



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE — April 6, 2022

Yakama Nation encouraged by EPA and Army Corps commitments to clean up Bradford Island Superfund Site

Toppenish, WA — Swift action and an inclusive cleanup process were the two main takeaways from a meeting between the Yakama Nation and officials from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Army Corps of Engineers about the Bradford Island Superfund Site. At yesterday's meeting, EPA and the Army Corps committed to finalizing a federal facilities agreement within a year, expediting cleanup actions where possible, and fully engaging the Yakama Nation in all processes.

"Hearing these comments, which acknowledge the impact of this contamination on our health and our role as a sovereign nation to engage in this work, makes us hopeful for the future," said Virgil Lewis, Yakama Nation Vice Chairman.

EPA added Bradford Island to the National Priorities List – a list of the country's most contaminated sites – last month following repeated requests from the Yakama Nation. Bradford Island is one of the most polluted sites on the Columbia River, exposing people, plants and animals to a variety of contaminants and resulting in the highest level of PCBs in fish tissues in the United States. As a result, the area has been under an Oregon Health Authority and Washington Department of Health DO NOT EAT fish consumption advisories for years.

EPA and the Army Corps also acknowledged the United States' responsibilities to the Tribe under the Treaty of 1855 and agreed to include Yakama Nation in the planning and cleanup process. Under the Treaty, the Yakama Nation's ability to fish is protected. The Yakama Nation was clear that they would not allow Treaty-protected rights to be threatened, diminished or ignored.

"The Yakama Nation has for years advocated for the cleanup and restoration of this important ecological, cultural, and economic resource; they rely on this area as traditional hunting and fishing grounds," said Calvin Terada, Director of EPA's Region 10 Superfund and Emergency Management Division in Seattle. "By adding Bradford Island as a Superfund Site on our National Priorities List, EPA steps into a more formal role in overseeing the Corps' cleanup work with the collective goal to accelerate cleanup at this site."

"It was a privilege to meet with the Yakama Nation to discuss the Bradford Island cleanup. As always, they were gracious hosts, and I honor and respect Yakama Nation's passion for this effort," said Col. Mike Helton, Portland District commander. "Now that Bradford Island is part of the National Priorities List, USACE welcomes EPA's expertise and partnership to ensure this important area is cleaned up and made safe for fish, wildlife and people," added Helton. "We are looking forward to building our relationship with the Tribe and EPA as we move this important effort forward."

“Cleaning up the contamination at Bradford Island is an urgent issue and the United States needs to live up to its promises to protect the people who have been on this land since time immemorial,” said Jeremy Takala, Tribal Council Member. “Our goal is clean, healthy fish that is safe to eat.”

###

The Yakama Nation is a federally recognized sovereign tribal government with certain reserved rights that are guaranteed in perpetuity by the United States in the Treaty of 1855. Today, Yakama Nation works towards a clean and productive Columbia River that sustains the cultural practices of Yakama members and improves life for our neighbors and future generations.

Media Contacts:

Phil Rigdon, YN DNR Superintendent
(509) 865-5121 x4655, phil_rigdon@yakama.com

Davis Washines, YN DNR Fisheries Government Relations Liasion
(509) 388-3477, wasd@yakamafish-nsn.gov