

Columbia River Basin Restoration Program

Toxics Monitoring Subgroup (TMS) Workshop Summary

Wednesday, April 22, 2026 | 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM PT

In-person at DoubleTree Hotel in Portland, OR and online

Overview

The TMS workshop brought together a wide range of technical experts and partners to refine the direction of the draft Basin-wide Toxics Monitoring Strategy.

Workshop Objectives:

- Advance Basin-wide Toxics Monitoring Strategy toward finalization
- Obtain feedback on priority monitoring elements
- Discuss collaboration options for Basin-wide monitoring network
- Identify data gaps and opportunities for partnership contributions
- Strengthen Basin-wide commitment to a shared, voluntary monitoring approach

Attendees:

- Jade Alvey, EPA
- Jenn Ambrose, Oregon Department of Agriculture
- Greg Anderson, U.S. EPA Region 8
- Christopher Ayres, City of Vancouver
- Austin Baldwin, USGS
- Kylie Ball, Nez Perce Tribe Water Resources Division
- Dianne Barton, Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
- Jakub Bednarek, Washington Department of Ecology
- Negonnekodoqua Blair, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Keith Bollt, US EPA Chesapeake Bay Program Office
- Adriane Borgias, Washington State Department of Ecology
- Peter Brumm, EPA R8
- RODNEY Cawston, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
- Megan Christian, Oregon Health Authority - Healthy Fish Consumption Program
- Ken Clark, Nez Perce Tribe
- Catherine Corbett, Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership
- Hilary Cosentino, The Freshwater Trust
- Rick Cowlshaw, Oregon Dept of Agriculture
- Michael Dumelle, EPA
- Ryan Dunbeck, Nez Perce Tribe
- Sherrie Duncan, Yakama Nation Fisheries
- Meghan Dunn, EPA Region 10
- Sarah Dunn, USGS
- Mariah Durglo, Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes
- Kai Elgethun, R10 EPA LSASD RAB
- Mary Engels, University of Idaho
- Nathan Enos, Washington Ecology
- Claudette Enos, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

- Bryan Fiedorczyk, EPA
- Heidi Fleury, Western Montana Conservation Commission
- Whitney Fraser, Lodestone Environmental Consulting/Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
- Greg Frey, The Council Oak
- Tara Galuska, Recreation and Conservation Office
- Laura Gephart, Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
- Catherine Gockel, EPA R10
- Janelle Groff, Flathead Lake Biological Station
- David Gruen, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
- Kalea Gurfield, Oregon State University
- Keri Handaly, Grand Ronde
- Paige Haxton-Evans, ODEQ
- Will Hobbs, WA ECY
- Gina Hoff, USBR
- JoAnn Holloway, U.S. Geological Survey
- Mary James, Nez Perce Tribe
- Mark Jankowski, USEPA
- Brian Johnson, City of Vancouver
- Jeremy Johnson, Alta Science and Engineering
- Yvette Joseph, Colville Confederated Tribes
- Jennifer Karp, City of Portland Environmental Services
- Caroline Keever, Upper Columbia United Tribes
- Tamara Knudson, Alta Science and Engineering
- Krista Lammers, Western Montana Conservation Commission
- Cady Lancaster, Oregon State University
- Katie Lethe, The Freshwater Trust
- Casey Lewis, Western Montana Conservation Commission
- Justin Lini, Council Oak
- Katarina Lunde, Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership
- Andy Marquez, Washington State Department of Ecology
- Kevin Masterson, Stony Creek Consulting
- Martin Merz, EPA
- Patrick Moran, US Geological Survey
- Brian Muegge, Salmon-Safe
- Linda Nemeth, Nez Perce Tribe
- Robin Parker, CRBRP EPA Region 10
- Sean Payne, U.S. Geological Survey
- Nicholas Peak, EPA, Region 10
- Rebecca Perrin, US EPA R8
- Jennifer Peterson, Oregon DEQ
- Erik Peterson, U.S. EPA
- Melody Poland, US EPA
- Nathaniel (Nat) Scholz, NOAA Fisheries, Northwest Fisheries Science Center (retired)
- Irvin Schultz, NOAA Northwest Fisheries Science Center
- Kevin Scribner, Salmon-Safe
- Kelsey Shaw Nakama, Tualatin Riverkeepers
- Laura Shira, Yakama Nation
- Evan Smith, CSKT
- Mary Lou Soscia, Retired US EPA
- Julann Spromberg, Northwest Fisheries Science Center
- Rebecca Stevens, Coeur d'Alene Tribe
- Brooke Stowell, Nez Perce Tribe
- Dorie Sutton, City of Vancouver WA
- Andrew Swanson, Oregon ACWA and Clackamas WES
- Krishna Viswanathan, EPA R10
- Chris Weer, City of Vancouver
- Michelle Wilcox, EPA
- Ashley Zanolli, EPA Region 10

