

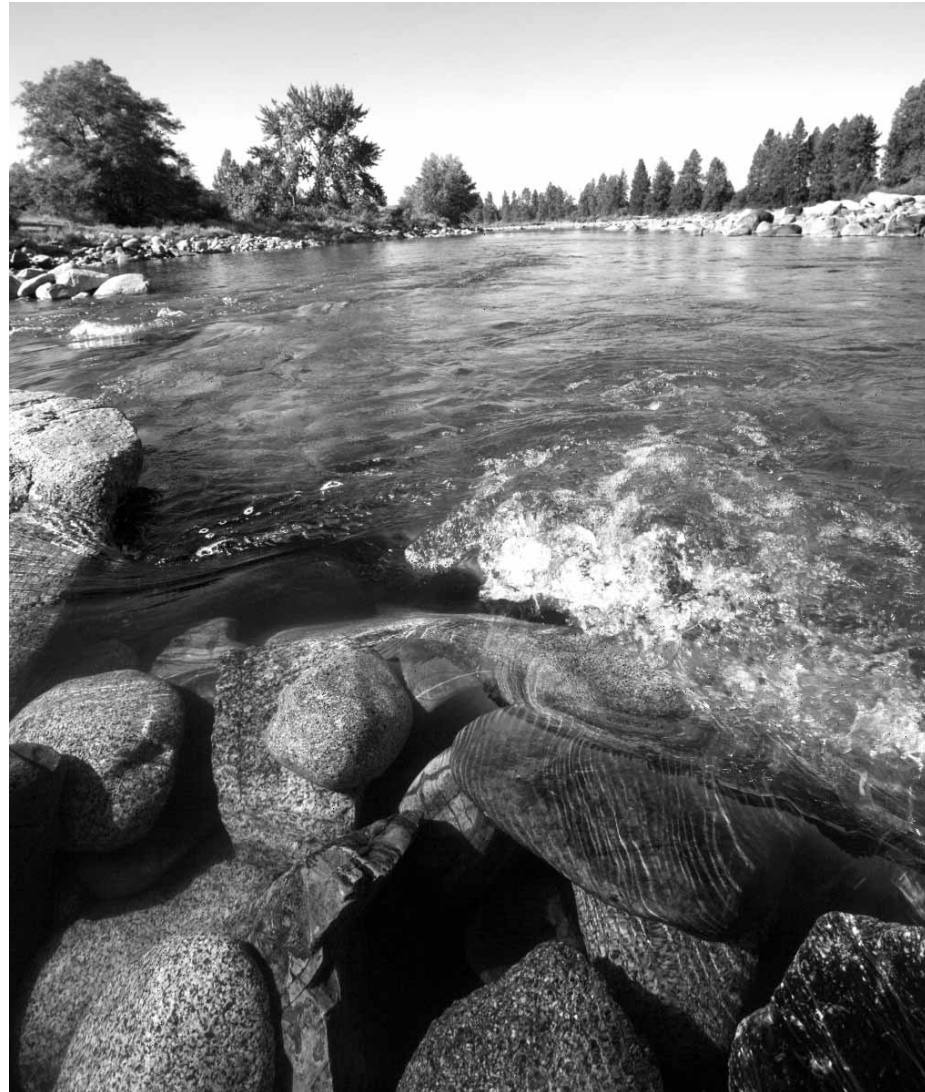
Ecology's mission: Protect and enhance the Spokane River system

With pollution entering Lake Spokane and the Spokane River from numerous sources – and the knowledge that our water supply is not infinite – Ecology's role in protecting the health and uses of the river system is complicated.

In one sense, Ecology has little leeway: The agency is required to make sure our water supply is ample and clean. Allowing the river and Lake Spokane to deteriorate is neither wise nor legal. So the question is one of how best to work with cities and industries that discharge to the river to not simply reduce pollution but to do it affordably. We must also work together, as a community, to ensure future generations have enough water to sustain a healthy lifestyle and economy.

Restoring the health of the Spokane River and promoting economic development are sometimes seen as opposing goals, but the truth is just the opposite: a healthy river will foster an economically vibrant community. This dynamic is reflected consistently in plans for the University District, the Great Spokane River Gorge and the New SciTech-Mobius projects, among others, all of which use the river as an inspiring cornerstone.

The task is to protect and enhance this incredible river asset without jeopardizing the many public and private investments that rely on it. This publication briefly describes a number of activities taking place to do just that. For more information, contact the names and Web sites provided on the back.



