



# Briefsheet

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## National Estuary Program for the Lower Columbia River

### Issue

The states of Washington and Oregon and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have joined together to fund a National Estuary Program for the lower Columbia River. The goal of an estuary program is to produce a locally-driven management plan to protect and improve the water quality of the estuary. National Estuary Programs are unique in providing federal resources that are used by local citizens to develop a management plan for the resource.

- Toxics in sediment and fish tissue that can affect the health of humans, fish, and wildlife;
- Habitat loss/modification that can affect fish and wildlife resources;
- Water quality problems that affect beneficial uses in portions of the estuary; and
- Overall decline in anadromous fish runs that has resulted in threatened and endangered species listings.

### Background

The purpose of the National Estuary Program is to provide resources to help manage estuaries of national, regional, and local significance that are threatened by overuse, pollution, and human activity. Congress established the program in amendments to the Clean Water Act in 1987. To date, 28 estuaries on the east and west coasts and the Gulf of Mexico have been accepted into the program. The governors of Washington and Oregon nominated the lower Columbia River to the program. The EPA accepted the lower Columbia River into the program in July 1995.

The governors based the nomination on the findings of the Lower Columbia River Bi-State Water Quality Program, a six-year study of the river between Bonneville Dam and the Pacific Ocean. The states of Washington and Oregon, the public ports in both states, and the Northwest Pulp and Paper Association funded the study. The results of the study highlighted four problems in the estuary:

### Current Situation

The National Estuary Program formed a Management Committee. Representatives from local governments, businesses, citizens' groups, Indian tribes, state and federal agencies, and environmental organizations make up the committee. It is tasked with developing a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan.

In addition, the committee reviewed the findings of the Bi-State studies and other studies of the lower river. Its next steps are to identify the priority problems the committee expects to address in the plan; to discuss those problems with the public; and to begin work designing the management measures to solve the problems and identify the funding sources to implement the plan.

## **Future Considerations**

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As part of developing the plan, the National Estuary Program will produce several documents during the first part of 1997. These include:

- A characterization of the estuary, in which the existing health of the estuary and the probable sources of pollution are identified;
- A description of the environmental goals and objectives for the estuary;
- Completion of a “base program analysis” which is an evaluation of the existing regulatory and institutional framework, an evaluation of the effectiveness of the framework, and recommendations for addressing areas not addressed and those that are duplicated.

The ultimate goal is to produce a plan that protects the estuary and supports the human and animal communities that depend on the estuary for their welfare.

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