

SPOKANE RIVER 2021

RIVER OR MACHINE: CAN BIDEN, TRUDEAU MODERNIZE THE COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY?

“Tribes in the United States and First Nations in Canada suffered profound damage and loss from Columbia and Snake River dams. Modernizing the Columbia River Treaty is a critical opportunity for Canada and the United States to join together in acknowledging damage done, right historic wrongs, and commit to stewardship of this great river in the face of climate change.” – John Sirois, Upper Columbia United Tribes, 1st One River, Ethics Matter conference, Gonzaga University, May 2014

Inaugurating Joe Biden as the 46th President is seismic, raising hope for modernizing the Columbia River Treaty. Two days after Inauguration Day, President Biden spoke with Prime Minister Trudeau. Biden and Trudeau will meet in February. We hope that transboundary water issues, notably the Columbia River Treaty, are on the agenda.

Sierra Club advocates adding “Ecosystem-based Function” – health of the river – as a 3rd primary purpose of the Columbia River Treaty. This includes restoring salmon runs above Grand Coulee Dam to tributaries such as the Spokane River. The current river treaty has only two purposes: (1) hydropower and (2) flood risk management.

The Columbia River was one of the earth’s richest salmon rivers. Now it is among the earth’s most dammed and electrified rivers. Dams and stair-stepping reservoirs plugged into an electric grid built an “organic machine” as named by historian Richard White. Decisions excluded indigenous people and local EuroAmerican settlers.



The Sierra Club has extended its COVID-19 operational response through Sunday, July 4, 2021. This means all national, chapter, and shared offices will remain closed, with rare exceptions for urgent business.



*Columbia River at Revelstoke, BC
Photo credit: John Osborn*

State chose “Lords of Yesterday”: mostly representatives of federal agencies aligned with hydropower, flood risk management, and irrigation.

What about Indigenous people? Are they at the negotiating table? Canada: Yes. United States: No.

Are salmon, other nonhuman life, and the River at the negotiating table? Not for the U.S. Giving voice to the voiceless is “Ethics 101.” Tribes and First Nations are best positioned to speak for salmon and the River. In the U.S., tribes are not on the U.S. negotiating team.

Biden and Trudeau are entering a watershed moment for the United States and Canada to make Treaty decisions for the Common Good: righting historic wrongs, promoting stewardship, and building resilience against the climate crisis. **They – and we – need to get this done.**

Interested in the fate of rivers during this climate crisis? Join the UCR Group’s Rivers Committee. **Contact: John Osborn, john@waterplanet.ws or Tom Soldner, waltsoe@gmail.com**



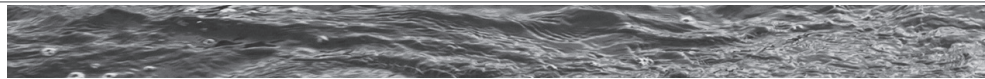
Columbia River Estuary

The U.S. negotiating position is based on “Regional Recommendations” completed in 2013. President Biden speaks of unity. The region unified behind these recommendations that included adding Ecosystem-based Function – river health – as a 3rd Treaty purpose.

In May 2018 U.S. negotiations with Canada commenced. Who is at the negotiating table and who is making the decisions?

The U.S. State Department (“State”) asserts that it “owns” the US-Canada relationship. State selected the U.S. negotiating team. Who did they select? In the words of Charles Wilkinson,

Dams brought great benefits for some, wrenching impacts for others: salmon extinction, forced relocation, poverty, disease and mental health disorders, and cultural genocide. For any hope of reconciliation, these truths must be spoken and heard. You are encouraged to attend the “One River, Ethics Matter” annual conferences, this year hosted by the Okanagan Nation Alliance and UBC. www.celp.org/ethics-treaty-project/



ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE WITH PROFORESTATION



Proforestation: n. The practice of purposefully growing an existing forest intact toward its full ecological potential. It is a nature-based solution whereby existing forests are protected as intact ecosystems to foster continuous growth for maximal carbon storage and ecological and structural complexity.

You have probably heard about the importance of rain forests, sometimes called the “lungs of the earth,” in storing carbon (CO₂), which is vital in our fight to constrain climate change. Temperate forests also store carbon both above and below ground for long periods.

Intact temperate forests, largely free from human intervention except primarily for trails and hazard removals, are the most carbon-dense and biodiverse terrestrial ecosystems. U.S. forests remove sufficient atmospheric CO₂ to reduce national annual net emissions by 11%. Intact and older forests have the potential for much more rapid CO₂ removal rates and carbon sequestration.

