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Special Report

Death of the Spokane River?

Upper Columbia River Group

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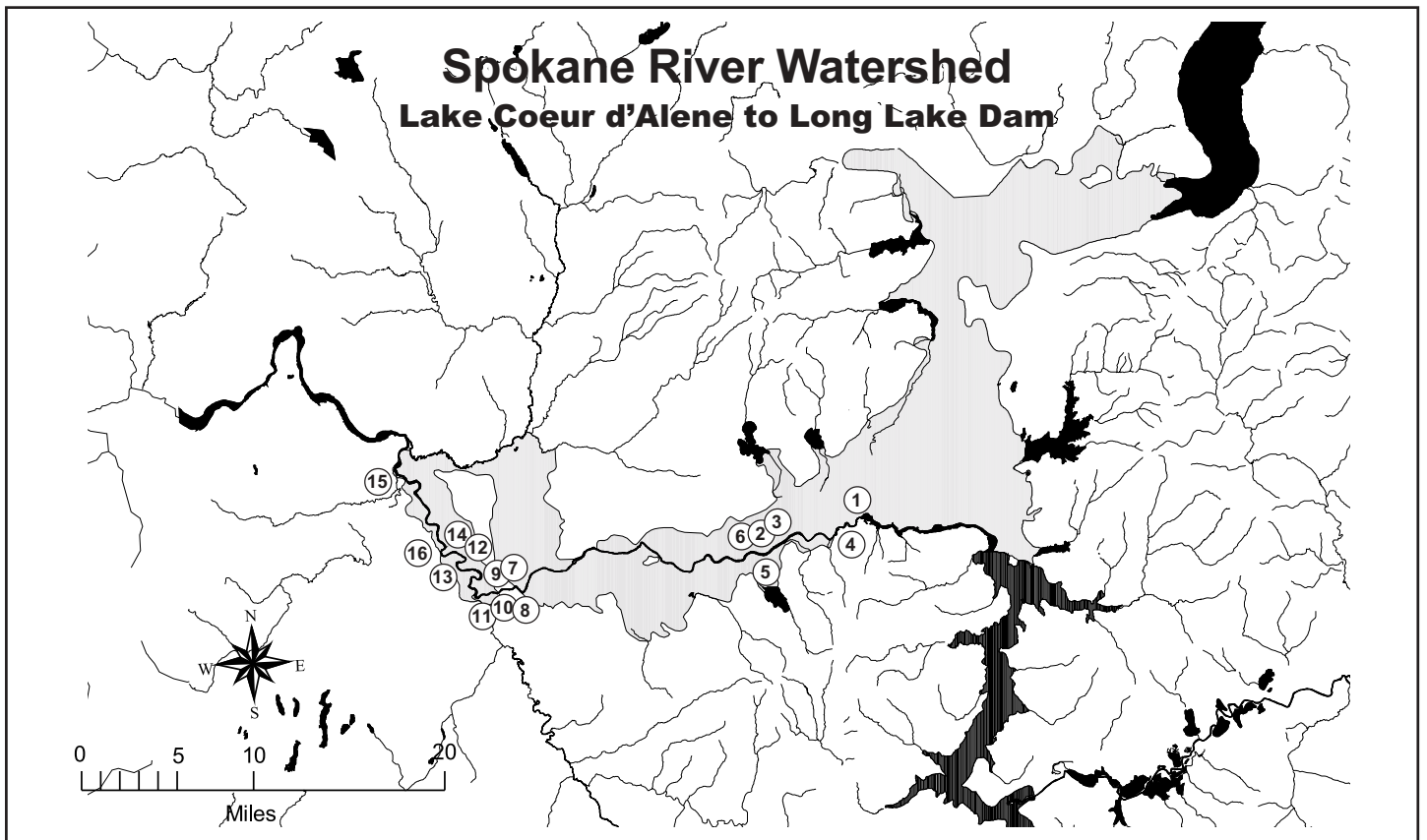
(1) Avista's Post Falls Dam. Note all the water behind the dam but hardly a trickle for the Spokane River. Our river is being destroyed by profoundly serious water *quantity* and water *quality* problems.

What you don't see are the mining wastes containing lead, cadmium, arsenic, and zinc. 60 million tons of toxic sediment sit on the bottom of Lake Coeur d'Alene (and another 100 million tons are perched above Lake Coeur d'Alene between the Cataldo Mission and Harrison). The Superfund cleanup is crippled. EPA's plan for the Superfund cleanup of the Coeur d'Alene Basin has gaping holes (including no Superfund cleanup for Lake Coeur d'Alene). The cleanup has no secure funding, and is in the control of local Idaho county commissioners opposed to the Superfund cleanup. Mine wastes continue to move from Idaho into Washington, polluting the Spokane River.

