

Community Update and Status Report
On Re-Conveying 34 Miles of Columbia River Shoreline
From the Corps of Engineers, to the Tri-Cities Community

Brad Fisher, Doc Hastings and Gary Petersen

It has been nearly four years since the three of us teamed-up to inform and build broad community support for reconveyance of roughly 34 miles of Columbia River Shoreline back to our Tri-Cities. After 69 years under Corps of Engineers control, we recognized that the primary purpose and Congressional authority for Corps continued ownership – that of flood control – is no longer valid.

A legal review funded by the community was conducted by the K&L Gates law firm. K&L Gates legal analysis provided the conclusion that the original Congressional authorities granted to the Corps in 1945 for flood control no longer have a valid purpose since six U.S. additional dams have been built upstream of the McNary dam, and three have been built in Canada since 1948. The possibility of a Columbia River flood like the flood of 1948 when there were only two dams upstream of the Tri-Cities, is therefore extremely remote.

K&L Gates recommended that the Tri-City community consider new legislation authorizing the conveyance (re-conveyance) of the river shore running through the three cities along the McNary reservoir, back to local communities. “Specific direction from Congress is needed to break the bureaucratic hold of the Army Corps so that after sixty years the Tri-Cities can be reconnected with the Columbia River,” was a K&L Gates recommendation.

Representative Dan Newhouse introduced language into the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2017 that required the Corps of Engineers to provide a complete description, and cost of acquisition, of the river shore properties running through the Tri-Cities under Corps control (both owned and easements). The Corps did provide extensive documentation to the community just a few months ago.

Re-conveyance would place these properties back under community control. It will then be up to the communities themselves to go through the public process of zoning the properties, and identifying future uses.

There have been at least five extensive and costly Tri-City river shore studies conducted since 1988. These studies/reports contain extensive recommendations and details; all with a singular recommendation that the Columbia Rivershore is the most underutilized and undermaintained property in the Tri-Cities; and improvements cannot be accomplished under Corps ownership. In addition, under the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) our community has worked diligently with the Corps through several attempts to get even small parcels of the river shore returned to the community. To date these attempts have been unsuccessful!

We believe that we have the support of every publicly elected body in the Tri-Cities – cities, counties, and ports – as well as major organizations such as Rotary clubs, and Chambers.

As you can see in the video found at: <https://www.tridec.org/columbia-river-shoreline-reconveyance/>, the Columbia river shoreline has been in a deteriorating condition for so long, and the wild vegetation growth has been so slow over 69 years, that residents seem to have simply ‘gone blind’ to how unattractive, and inaccessible, the actual river shore property has become.

To us the answer is very simple: 1) do nothing, and continue to let the Corps (which has no funding available for maintenance or improvements) allow the shoreline to continue to deteriorate even more; or 2) obtain Congressional authority to re-convey these properties back to our community!

When successful, the community itself then can take time to determine future enhancements to our parks for recreational purposes; for slowly lowering the levees to allow more visibility of the beautiful, blue, Columbia River; and where along the river limited commercial activities might be developed to offset annual maintenance operating costs to the three cities (which are in excess of \$2 million a year; with no return to cover those investments).

These steps, under local community control and decision-making, will not happen overnight; and most will likely take several decades to bring to fruition. But these cannot be accomplished under continuing Corps ownership.

We ask for your support as we move toward reconveying the 34 or more miles of Columbia Rivershore running through the Tri-Cities.

For More information, please contact:

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