We hear a lot about afforestation (planting trees on land previously used for other things) and reforestation (planting trees on land where trees have been harvested). However, afforestation requires an enormous amount of additional land, and neither strategy can remove sufficient carbon by growing young trees during the critical next few decades.

Because older forests tend to sequester more CO₂ annually and contain far greater overall carbon stores, allowing existing, intact U.S. forests to grow older will substantially increase CO₂ sequestration and storage. This “proforestation” serves the Common Good by maximizing co-benefits such as nature-based biological CO₂ sequestration and many ecosystem services such as biodiversity enhancement, water and air quality, flood and erosion control, public health, and scenic beauty.

Caveat emptor: Be careful to do your research when you hear the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) or WA Department of Natural Resources and Commissioner of Lands talk about “forest health” and “wildfire prevention.” Financial incentives to convert standing forests into “board feet” drive decisions by the State and USFS. “Forest Health” and “wildfire prevention” have long been used to exploit forests and maximize agency budgets.

The vast majority of high severity fires are not primarily driven by the amount of fuel in the forest, but rather by drought and weather conditions, neither of which are addressed by forest-thinning. In addition, the state and USFS hires commercial companies to do some of their work, which means that work must be commercially viable, resulting in the logging of larger trees as well thinning smaller ones. Finally, the state has antiquated laws that cut down forests to raise funds for education and other county/local government programs.

For the sake of our future and that of our children and grandchildren, better forest management must protect and maintain older intact forests in our state. If you are interested in working with Sierra Club on forest issues, contact Tom waltsoe@gmail.com. **See more forest resources at www.sierraclub.org/forests.**

UPPER COLUMBIA RIVER GROUP

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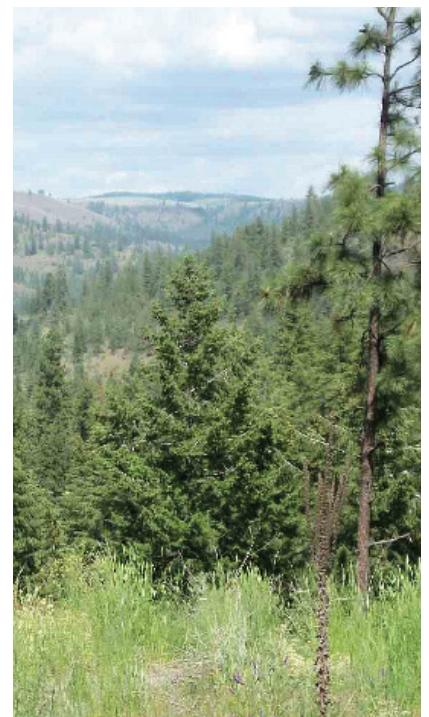
Barbara Rasero

Newsletter Editor

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Upper Columbia River Group



UCRG: ANNUAL ELECTION

All Sierra Club members in our group are eligible to vote in this election. Vote for 4 positions on the Group Executive Committee (ExCom).

Ballots must be received by March 15, 2021 by 5 p.m.

NOTE: Each member of a joint membership may vote, each using one of the two columns. **Please tear off and mail this entire page to: Sierra Club, P.O. Box 413, Spokane, WA 99210.**

FOR EXCOM (vote for 3) VOTER 1 VOTER 2

Jace Bylenga	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fred Christ	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Carolyn Leon	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tom Soeldner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(write in) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(write in) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(write in) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

JACE BYLENGA has been involved with the local Sierra Club since 2008 as a volunteer and then as a staff organizer in the Spokane region with the Beyond Coal campaign. He brings experience as a community and political organizer, youth outings leader, advocate for equity and racial justice, clean energy, and clean water.

FRED CHRIST maintains the Group's events record and allocation report. He has served as back-up Secretary for several years and is the Group's Treasurer. He has a special interest in community outreach — an intrepid volunteer for our annual Winter Waters event — and our Outings program.

CAROLYN LEON currently serves as Chair for both the Group's ExCom and the Outings Program. She also represents us to our state chapter's governing board. Carolyn's love of outings comes from her father, Rich Leon, a much beloved leader of outings, author, and editor of our Sierra Club Trail Guides.

TOM SOLDNER has served as the Group's Treasurer and Co-chair. He now serves as National Forest Chair and as a member of the Rivers Committee. His special interest is understanding humanity's place as part of, rather than apart from, the natural world. He is active in connecting the faith community with environmental stewardship and co-coordinates the Columbia River Ethics and Treaty Project.