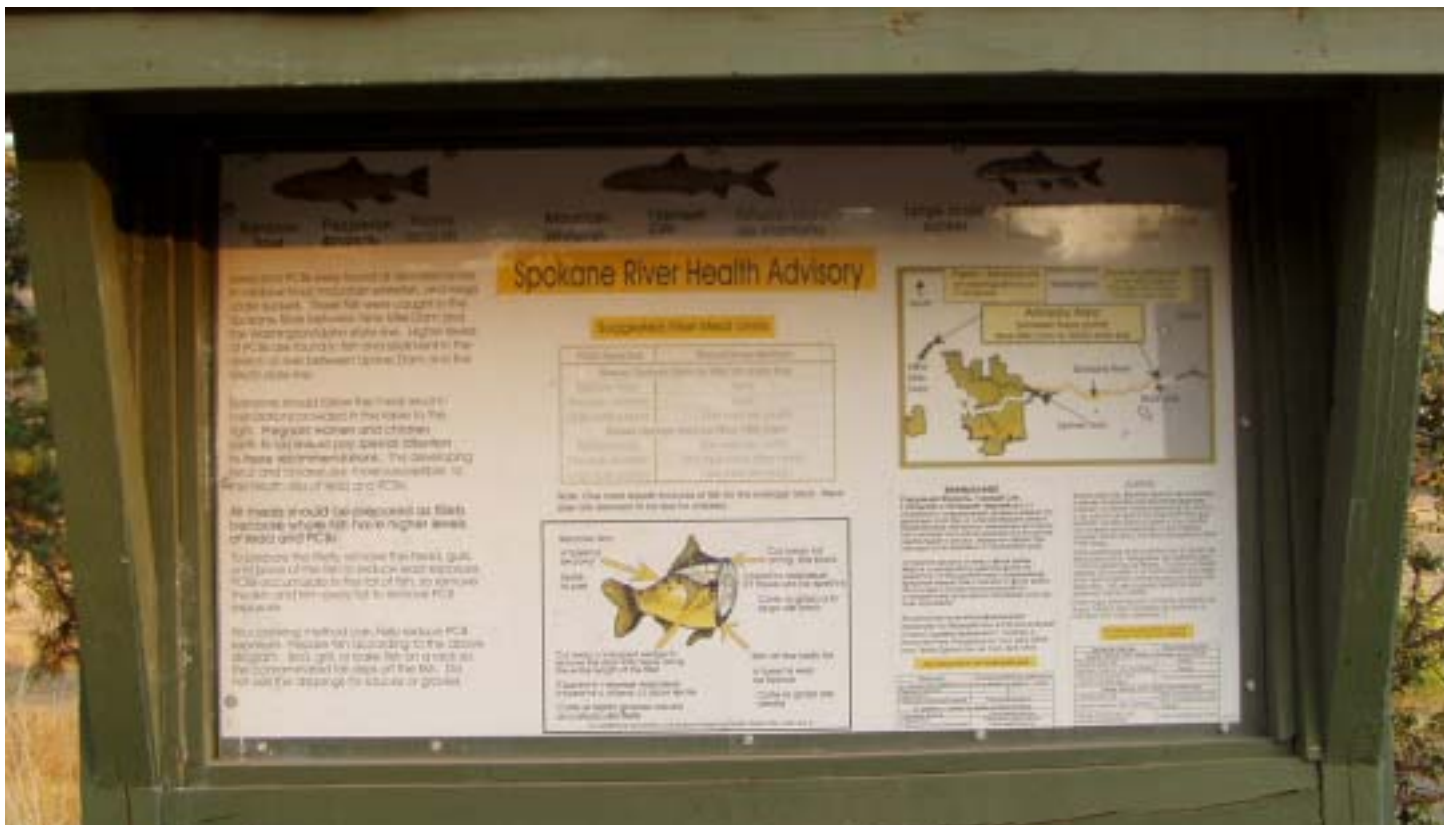


(2) Spokane River, near the Washington-Idaho state line. The riverbed is almost completely dry. Where is the water? Impounded upstream in Idaho.

When water crosses the state line, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is responsible for ensuring water meets Washington standards for water quality, including heavy metals and oxygen. Those standards are not being met.



The Spokane River: Washington State's most polluted and endangered river. Numbers on the map are locations that correspond to the numbered photos. The Aquifer is depicted in light gray. The Aquifer and River are inseparable. Pump the Aquifer, rob the River.



