



Donate for a Healthy River

Spokane Riverkeeper eNews Spring 2020



The Merganser

A word from your Riverkeeper, Jerry White Jr.

The Spokane Riverkeeper wants to express our solidarity with communities of color in the midst of the national anguish over the brutal slaying of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, MN. We also recognize the need for immediate action informed by the recognition that our work to protect rivers intersects with the systemic and institutional racism that exists in our country, in our watershed, and even in our own movement. Black lives matter. The lives of indigenous people and all people of color matter. Further, the access to a clean environment and the quality of life that Rivers give, should not be a white privilege.

All people should have access to clean water and a healthy environment and the means to protect that access.

George Floyd's murder has provided a moment, and hopefully a movement, of collective soul-searching - not just about the ways in which we understand racist systems, but the way in which white privilege serves to under-pin these systems and bias.

For example, here at the Spokane Riverkeeper we understand that it was Native American societies on the Columbia Plateau that were and continue to be, the first Waterkeepers. However, these same communities have historically been targeted by everything from subtle acts of racist behavior to being disproportionately imprisoned and killed by police in the urban streets that are often only meters away from the Spokane River.

It is also not lost on us that our staff is white. We are reflecting on this, and understand that our program has a great deal of work to do in understanding our own contributions to a system that supports bias - even within our own movement to protect our waterways.

As such, we are committed to taking steps to share our movement with communities of color, and to develop actionable ways to share the power of river advocacy with communities whose lives are directly affected by the lack environmental justice. Please stay tuned as we begin to discuss our role in the

Intersectional Environmentalist Pledge:

I will stand in solidarity with Black, Indigenous + POC communities and The Planet

I will not ignore the intersections of environmentalism and social justice

I will use my privilege to advocate for black + brown lives in spaces where this message is often silenced

I will proactively do the work to learn about the environmental and social injustices Black, Indigenous + POC communities face without minimizing

I will respect the boundaries of BIPOC friends and activists and not demand they perform emotional labor or do the work for me

I will share my learnings with other environmentalists and my community

I will amplify the messages of Black, Indigenous + POC activists and environmental leaders

I will not remain silent during pivotal political and cultural moments that impact BIPOC communities

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intersection between environmentalism and social justice, with our River fans, river user-groups, our supporters and communities of color over the next year.

The Spokane Riverkeeper is in an exciting new chapter of its history. We have gone independent from the Center for Justice - our original fiscal sponsor and long-time home. As a chapter of the International Waterkeeper Alliance, we continue to fulfill our unique role in the Spokane River Watershed.



We are fond of saying, “It is your river. We protect it”. But as we forge our own way, earn our keep in this community, we feel that you deserve to understand our definition of “Protection”. What does protection really look and sound like in your watershed? It turns out that it is this definition of “protection” that makes our work singular and important in this community. While it takes many different forms and here are just a few examples:

Protecting your River means:

- Challenging the status quo when needed. Saying NO to false collaborations like the “Trojan horse” efforts of the Spokane River Regional Toxics Task Force.
- Saying YES to meaningful collaboration. Running citizen science programs through innovative partnerships with organizations like Spokane Falls Trout Unlimited. Working on riverside Homeless Outreach Programs with organizations like Frontier Behavioral health and SNAP. Collaborating with Washington Department Of Ecology on correcting non-point source pollution in the Hangman Creek Basin and riverside litter pickups.
- Pushing entities like the City of Spokane to put a robust water conservation plans in place for the health of your river.
- Fighting “variances” or exceptions to toxic pollution limits that represent “Passes to Pollute” for big polluters.
- Using the law to change the way the powerful treat our waterways. An example, Litigating against the EPA when they worked with dischargers to roll back protections for your river and changed the amount of toxic pollution allowable in your river and the State’s waterways.
- Performing regular river pollution patrols along the Spokane River and its tributaries.
- Doing the hard work to recover wild trout - advocating for native species and their recovery

So as we stand on our own to feet, with your support and help, please remember that we are the organization out there, patrolling your river and noticing what is good, bad and ugly. We are not afraid to say what needs to be said to the power brokers and polluters, and we honor the commitment and vision of our partners and friends as they entrust the protection of their river to us and our efforts!
[\(Read the entire blog here\)](#)

Variance for Toxic Pollution - Update



Spokane River dischargers are working to evade water quality criteria that regulates the amount of toxic PCBs they can dump into the river. Using a tool called a “variance” they are legally polluting our river. We are leading the fight against variances, which would give the five dischargers between 13-20 years to come into compliance with water quality standards. To us, this amounts to “kicking the can down the road”, with no end in sight.