Other Executive Committee members, elected last year and continuing to serve through 2021, are **Kathy Dixon, Evita Krislock, and Paige Kenney.**

TRANSITIONS: JOHN OSBORN



In 1983 John Osborn began his medical career in Spokane, and by 1984 was energetically involved with Sierra Club's Spokane Group and Northern Rockies Chapter. He has been

a prime mover for Sierra Club's work in our region ever since that time.

Between 1988 and 2000 John published 80 issues of the journal *Transitions* for for the Inland Empire Public Lands Council; it documented the changing environmental, political, and economic landscape of the Inland Northwest. Over the past several years John has been making his own "residential" transition. He has continued working as a member of our Upper Columbia River Group even as he and Rachael (Paschal Osborn) have settled on Vashon Island west of the Cascades. Now, while he will continue

working with our Spokane-based group on Spokane and Columbia River issues, he will do that primarily as part of Sierra Club's Washington Chapter.

Those of us who have worked with John over the years will miss his wise, persistent, and steady local presence, but we are confident of his committed partnership in Sierra Club's vital work in our region. While we will miss seeing him, we know that the Spokane and Columbia Rivers and the forests and prairies of Eastern Washington will still find him working for their protection and well-being.





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UPPER COLUMBIA RIVER GROUP

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Explore, Enjoy, and Protect the Planet.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:

A number of environmental bills are currently under consideration in the Washington State Legislature. Below are three that we are following with special interest.

Clean Cars 2030. This bill addresses climate change head on. Featured on our Sierra Club Chapter website as a legislative priority, this bill has been introduced into both the House (HB 1204) and the Senate (SB 5256). It makes a bold statement: All new vehicles beginning with the model year 2030 must be electric to be registered in Washington. Exemptions include earlier model vehicles, emergency vehicles, and those weighing over 10,000 pounds. California has already adopted a similar bill, as have the UK, Netherlands, Ireland, Sweden and Norway.

The argument: Cars and trucks are our state's largest source of carbon pollution; also, gas prices here are high. Electricity in Washington is much less expensive and 70% is derived from renewable sources. The move to electric vehicles makes both economic and environment sense. California's bill doesn't take effect until 2035, which would make Washington a leader in this initiative. According to a Climate Nexus Poll, 59% of Washingtonians support a gas car phaseout by 2030.

Clean Fuel Standard. HB 1091 failed in 2020 and has been re-introduced this legislative session by request of Gov. Inslee. It directs the Department of Ecology to adopt rules establishing a Clean Fuels Program (CFP) to limit the greenhouse gas per unit of transportation fuel to 10 % below 2017 standards by 2028 and to 20% below 2017 standards by 2035. Net neutrality is supposed to be reached by 2050 HB 1091 has passed the House Transportation Committee and is now in Appropriations. Consideration of this bill requires more care than for the Clean Cars 2030 bill discussed above. One of the sponsors of the bill, Rep. Fitzgibbons of Seattle, has said that Washington's farms, dairies, and forests can generate biofuels. The Sierra Club Chapter generally supports a clean fuel standards bill; the National Sierra Club supports also the use of biofuels as long as the process of creating them doesn't cause more harm than the good of the intended outcome. 350 Spokane supports the bill, but prefers an even faster timeline, reaching net neutrality by 2040.

HEAL Act. SB 5141, the Healthy Environment for All Act defines "environmental justice" in state law, outlines how state agencies should consider community needs and environmental justice in the work that they perform, establishes a permanent Environmental Justice Council to work with these agencies to help create EJ legislation and to expand equitable community participation. It will require an EJ assessment of proposed bills and rule-making. It includes a provision for a map of Washington State that will identify areas of greater environmental impact. As members of the Sierra Club, we recognize that the levels of environmental health and safety can differ dramatically depending upon where one lives. The Shriver Center on Poverty Law reports that 70% of the country's most contaminated sites are within a mile of public housing. Living near a railroad that transports combustible fuels (inadequate vessels known as "bomb" cars have been used to carry crude oil) or near a freeway full of automobile traffic that emits carbon monoxide are further examples of the way that poverty often exposes people to greater pollution and danger. SB 5141 ensures tribal sovereignty and rights. This bill has been introduced in the Senate Environment, Energy, and Technology committee. We are interested in tracking its progress.

If you are interested in more information or to get involved, contact Kathleengdixon@gmail.com.

See more @ www.sierraclub.org/washington/politicalaction

