contaminated soil in front of Northport, why not use course gravel and let Mother nature put sand where she wants it? She had a few more years experience than our planners 😊

Justin Hotchkiss, FarNorth Charters, received online May 15

My name is Justin Hotchkiss, I am owner of FarNorth Charters and have been a flyfishing guide on the Upper Columbia since 2006 and I've been fishing the river for 38 plus years. I watched the last project at Black sand beach from start to finish and the beach is black again, just pointing out that the river will just keep washing contamination down every spring with high water. This site will do the same. My opinion is just leave it alone. The removal of soil and rocks will only stir up the contamination affecting habitat down stream. It will kill decades of aquatic insects that the native Red Band rainbows use as subsistence, it will remove native spawning beds for all species of game fish in the upper reaches. There need to be impact studies on these subjects before playing God. This litigation with Teck has put a hurting on this native species of trout with the killing of Thousands of fish using gill nets that no one knew about or had any say in. We still see a sever impact from this. Also encouraging a beach area will only lead to more people /kids drowning. This is not a swimming river and never has been. There are many factors to consider before we just go and stir up a bees hive with not knowing it full impact , just to make someone feel like there making it better.

Jack Mitchell, received online May 15

Even though certain things can be helped by man, the best plan of action is to let nature take it's course. Just let it be. Blacksands clean up obviously didn't work, because the sands are black again. If this project happens, I'm not sure if this process will close down the boat ramp? It is the only one to access the upper river with improved ramps. Also the idea of a swimming beach is a major liability as the upper Columbia really is not a great swimming river. Quite dangerous, really. About a decade ago or so there was a federal study that came in and wiped out a bunch of fish in the river to collect metal samples so as to arm the lawyers in a litigation against Cominco.... The river has actually never been the same since, when it comes to trout population. Instead of some long litigation battle, and lining the pockets of a bunch of attorneys, my suggestion would be to just quit dumping metal in the river and let it be. Let nature take it's course at this juncture, and quit trying to manipulate. Pretty simple; But who am I, I'm just a fishing guide. The interesting part about this study that happened was that Washington state fish and wildlife department didn't even know about it.

In the last 33 years of Guiding in Washington , I have watched our natural resources go by the wayside generally due to miss management in my humble opinion.

Marc Schneider, received online May 17

How long will the clean up take? A beach on the upper Columbia is not a good idea. What happens to the boat ramp? How do we gain access to the river? Not having it would be a major setback to this community.

Ecology's response

Thank you for your comments. We appreciate your observations about past studies and cleanup, and potential effects of this cleanup. We address these in more detail below.

Black Sand Beach cleanup

In 2010, about 9,100 tons (6,300 cubic yards) of sediments containing granulated slag were excavated from [Black Sand Beach](#)⁸ and the slag was hauled to the [Teck Resources Limited facility in Trail](#),⁹ British Columbia, for recycling. The project was completed under an agreement between Ecology and Teck American Incorporated. Teck funded the work.

The Teck facility, on the Columbia River about 10 miles upstream from the U.S.-Canadian border, stopped discharging granulated slag to the river in mid-1995. From 1896 to mid-1995, Teck routinely discharged up to 145,000 tons of slag into the river annually. Previous discharges have resulted in a significant source of slag in the Upper Columbia River.

Unfortunately, granulated slag has redeposited on the cleaned-up Black Sand Beach. However, a large volume of granulated slag and metals-contaminated sediment was removed that would have continued to wash downstream.

We understand that recontamination from upstream sources is likely to occur. However, cleanup will remove a large volume of slag and metals-contaminated sediment before they continue to wash downstream.

To prevent cap materials from washing away following this cleanup, the cap design will be consistent with river conditions and likely include more gravel- and cobble-sized material, rather than sand. Site-specific hydraulic modeling will help us better understand river conditions and identify appropriate cap materials and their location.

Impacts to fish populations and sport fishing

The majority of the cleanup work, aside from the work around the boat launch and dock, will be done during low water to avoid working in the water. Best management practices, such as silt curtains and turbidity curtains, will be used to contain sediments disturbed during the work. To prevent cap materials from washing away following this cleanup, the cap design will be consistent with river conditions and likely include more gravel- and cobble-sized material, rather than sand. Site-specific hydraulic modeling will help us better understand river conditions and identify appropriate cap materials and their location.