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www.ecy.wa.gov/ecyhome.html

Click on *Index* and *Spokane River Basin*

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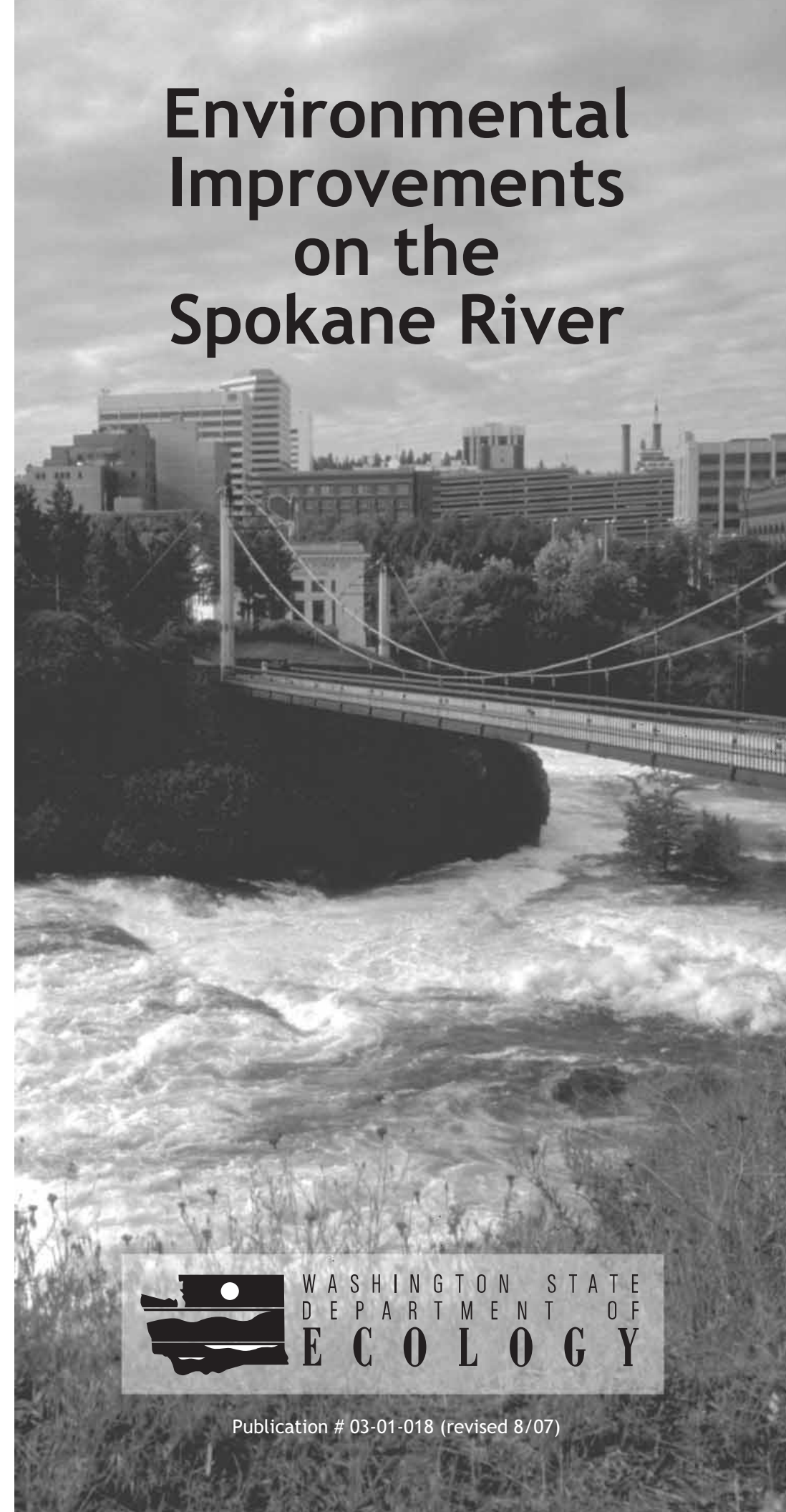
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Environmental Improvements on the Spokane River



Publication # 03-01-018 (revised 8/07)

Water quality improvement plans

The Spokane River suffers from several types of pollution, and Ecology is developing a water quality improvement plan - or "total maximum daily load" (TMDL) - to address each problem.

🌀 **Dissolved oxygen** – A plan is being completed in 2007 to make sure there is enough dissolved oxygen for fish in Lake Spokane and the Spokane River.

🌀 **Phosphorus** – A plan was completed in 1992 but is being revisited (as part of the dissolved-oxygen plan) to address excess nutrients from polluted runoff and other sources. These nutrients fertilize algae and plants. The excess plants harm recreational uses in Lake Spokane and reduce the oxygen for fish.

🌀 **Dissolved metals** – A plan was completed in 1999 to address metals primarily from historic mining practices in Idaho.

🌀 **PCBs** – Plans are under way to address polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) from several sources that historically used PCBs in their operations. The PCBs are found in the water and accumulate in fish. In a separate effort, the 2007 state Legislature dedicated funding in the "Urban Waters Initiative" to look for the sources of PCBs and flame-retardant chemicals to the Spokane River.

In addition to these plans, water quality improvement plans are being developed on the tributaries of the Spokane River. Both the Little Spokane River and Hangman (or Latah) Creek are impaired by low dissolved oxygen, fecal coliform bacteria and high temperatures. The plans for these rivers will also address phosphorus since they are a source to the Spokane River.

