

# DOE NEWS

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## DOE TO CONDUCT NATURAL RESOURCE DAMAGE ASSESSMENT PROCESS AT HANFORD

The federal Departments of Energy (DOE), Commerce and the Interior today announced plans to conduct a phased Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) process at the Hanford Site in eastern Washington to further cleanup and restoration of the site. DOE, as the lead response agency and a federal natural resource trustee for the Hanford Site, will lead the assessments in parallel with ongoing ecological risk assessments under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA). The NRDA process will evaluate whether there have been any adverse effects on natural resources as a result of releases of CERCLA hazardous substances at the 586-square-mile site.

“This is an important phase we are launching,” said Keith A. Klein, manager of the DOE Richland Operations Office. “We will build on our extensive environmental monitoring program, which has produced thousands of ecological and environmental studies over more than 60 years, to assess whether there have been any effects on natural resources from Hanford releases.”

DOE will conduct the assessments in collaboration with the Hanford natural resource trustees, which include, in addition to DOE, the Departments of Commerce and the Interior, the states of Washington and Oregon, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Indian Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and the Nez Perce Tribe.

To the extent practicable, the Hanford phased NRDA will be integrated into DOE’s ongoing cleanup actions at Hanford. DOE expects to carry out both the cleanup and NRDA process within its existing budget request. The phased NRDA process could include identifying gaps in existing data, designing additional studies if necessary, developing a conceptual site model showing where contamination exists, and drafting an assessment plan for potentially affected natural resources. If the assessment finds that natural resource injuries have resulted from Hanford CERCLA releases, future cleanup actions may be designed to achieve restoration of the natural resources affected.

“Designing cleanup actions to achieve both cleanup and restoration goals will allow us to identify and begin reducing potential natural resources impacts sooner,” Klein said. “We believe that’s in everyone’s interest.”

The concept of natural resource trustees is derived from a legal principle that federal, state and tribal governments hold certain property and natural resources in trust for the benefit of the public and that those governments have the duty and authority to protect and preserve such property and resources for public uses. Through this NRDA process, trustees may determine the nature and extent of injuries to natural resources from covered releases, and develop strategies to restore any natural resources affected if necessary.

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