(3) Warning! Don't eat the fish! PCBs and lead contaminate fish in the Spokane River and can be damaging to humans—especially pregnant women and children. The Spokane Regional Health District has posted signs along the river. The advisories are posted in many languages because some immigrant populations are more likely to depend on fish for meals.

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(4) Mother and child fishing. Spokane River (in Idaho). Idaho politicians long fought the posting of health advisory signs in Idaho.



(5) Irrigating sidewalks, wasting water. The Spokane-Coeur d'Alene region uses more water per capita than just about anywhere in the United States.

Where does the water come from? The Spokane-Rathdrum Aquifer. Pump the Aquifer, rob the River. Municipalities complain about their inability to get new water rights, but not a single city in this region has an effective water conservation plan. Wasted water contributes to the dire condition of the Spokane River.



(6) Dry River Bed. (Harvard Road Bridge just a few miles from the Idaho-Washington state line.) Water that should be flowing in the Spokane River is impounded behind Post Falls Dam in Idaho.

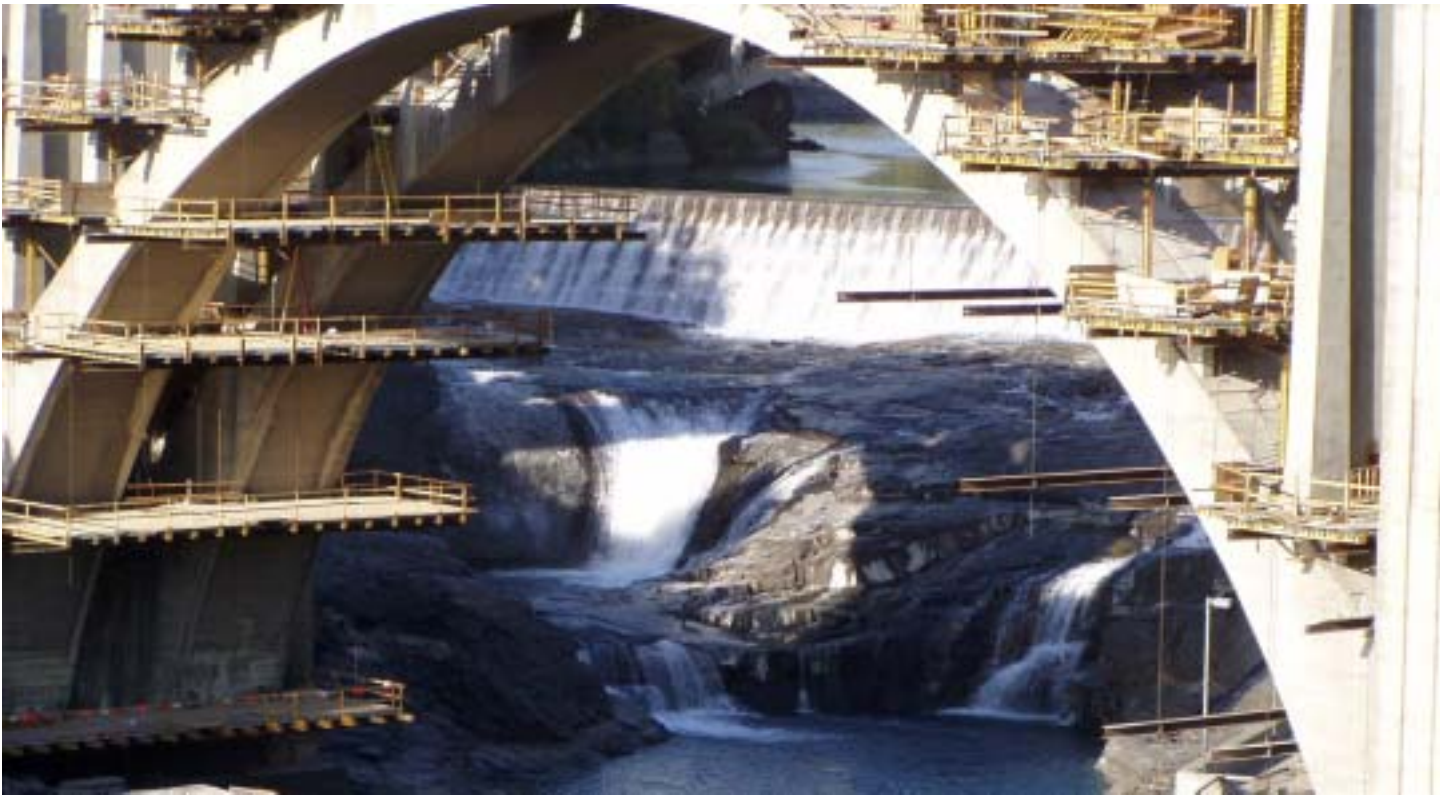


(7) Spokane Falls: no water. Here is where Spokane started in the 1870s. The Falls gave Spokane its name. Now Spokane Falls are silent for many months each year. Upstream Aquifer pumping depletes the flow at this point.



