FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THOUSANDS URGE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO DROP PROPOSAL TO RECLASSIFY HIGH-LEVEL NUCLEAR WASTE AT HANFORD

November 7, 2018, Portland, OR—More than 2,000 people are urging the Trump administration to withdraw a controversial proposal to reclassify 70,000 gallons of high-level nuclear waste in a cluster of tanks near the Columbia River. DOE’s proposal seeks to reclassify the pollution as low-level waste so that DOE can fill the tanks with grout and leave the waste at Hanford indefinitely.

"The future of the Hanford cleanup is at stake if Department of Energy proceeds with leaving high-level nuclear waste in shallow land burial at Hanford. These long-lived radioactive products will far outlive their containers and migrate into the river and our food, air and water resources. The Trump Administration hopes to save billions of dollars at Hanford by simply not conducting the cleanup," said Tom Carpenter, Executive Director of Hanford Challenge.

Over 2,000 comments and petitions gathered by a coalition of public interest groups including Hanford Challenge, Natural Resources Defense Council, Columbia Riverkeeper, Heart of America Northwest, and others highlight major flaws in a U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) proposal to reclassify and abandon waste in tanks and soils in Hanford’s C Farm—an area contaminated with nuclear waste containing plutonium, americium, technetium and other long-lived pollution.

"Changing the name of High Level Nuclear Waste does not change how contamination will spread from Hanford’s High Level Nuclear Waste tank farms, nor does changing the name of the waste prevent the cancer that future generations will suffer," said Washington state Representative Gerry Pollet, Executive Director of Hanford Cleanup watchdog Heart of America Northwest.

“The federal government’s proposal sets the stage to leave long-lived, dangerous contamination close to the Columbia River at Hanford,” stated Dan Serres, Conservation Director for Columbia Riverkeeper. “The Trump administration’s proposal makes Hanford a high-level waste dump in all but name.”

State and tribal governments are also raising questions about DOE’s proposal. The Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation challenged a previous attempt by the federal government to reclassify waste and sent a letter calling on the federal government to clean up high-level waste at Hanford. In October, the Oregon Department of Energy asked the federal government to provide more information about the risks associated with waste in soils, pipes and tanks in Hanford’s C Farm. In November, the State of Washington also raised serious concerns about DOE being “unable to show compliance” with DOE’s own criteria for reclassifying waste. Similarly, the Hanford Advisory Board urged U.S. DOE to rethink its approach, which ignores pollution already in the soils near the tanks.

Hanford is the most contaminated site in the Western Hemisphere. From World War II though the 1980s, the U.S. government used the site for nuclear weapons plutonium production. The Columbia River’s Hanford Reach is also home to the best mainstem Chinook salmon spawning habitat in the entire Columbia River system. The Hanford area has great traditional and religious significance to Columbia Plateau tribes and is home to multiple traditional cultural properties, traditional use areas, as well as significant ceremonial sites.
U.S. DOE plans to make a final decision on the waste reclassification in Fall 2019.

Resources:

- Comment letter, Oregon Department of Energy Comments on WIR.
- Hanford Advisory Board Advice, Waste Incidental to Reprocessing Determination for Waste Management Area C.
- Fact Sheet, WIR Comment Period
- “Competing Visions for the Future of Hanford,” report with tips for how people can get involved.
- The Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation letter, Comments on WIR.
- Washington Department of Ecology letter, Comments on WIR.

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About Columbia Riverkeeper
Columbia Riverkeeper’s mission is to protect and restore the water quality of the Columbia River and all life connected to it, from the headwaters to the Pacific Ocean. Representing over 16,000 members and supporters, Columbia Riverkeeper works to restore a Columbia River where people can safely eat the fish they catch and where children can swim without fear of toxic exposure. Columbia Riverkeeper is a member of Waterkeeper Alliance, the world’s fastest-growing environmental movement, uniting more than 300 Waterkeeper organizations worldwide. For more information, go to columbiariverkeeper.org.

About Hanford Challenge
Hanford Challenge exists to transform Hanford’s nuclear legacy into a model of safe and effective cleanup. Our mission is to help create a future for Hanford that secures human health and safety, advances accountability, and promotes a sustainable environmental legacy. For more information go to hanfordchallenge.org.

About Heart of America Northwest
Heart of America Northwest is one of the leading citizen groups working to stop the use of Hanford as a national radioactive waste dump and to protect the Columbia River and our region’s health from Hanford’s growing contamination threat. They have 16,000 members across Washington and Oregon. For more information go to hanfordcleanup.org.