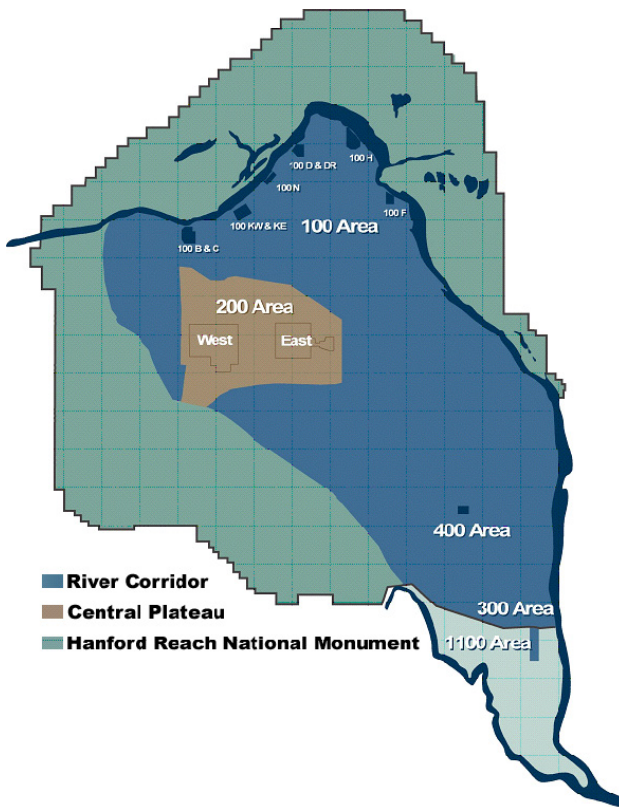


Hanford, the river & you



Get involved!

Your voice is important to ensure safe, continued, and timely cleanup of the Hanford Site and keeping the Columbia River safe.

How? Try:

- Attending public meetings
- Commenting during public comment periods
- Watching our website for information
- Inviting us to speak to your organization



Preserve



Protect



Restore

Questions?

[Ecology.wa.gov/Hanford](https://ecology.wa.gov/Hanford)



EcologyWAHanford



@ecyHanford

Nuclear Waste Program
3100 Port of Benton Blvd.
Richland, WA 99354



DEPARTMENT OF
ECOLOGY
State of Washington

To request ADA accommodation including materials in a format for the visually impaired, call Ecology at 509-372-7950 or visit <https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility>. People with impaired hearing may call Washington Relay Service at 711. People with speech disability may call TTY at 877-833-6341.



The Columbia River

The 1,243-long-mile Columbia starts in British Columbia, Canada, flows through Washington forming the border between Washington and Oregon, and empties into the Pacific ocean. Through the centuries it has played an important part in the economy and culture of the region.

The Hanford Reach is the last non-tidal, free-flowing section of the Columbia River in the United States. This portion of the river borders the Hanford site and supports over 40 species of fish and other wildlife. It was made into a national monument in 2000. Because of the security requirements of the Hanford site, much of this area has not been developed since 1943.

The Columbia has a rich history of supporting the people who lived along its banks. As early as 10,000 years ago, ancestors of many of today's tribes used the river as an important part of their daily life. Fishing, transportation, and hunting are some of the things that the Columbia was used for.

Today the Columbia River is still important to the people who live near it. It provides drinking water, irrigation for crops, hydroelectric power from the many dams, fishing, and recreation.

During the years that Hanford was active, many contaminants were released into the river. However, since the signing of the Tri-Party Agreement in 1989, the river has been cleaned up to drinking water standards. The Columbia River through the Hanford Reach meets the highest surface water quality standards in Washington and is considered safe for all uses.

Ecology's Nuclear Waste Program is responsible for regulating the safe cleanup of the Hanford Site to protect human health and the environment.

What is Hanford?

The Hanford site was chosen in 1942 to research and produce plutonium, which was used in the first atomic bomb. After the war, nuclear weapons production continued and greatly expanded. Production on the 586-square-mile site ended in 1987. This resulted in substantial amounts of contamination in land and groundwater from radioactive and chemical waste.

The Columbia River borders Hanford on the north and east. This helped create a large buffer around the nuclear production facilities, which was good for both secrecy and public safety. One of the greatest concerns is that the contaminated groundwater will get into the Columbia River.

With the signing of the Tri-Party Agreement in 1989, the U.S. Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Washington State Department of Ecology created a legally enforceable Hanford cleanup schedule.

A serious threat

Hanford is the most contaminated nuclear site in the United States. There are 56 million gallons of highly toxic radioactive waste stored in aging and leak-prone tanks. More than 20 of the 149 single-shell tanks have leaked, and many others may have leaked. The waste in the tanks poses a serious threat to groundwater and the river. Removing tank waste and placing it in permanent safe storage is crucial to our health, safety, economy, and environment.

The Hanford Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant – also known as the vit plant – will vitrify (immobilize in glass) waste removed from the underground storage tanks. After it is vitrified, the waste is still radioactive and toxic, but can be safely stored and monitored without causing further soil and groundwater contamination. Once the waste is vitrified and encased in stainless steel, it will be disposed of deep underground. Lower-activity waste will be vitrified and disposed of in a specially prepared landfill on the Hanford site.