(8) Avista (Washington Water Power). Avista's dams in the early 1900s extirpated the river's once-prized salmon runs. Avista's PCBs pollute the river. The Post Falls Dam is dewatering the river. Avista's facilities in downtown Spokane divert water (what little there is) from Spokane Falls. And now Avista has applied for water rights in Idaho, pumping more water from the Aquifer and further damaging the Spokane River. Avista has done more to destroy the Spokane River than any other single institution. Will that ever change?

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(9) Lower Spokane Falls, as seen through the main arch of the Monroe Street Bridge. Spokane Falls are stolen from our community during the summer and autumn months for three main reasons: (1) water is pumped from a depleted Aquifer that otherwise feeds the river, (2) the river's water is impounded behind Avista's Post Falls Dam in Idaho, and (3) Avista diverts water from Spokane Falls for power generation. The once-mighty falls are silent.

SPOKANE RIVER

Native American Gathering Place



The following account is one of several told by the local tribes to describe the origin of Spokane Falls. At the time of the legend the Chief of Amana called themselves the S'kwa'w'w'w'.

Two Spokane men (Coyote and Fox) were traveling together on their way north. When they reached a river, Coyote said to Fox, "I believe I'll get married. I'd like to take one of those Chief of Amana women for my wife." "So they decided to go in search of the Chief of the Chief of Amana. They were located here with his wife, and Coyote approached her with a gift of salmon. "Chief, I would very much like to have one of your tribal women for my wife. Can we talk about which one you would choose for me?" "Now Coyote, you know we do not approve that our women marry with other tribal members. So you cannot take one of our Chief of Amana women for your wife." Coyote and Fox left the Chief.

Coyote became so disappointed with the Chief's decision, he began to rage in his compassion. Fox, "Leave the Chief will be sorry for his refusal. I'll make a big waterfall here in his big spot. Furthermore, salmon will not be able to get over the falls to feed the Chief of Amana." Since Coyote had the power for his wives to be granted the great falls immediately located as he had proclaimed. That is how the Spokane Falls began.

Its location on the banks of a major inland waterway, and its strategic access to annual salmon runs, have made the Spokane Falls a gathering place for thousands of years. The Spokane Indians who traditionally occupied the region around Spokane Falls, called the falls "s'kwa'w'w'w'" (pronounced s-dil-het-lwa) meaning "last water."

Visitors to Spokane Falls during the fishing season (early summer) included their neighbors the Coeur d'Alene, Kalispel, and Salish-Kootenai who gathered to fish, renew ties, trade goods, share stories, and exchange news. Throughout the region, gatherings continue to take place keeping cultural ties strong among area tribes.



The city's name "Spokane" was derived from the name of a local tribal leader - "sp'w'w'w'" pronounced s'kwa'w'w'w' meaning "last."

Spokane Falls are the physical inclusion of the ancient Native American inhabitants of the region.

John Stevens' writings. Amelia Stevens (seated at right) and others at Spokane Indian Camp near Spokane. Washington, circa 1848.



The Spokane River once yielded large salmon in abundance similar to the other salmon rivers.



Spokane Indians fishing at Little Falls, approximately 40 miles downstream from Spokane Falls July 3, 1908.



Spokane Indian encampment at Silver Falls, just downstream from Spokane Falls. During the 1925 National Indian Congress held in Spokane.





(10) Spokane Falls: ancestral gathering place. At the time of Lewis and Clark and David Thompson, our river supported great runs of salmon and steelhead. For thousands of years, Indians came to Spokane Falls as a meeting place. It was here that the City of Spokane began. The people of Spokane must recommit ourselves to restoring Spokane Falls and the Spokane River.



(11) Gage, Spokane River (Peaceful Valley). River gages measure the amount of water flowing in the Spokane River. The numbers on this gage, located just downstream from Spokane Falls, confirm what our own eyes tell us: the river is being dramatically dewatered during summer and autumn months.



(12) Aquifer springs, West Central Neighborhood in Spokane. During the summer and fall, the Aquifer is the lifeblood of the Spokane River. Cold, clean water flows into the Spokane River from the Aquifer. Pumping water from the Aquifer upstream steals from the river.