- Jasmine Zimmer-Stucky, Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership

TMS Workshop Summary

Welcome, Pin Your Project on the Basin, and Framing

Krishna Viswanathan, EPA Region 10 Water Division Director

Krishna welcomed the group and noted that the Monitoring Strategy is the centerpiece of EPA's efforts to develop a baseline by which progress will be measured. This is important to document results from the Columbia River Basin Restoration Program. This effort builds on the collective experience of partners and will help set a foundation for future collaboration. Krishna stressed that while reducing toxics in such a large Basin is a long-term challenge, this effort will advance the consistency and availability of data for all interested partners. He thanked the TMS Core Team for their work in developing this workshop and the Yakama Nation for their leadership throughout this effort.

Survey 123: Pin Your Project

Attendees were asked to voluntarily submit information to USGS on their monitoring projects using Survey 123 (tinyurl.com/AprilTMS). Information could include locations, toxics, media, focus of the project, and contact information for follow-up. This information will be used for a 2027 update to the Toxics Monitoring Dashboard to include projects outside of EPA-funded projects, pending follow-up with contacts who submitted information.

Toxics Monitoring Strategy Update and Key Considerations

TMS Core Team Presenters: Patrick Moran, USGS; Mark Jankowski, EPA; Lisa Kusnierz, EPA; Ashley Zanolli, EPA

Ashley spoke to attendees about the purpose of the Columbia River Basin Restoration Program and Funding Assistance Program and how they support two of the EPA's pillars:

- Pillar 1: Clean Air, Land, and Water for Every American
- Pillar 3: Permitting Reform, Cooperative Federalism, Cross-Agency Partnership

The draft Strategy was sent out for TMS review prior to the workshop. It addresses water quality trends assessment and identifying possible causes of water quality problems per Clean Water Act Section 123, including what to monitor, where, and how to ensure data quality and comparability. Ashley summarized the current status of the draft Strategy and the engagement process to date. Patrick discussed the vision for the Strategy, 20-year goals for the effort, and a proposed framework for achieving success. Mark discussed potential indicators, priority

chemicals and media. Lisa spoke about the proposed appendices, screening values, adaptive management, and a proposed timeline for completing the Strategy.

Technical Breakout Groups

In the technical breakouts, individual participants expressed strong alignment on the need to balance risk to human health and aquatic life equally when prioritizing indicators. There was clear interest in expanding the list of priority chemicals, particularly to include PFAS and PBDEs, and in incorporating non-targeted analysis to detect emerging contaminants. Fish tissue monitoring (especially for persistent, bioaccumulative, and toxic substances) was widely supported as a foundational component for the first five years, though participants emphasized the importance of also collecting water samples, potentially through passive sampling approaches. Individual participants voiced agreement that a core set of indicators should be consistent across the Basin, with flexibility to add localized indicators where needed. Determining the appropriate species and tissues for fish sampling remains an open question, with ongoing debate about whether filet or whole-body samples best serve partners' goals.

The conversation around the monitoring network highlighted a strong preference for a fixed-site design to ensure consistency over time and enable robust status-and-trends reporting. Participants recommended including both mainstem Columbia River sites and tributaries, and some expressed interest in incorporating probabilistic elements if feasible. Land-use patterns were seen as an important factor in site selection, and many partners emphasized the value of using HUCs and integrator sites with existing historical data, while also ensuring that data-poor areas are not overlooked. Seasonal and flow-related timing considerations will need to be built into the sampling design, along with indicator-specific frequencies that reflect expected rates of change.

Partners also discussed how the strategy could support and leverage their work. A Basin-wide indicators list, for example, could help partners align their sampling plans and improve consistency across jurisdictions. Results from strategy-driven sampling could guide follow-up investigations in areas of concern, whether through targeted water sampling or additional fish tissue collection. Citizen science emerged as a potential tool to expand capacity, and many partners expressed interest in laboratory collaborations or shared resources to help meet analytical needs.