Because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which derailed the public input process, we asked the governor and State Department of Ecology to delay the process for approving these variances. See our letter [Here](#) and press

[Here](#). To learn more about these massive threats to our river, and sign our petition pushing back on these variances, check out our [website](#).

Hangman Settlement Agreement Report: Good News for Hangman Creek - Good News for Native Fish

In 2015 we sued the Environmental Protection Agency for

improving an ineffective cleanup of plan of Hangman Creek, one of the dirtiest creeks in Washington State. Ultimately we settled the lawsuit for the promise that the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) would greatly increase their time and resources cleaning up the watershed. These cleanup efforts are just beginning. Along with increased watershed surveys that ensure "best management practices" are followed in the watershed, Ecology will be assessing all of the riparian areas, conducting in stream surveys, and developing a comprehensive outreach plan in the basin. We are excited to see what improvements these efforts will bring in the basin.



Socially Distanced River Cleanups



The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic forced us to cancel our group river cleanups this spring. But that doesn't mean we've stopped cleaning up the river. We held our first public (and very rainy) river cleanup, where we provided supplies to households to cleanup the river. We plan on doing this every Wednesday, but check on [facebook page](#) for updates.

Water Conservation IS River Protection



Water Conservation: Conserving water from our Spokane Valley Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer IS River protection. It is not too late to comment on the Spokane Draft Water Conservation plan. The plan needs to be strengthened. It needs a drought response plan with measures that are tied to in stream flow guidelines that take into account the condition of our river. Strong conservation measures is a sure way to ensure water for our river in the critical low-flow seasons of the summer. More info on how you can help [HERE](#) [Spokesman Review Article](#) [Press here](#)

Citizen Science Update

We had an amazing year measuring turbidity in Hangman Creek and the Spokane River. These turbidity measurements give us a good idea of how much sediment Hangman Creek is dumping into our river. We had 19 citizen scientists go on over 80 sampling runs. In addition, we partnered with the seven secondary school students at the Salish School of Spokane to measure a host of water quality parameters. Overall, we found lower turbidity levels in Hangman Creek and the Spokane River, indicating cleaner water. However,

huge rainstorms in May caused massive pollution loads right when our native redound trout were hatching.



A New Beginning

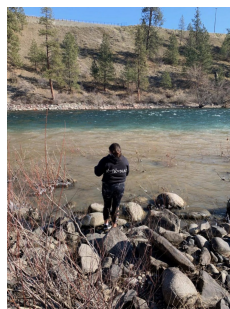


The Spokane Riverkeeper is well on it's way towards independence as our own nonprofit. Since our founding, the Center for Justice has been our fiscal sponsor. Now that the Center has closed it's doors, we've applied for our own 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. And in the interim, Waterkeeper Alliance is our fiscal sponsor for new grants until our tax exemption status is approved with the IRS.

With that comes a change of location, although only slightly. We will be located down the hall from our old office, on the third floor of the Community Building, 35 W Main, Suite 308. Come say hi!

Drips and Drops

- We placed our temperature loggers into Hangman Creek and will do so soon in the Spokane River, continuing our work to show that many parts of our watershed do not meet state's water temperature standards.
- Our path towards independence was made possible by our amazing new board including Josh Abel, President & Board Chair, Patty Gates, Founding Board Member, and Carrie Herrman, Secretary. Please thank them if you get a chance.
- We received a grant in collaboration with University of Idaho's Water Resource Research Institute (IWRRI) to study crayfish in the Spokane River using citizen scientists! Who wants to go crawfishing with us? Look for details in 2021.
- Don't forget: Sign our Petition against "Variances" or passes to pollute for Toxic Pollution in our river! [Here](#)





Thanks Tim Connor for redband trout photo, the crawfish photo and to Dan Berry for Grass Widow photo