Idaho continues to give away water rights to an already over-allocated Aquifer. In Washington, Gov. Gary Locke and the Legislature confirmed massive and illegal water rights to the City of Spokane. Idaho and Washington *both* are killing the Spokane River by over-allocating the Aquifer.

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(13) Trout Fishing, Spokane's West Central Neighborhood. The Spokane River is one of America's unique urban trout fisheries. Trout depend on cold, clean water from the Aquifer. Depleting the Aquifer threatens to destroy Spokane's prized fishery. Toxic metal pollution is less of a problem further from the Idaho border, allowing for one fish meal per month. Anglers increasingly advocate the fishery be designated "catch and release" to protect human health and the fishery.



(14) Sewage. PCBs and other pollutants are dumped into the Spokane River by sewage treatment and industrial plants including the Spokane and Liberty Lake sewage treatment plants, Kaiser, and Inland Empire Paper. Idaho dischargers, including the cities of Hayden, Coeur d'Alene, and Post Falls, contribute significant pollution to the Spokane River. Effluent uses up dissolved oxygen, risking fish kills and algae blooms in the river and Long Lake. Polluters are pressuring Washington state officials to abandon state standards for the Spokane River.



(15) Avista's Nine Mile Dam. Dams built on the lower Spokane River blocked salmon from returning home, violating Washington State law, and extirpating salmon and steelhead in our river. The pool behind the dam has filled in with sediment, raising concerns about the accumulation of mine wastes and PCBs.



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Call to Action

For additional copies of this *Special Report* on the Spokane River, please contact us. This report is in color on the web along with a printable color copy at www.waterplanet.ws/ucr

Contact us: Sierra Club - Upper Columbia River Group 509/456-3376;
www.idaho.sierraclub.org/uppercol/contacts.htm
John Osborn <John@waterplanet.ws>

What you can do:

1. Volunteer with the Sierra Club's Aquifers and Rivers Committee (ARC). Contact John Osborn <john@waterplanet.ws> or our office at 509-456-3376.
2. Work with your church, synagogue, mosque, civic groups, and outdoor groups to advocate with our community's leaders to save the Spokane River.
3. Write a letter-to-the-editor to the *Spokesman-Review* and the *Coeur d'Alene Press* (see below).
4. Walk or ride your bicycle along the Centennial trail, or visit a Spring, or go to Plantes Ferry Park . . . or somehow spend time on or near the river. The river speaks more eloquently than any of us. Also, pick up trash to pack out while visiting.



(16) Riverside State Park, Bowl and Pitcher rock formations. Spokane has one of the nation's finest park systems. The necklace of parks along the river depends on a clean, flowing river.

Write letters to the Editor

Dear Editor:

1. Protect our quality of life. The Spokane River is the heart of Spokane and our quality of life. Post Falls calls itself "Idaho's River City". Our river is in terrible trouble. The river is nearly dry. The Spokane River is the most polluted river in Washington State in terms of heavy metals and PCBs. We must commit ourselves to restoring the Spokane River.

2. Conserve water. The Spokane-Coeur d'Alene region uses more water per person than just about any other region in the United States. We waste water. The water comes from the Aquifer. The Aquifer is the lifeblood of the Spokane River during the dry summer and fall months. Pump the Aquifer, rob the River. To save the Spokane River, we must implement water conservation measures on both sides of the state line.

3. Stop issuing new water rights. Over-pumping the Aquifer is drying up the Spokane River. Idaho and Washington must stop issuing new water rights, and both states need to commit to keeping water in the Spokane River.

4. Avista needs to help save the Spokane River. Avista has done more damage to the Spokane River than any other institution: its dams extirpated the river's once-fabulous salmon runs, Avista impounds water behind Post Falls Dam that should be flowing in the Spokane River, Avista's PCBs pollute the water, Avista diverts water from Spokane Falls, and Avista wants to pump more water from the Aquifer for a power plant.

5. Clean up Idaho's mining wastes. Lake Coeur d'Alene has 60 million tons of toxic mine wastes on its bottom, with another 100 million tons perched upstream. Idaho's pollution is flowing into Washington. EPA and Washington must uphold Washington's water quality standards, and insist on a real Superfund cleanup of Lake Coeur d'Alene to restore the polluted, heavily clearcut Coeur d'Alene Basin.

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Coeur d'Alene Press: Letters to the Editor, Coeur d'Alene Press, 201 N. 2nd, CDA, ID 83814, email: editor@cdapress.com