Program Delivery Breakout Groups

The program delivery discussions focused heavily on defining success and establishing meaningful metrics. Individual participants emphasized that metrics should be chosen for their relevance, not just their ease of measurement, and that short-term metrics must clearly

connect to the 20-year vision. They proposed an evaluation framework that considers where resources are being invested, whether useful information is being collected and acted upon, and ultimately whether water quality conditions and fish health are improving. Partner capacity surfaced repeatedly as both a barrier and a metric in its own right; tracking who is trained, staffed, and ready to contribute may be more informative than counting training events. Participants also stressed that the Strategy should explicitly articulate its long-term goal: improving conditions across the Basin and making fish safer to eat. To maximize the value of the data, the program should be designed to meet regulatory data standards so that states, Tribes, cities, and other partners can use the results for permitting and policy decisions.

When discussing collaboration and how to ensure program longevity, individual participants noted that no single governance model stood out as the clear choice. They also identified a major risk: unstable and insufficient funding. They encouraged starting with shared values rather than organizational charts, drawing lessons from Chesapeake Bay and Puget Sound ecosystem recovery programs. While the Yakama Nation's proposed "Implementation Plan for a Basin-Wide Monitoring Program" generated interest in the need for a governance and partnership structure to build capacity, participants emphasized the need for broader representation across all seven states and Tribal governments. A non-profit structure had appeal for some individuals, but raised concerns about the capacity required to start a new organization, for that organization to be able to accept federal funds without being named in statute, and about conflicts of interest if federal staff were too closely involved.

Most individuals representing partner organizations indicated they could contribute in-kind support (sampling, boats, analysis) rather than direct funding. Integrating toxics monitoring into existing fish collection permits, through agencies and other organizations that collect fish, was seen as the most realistic near-term approach in the absence of dedicated funding for a Basin-wide monitoring program.

A Basin-wide programmatic Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) was widely viewed as the most powerful enabling tool for long-term success of a coordinated Basin-wide monitoring program. EPA staff clarified that a programmatic QAPP may be challenging due to needing signatures from all implementing it but recognize the goal is for a shovel-ready QAPP and are aiming for that with the QAPP framework. Participants also pointed to underutilized opportunities, such as private foundation funding and citizen science monitoring models, and expressed interest in organizing a partner-led informational event to familiarize lawmakers with the program.

Plenary: Adaptive Management, Year 1 Implementation, & Future Focus

Adaptive management was another discussion topic within some breakout groups where time allowed. Individual participants voiced agreement that adaptive management review cycles of the Strategy should be driven by capacity rather than rigid timelines, with general support for a 5–7-year cycle and a recommendation to begin synthesizing data in Year 4. They emphasized the need for a fast-track mechanism to address emerging contaminants without waiting for a full Strategy update. Individuals also distinguished between light check-ins and full revisions, noting that the level of effort should be clearly defined in advance. Several participants pointed out that outputs from existing grants (such as the EPA Columbia River Basin Restoration Program’s Toxics Reduction, Tribal Lead, and Science and Monitoring grants) should consistently feed back into Strategy refinement, and that this feedback loop needs to be strengthened. [Water Quality Exchange \(WQX\)](#) training data was identified as a near-term priority to ensure partner data can be readily incorporated into Basin-wide reporting.

Closing

The TMS Core Team is seeking additional volunteer to support upcoming follow-up focus groups in Summer/Fall of 2026, including QAPP development, indicator selection, and monitoring network design. These individuals represent state and local agencies, Tribes, universities, private industry, and federal partners.

Looking ahead, individuals expressed broad support for completing the Basin-wide Toxics Monitoring Strategy, as well as the proposed future TMS focus areas, with particularly strong enthusiasm for developing a programmatic QAPP template. Other areas of interest included the Year 1 Monitoring Plan; Status and Trends Report; [Monitoring Dashboard](#) update; Screening Values; and WQX training(s). Several additions were recommended, including a programmatic toxics reduction strategy, citizen science standards, an outcomes-based project map, and a science communication platform. The TMS and Core Team are currently unable to resource and staff all of these recommendations, but they will be revisited at the 2027 TMS workshop for further discussion. Individual TMS members also reiterated interest in a partner-organized informational event to familiarize lawmakers with the program, and establishing in-kind laboratory partnerships. Across all these areas, participants emphasized the need for a formal learning structure across the TMS and broader Working Group to ensure that outputs inform decisions rather than simply generating a series of reports.