Dam licensing

Non-federal hydroelectric facilities on most rivers and streams in the U.S. are under the jurisdiction of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. The commission issues licenses for these facilities and sets conditions for periods of 30 to 50 years. The licenses ensure that dams are operated safely and that measures are taken to offset environmental harm.

The licenses of 22 dams in Washington are due to expire between now and 2010 and are subject to renewal. The Avista Corporation owns six of the seven hydroelectric dams along the Spokane River. Five of Avista's dams were scheduled to be relicensed by July 2007 and are currently operating under temporary, annual licenses.

Conditions on the license are expected to address recreation, flow, fish resources and numerous other activities and characteristics associated with the river.

The federal Clean Water Act requires a state water quality certification when a federal agency licenses or permits an activity, such as a hydroelectric project, that involves a discharge to the nation's waters. Ecology reviews, sets conditions, and decides whether or not to approve the certification for the five Avista dams. An application for the certification was submitted in July 2007 and is expected to be issued in 2008.

Comprehensive planning

Two significant planning efforts are under way that directly affect the Spokane River. These locally driven processes address shoreline management and a long-term vision for Spokane's gorge.

Spokane County and the cities of Spokane, Millwood, Spokane Valley, Medical Lake, Waverly, Latah and Rockford all are working to update their shoreline master programs by 2008. Under the state's Shoreline Management Act, counties and cities are required to develop plans to protect shorelines of lakes and streams, including the Spokane River and Lake Spokane.

Inappropriate development can harm water quality by increasing erosion and stormwater runoff, destroying fish and wildlife habitat, and limiting public use of the resource.

A local effort is under way to enhance and preserve the Spokane River gorge and falls, led by the non-profit group Friends of the Falls in cooperation with other community groups and private industry. The "Great Gorge Plan" addresses recreation, economic development, access and cultural issues along the river corridor.

Watershed planning

Local governments and organizations are working to maintain an adequate water supply in the Spokane River area.

The Washington Legislature approved the Watershed Planning Act in 1998, and has provided money each year to help local governments and organizations to:

- 🌀 form planning units (*Phase 1*);
- 🌀 pay for studies to make recommendations on water resource management (*Phase 2*);
- 🌀 develop a plan (*Phase 3*); and
- 🌀 implement plan recommendations (*Phase 4*).

Plans may establish more water storage facilities, create strategies to conserve water and identify ways to ensure that streams can provide a healthy environment for fish.

Both the Middle /Little Spokane and the Hangman (Latah) Creek planning units have completed plans and are scheduled to complete Phase 4 by spring 2008. The planning unit for the Lower Spokane River watershed, which starts where Latah Creek enters the Spokane River and extends to the north and west, is currently working on Phase 3 to be completed in 2009. All of the Spokane River planning units are collaborating to develop stream flow recommendations for the river.

Cleaning up PCBs in Sediments

Under Ecology direction, PCB-contaminated sediments were cleaned up during the fall and winter of 2006 behind Upriver Dam and at a location known as Donkey Island. About 3.6 acres of sediment were covered with a protective cap near the dam and about 800 cubic yards of contaminated sediment were removed at Donkey Island. Cleaning up PCB-contaminated sediments is part of Ecology's focused effort to reduce PCBs in the river and in fish.

Fish-consumption advisories

In June 2000, the Washington Department of Health and the Spokane Regional Health District issued a fish-consumption advisory for lead contamination in whole fish due to historic mining practices in Idaho.

The advisory warned that people who eat meals made from whole fish, especially children and pregnant women, are at greater risk than people who eat only fish fillets. In March 2001, the health advisory was revised to recommend that people avoid or strictly limit consumption of fish caught in the river above Upriver Dam because of PCBs found in fish tissue. The need for fish advisories likely will change as water quality improves. Consult your local health authority for current information.

Spokane River metals cleanup

Mining wastes from Idaho's Silver Valley have extended well into Washington along the Spokane River. In 2002, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued a cleanup plan for the Coeur d'Alene basin that includes the Spokane River. In Washington, cleanup of "hot spots" associated with recreational sites and important aquatic habitats between state line and Upriver Dam began last summer with cleanup of the Starr Road recreational shoreline area, led by EPA. Ecology completed cleanup at the Island Complex and Murray Road recreational shoreline areas in late summer 2007. To represent Washington's interests with regard to cleanup work in the state of Idaho, the state has a seat on the multi-government Basin Environmental Improvement Act Commission.

Study of Rathdrum - Spokane aquifer

The Rathdrum-Spokane aquifer serves as a sole source of drinking water for 500,000 people in the Spokane-Coeur d'Alene vicinity.

A broad group of governmental agencies and interest groups in Idaho and Washington jointly conducted a bi-state study of the aquifer. The two states and the U.S. Geological Survey studied how much water is in the aquifer, where it is located, and how the aquifer interacts with the Spokane River. The study was completed in 2007. Currently local governments are discussing how to interact in the future with regards to managing the water in the aquifer for both states.