The work in the bay and public dock area will likely take two to three weeks and will close the boat launch. However, it will occur when the river is low, making the dock fairly inaccessible at the time even without ongoing work.

⁸ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/site/2036>

⁹ <https://www.teck.com/operations/canada/operations/trail-operations/>

Regarding federal studies, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has completed four fish tissue sampling studies associated with their [Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study](#)¹⁰ for the Upper Columbia River site.

Fish biologists with the Colville Confederated Tribes, Spokane Tribe of Indians, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Geological Survey, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services all participated in the sampling.

These studies were necessary to define the nature and extent of contamination and for the long-term protection of the fish. Scientific collections are designed to collect the minimal number of fish needed to meet study objectives, which are a minor proportion of a population.

The potential dangers of swimming at Northport Waterfront

We agree that swimming in this area can be dangerous and are not suggesting people swim here by doing this cleanup. However, we recognize people recreate here as evidenced by the existing path to the beach and site visits where we have seen people in the cleanup area. Providing safer access for these people and aquatic wildlife is our goal.

Recreational improvements are planned for the top of the hillside, not on the beach. The proposed picnic shelter and benches would be more of an extension of the town park, and placed where Town of Northport staff can drive by to check for any maintenance needs. We appreciate the comments we have received on this, and welcome further input on recreational enhancements and ideas for keeping people safe.

Jael Regis, President of Northport Historical Society, received online May 24

Justin,

Thank you and the WA State Department of Ecology for the opportunity to comment on the waterfront draft cleanup plan. The Northport Historical Society has a concern that was not addressed during the meeting on May 17, 2022.

We are concerned about the fate of the brick ruin of the [smelter pumping station](#)¹¹ located near the boat ramp. This historical artifact is the last vestige of the smelter in Northport. On GeoEngineers figure A.6, it appears that the proposed cleanup will bury this brick platform.

When we discussed the situation with John Roland a year ago, he indicated that it could be preserved.

We would like to see this area saved. Please review any notes that John may have made regarding this. We look forward to hearing from you on this subject.

¹⁰ <https://www.epa.gov/columbiariver/upper-columbia-river-remedial-investigation-feasibility-study>

¹¹ <https://www.northporthistory.org/smelter-pumping-station.html>

Ecology's response

We would also like to preserve this historical artifact. Ecology is committed to protecting cultural resources and follows [Governor's Executive Order \(GEO\) 21-02](#).¹² GEO 21-02 provides a framework to ensure we take all reasonable actions to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects to archeological and historic archaeological sites, buildings/structures, traditional cultural places, sacred sites, or other cultural resources. Although Figure A.6 indicates capping this entire area, when we develop the engineering design for the project, we will work to preserve this artifact.

Mindy Smith, received online May 31

I think the plan looks good. My only suggestion is to include more detail on the periodic review - what would be included? Is this just visual redeposition/erosion (and how assessed) or will there be some sampling? How will the public be informed about those results? Thanks for the opportunity to comment.

Ecology's response

Ecology will follow procedures for the periodic review that will be outlined in the Performance Monitoring Plan developed as part of the engineering design. The monitoring program will consist primarily of visual and photographic surveys of the site. If visual observations are not sufficient to document the long-term effectiveness of the cleanup action, we may conduct sampling and analytical testing and will share the results in the periodic review report.

Draft periodic review reports will be available for public review during 30-day comment periods. We will post notices of periodic review comment periods on our [Northport Waterfront cleanup site page](#),¹³ in the [Site Register](#),¹⁴ and on Ecology's [public input & events listing](#).¹⁵ You can [subscribe to the Site Register email list](#).¹⁶

We will also email a notice to people who have expressed interest in this site. Everyone who comments and provides an email address has been added. You are already on the list, but please notify Erika Beresovoy at erika.beresovoy@ecy.wa.gov if your email address changes.

¹² <https://dahp.wa.gov/2102>

¹³ <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/site/14874>

¹⁴ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Regulations-Permits/Guidance-technical-assistance/Site-Register-lists-and-data>

¹⁵ <https://ecology.wa.gov/Events/Search/Listing>

¹⁶ https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/WAECY/subscriber/new?topic_id=WAECY_118