

Dear Fellow Reporters,

We in the active Citizen Involvement Community appreciate your coverage and attention to Representative Newhouse' visit to the Columbia Rivershore today. He was there to learn about Columbia River Reconveyance which would transfer ownership of much of our Columbia Rivershore to local Cities, Counties and Ports from the Corps of Engineers.

This would be a Massive Change to our communities and region, and so far for many years, it was only been promoted by business interests. Community groups concerned with environmental and river quality and recreation have been completely left out. This last year, this began to change, and we in the community hope to work with the potential receiving parties to do the homework that should have been done years ago.

Serious questions remain:

1. What are the actual costs the receiving parties (cities and counties) will assume when the Corp turns over river shore. This could include costs of renewing certifications and assuming risks of future flooding or high water events, as happened a few years ago.
2. How will the continuous protection of shoreline and quality of river water be maintained when it goes from single Corps control to multiple controlling entities, leaving potential gaps? This long standing problem in environmental protection, when each small change does not pass a threshold, but the combined ones do, needs to be addressed. There is no local entity that assesses the River as a Whole.
3. What uncertainties do the receiving entities face from coming Climate Change Impacts, while the Columbia River Treaty with Canada is now being renegotiated? Canada largely controls water that will be sent South to us, and has had to release sudden amounts that have caused high water events here and that took out the Kennewick docks a few years ago. When private entities assume full river shore ownership from the Corps, what risks and liabilities go along with this? Could a reconveyance wait for the treaty to be renegotiated so we know what risks we are accepting?
4. We have just gone through a lengthy battle here over Columbia river dams and fish survival. What would transfer of ownership do to local operations that may impact fish survival on one of the richest spawning grounds on the Columbia, just north of Richland in Franklin County?
5. The local Native American tribes here have a rich and lengthy history with the land long before the Europeans / Americans came here. They have treaty rights signed with the US Government and the Corps. How will this treaty rights be protected and guaranteed, when the local cities and counties are not signatory to them?

6. What will changes in parks availability do to citizens who have come to not only love their parks but rely on them during this time of COVID 19 shutdown? Those parks are there because Corps ownership has ensured that nothing else can be done with that land except use it for public recreation. There is no continued guarantee that cities may now develop or sell the land for commercial use once conveyed.

7. That same long term Corps ownership has ensured that many cities along our river shore have become relatively rich supportive locations for wildlife that support birdwatching, recreation fishing, and other passive nature enjoyment activities. How will these areas continue to be protected under diverse ownership which may sometimes bisect them? This rich natural diversity also adds economic and life value to our community. Proposed Reconveyance has never assessed this.

The Alliance for a Livable, Sustainable Community is the largest quality of life and sustainable development citizens group in the Mid-Columbia. We provide an umbrella for many other specialty groups, like Audubon, Tapteal Greenway, Friends of Badger, Friends of the Rivershore,, Bike Tri-Cities, etc. We only seek to have broad public discussion and input and important questions answered before engaging on anything as massive and impactful as a total transfer of US public lands to different local entities. This Has Not Happened Yet, regardless of what you have been told.

The ALSC will work constructively with any and all potentially receiving entities to ensure that IF reconveyance occurs, it is done rightfully, and to the positive benefit of the whole Tri-Cities community, not just its commercial interests.

Sincerely,

Jim Wise

James A Wise, Ph.D.  
President, Alliance for a Livable, Sustainable Community.