

**The Columbia River Watershed:
Caring for Creation and the Common Good**

An International Pastoral Letter by the Catholic Bishops of the Region

“God saw all that had been made, and indeed it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31)

“We cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations ... delicate ecological balances are upset by the uncontrolled destruction of animal and plant life or by a reckless exploitation of natural resources. It should be pointed out that all of this, even if carried out in the name of progress and well-being, is ultimately to humankind's disadvantage.... An education in ecological responsibility is urgent: responsibility for oneself, for others, and for the earth.”

--Pope John Paul II, *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*, 1990

“We must expand our understanding of the moral responsibility of citizens to serve the common good...”

--The Catholic Bishops of the United States, *Economic Justice for All*, 1986

“The fundamental relation between humanity and nature is one of caring for creation.”

--The Catholic Bishops of the United States, *Renewing the Earth*, 1991

“We need to reexamine the ways we think and act, to affirm and support what we are presently doing that is environmentally responsible and to critique and challenge what is irresponsible and unsustainable.”

--The Catholic Bishops of Alberta, Canada, *Celebrate Life: Care for Creation*, 1998

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Caring for Creation, Community and the Columbia

The Columbia River Watershed stands as one of the most beautiful places on God's earth. Its mountains and valleys, forests and meadows, rivers and plains reflect the presence of their Creator. Its farms and fishing boats, rural communities and cities, railroads, ports and industries reveal the varied ways in which peoples of the region have worked with earth's beauty and bounty to derive their livelihood from the land and water.

The core of the 259,000 square miles of the Columbia Watershed is the 1,200 miles of the great river known as the Columbia. It begins in British Columbia in Canada, is fed in the U.S. by tributaries in Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon, and flows to the Pacific Ocean. This magnificent network of rivers -- the region's lifeblood -- is an extensive ecosystem that transcends national, state and provincial borders.

We, the Catholic bishops in the international watershed region of the United States and Canada, write this pastoral letter because we have become concerned about regional economic and ecological conditions and the conflicts over them in the watershed. We address this letter to our Catholic community and to all people of good will. We hope that we might work together to develop and implement an integrated spiritual, social and ecological vision for our watershed home, a vision that promotes justice for people and stewardship of creation.

We recognize the great contributions that our ancestors made to this region. The original native inhabitants and the early ranchers, farmers, fishers and loggers struggled against almost insurmountable odds to carve out a home in this sometimes inhospitable land. We recognize that damage to the watershed may have been caused by financial need and lack of knowledge more than by a lack of appreciation for the environment.

Our pastoral letter is not meant to criticize people's efforts to provide a suitable living for their family. We are hopeful that those involved in industry are, by and large, also concerned about the environment.

At the same time, we commend those who have recognized and responded to the environmental challenges that result from commercial and industrial enterprises. It is important for those with deeper concerns about the environment to recognize that farmers, ranchers and other landowners and workers are not their enemies. It is equally important that the latter groups seek to better understand environmental concerns. Protection of the land is a common cause promoted more effectively through active cooperation than through contentious wrangling.

We call for a thorough, humble and introspective evaluation that seeks to eliminate both economic greed that fails to respect the environment, and ecological elitism that lacks a proper regard for the legitimate rights and property of others.

The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good focuses particularly on our common responsibilities for our region. In this pastoral letter we will explore biblical and Catholic Church teachings about stewardship; the need to respect nature; and the need to recognize and promote the common good. These themes are consistent with a Christian belief that the earth is a creation of God intended to serve the needs of all creation.

Caring for Creation

The Columbia Watershed and all creation are entrusted to our loving care. As persons created in the image of God and as stewards of creation (Genesis 1-2), we are challenged to both use and respect created things. The watershed is ultimately God's; human beings are entrusted with responsibility for it, concern for its species and ecology, and regulation of its competitive and complementary uses.

The watershed, seen through eyes alive with faith, can be a revelation of God's presence, an occasion of grace and blessing. There are many signs of the presence of God in this book of nature, signs that complement the understandings of God revealed in the pages of the Bible, both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

Caring for Community

People are created in the image and likeness of God and are called to be neighbors to one another. We are created as social beings who must exercise a certain responsibility toward our neighbors. Each is responsible, in part, for promoting the good of the entire human community and the good of our common home.

Caring for our Common Home

The watershed is the common home and habitat of God's creatures, a source of human livelihood, and a setting for human community. The commons belongs to everyone, and yet belongs to no one. We hold this land in trust for our present use, for future generations, and ultimately for God, from whom all good things come. It is intended by God to be used for the well-being of all its human inhabitants, present and future.

The common good demands a proper respect for the land, the air and the water to assure that when we have passed through this land it remains habitable and productive for those who come after us.

The recognition of the presence and plan of God challenges us to work to understand better the ecosystems of our region and to seek to utilize its goods justly while respecting the value of all its creatures.

Commitment to Creation and the Common Good

The preservation of the Columbia Watershed's beauty and benefits requires us to enter into a gradual process of conversion and change. Our goal is to review very broadly the present situation of the watershed; to reflect on our common regional history; to imagine a viable, sustainable future for the watershed; and to seek ways to realize our vision.

Therefore, we offer four reflections, entitled: "The Rivers of our Moment," "The Rivers through our Memory," "The Rivers in our Vision," and "The Rivers as our Responsibility." We suggest that people will have to change some current practices to transform the watershed into an economically and ecologically sustainable place.

A Project in Process

As Catholic bishops, we offer a pastoral reflection spoken with a voice of faith and compassion, offering insights drawn from the teachings of Jesus Christ and from the Christian tradition through the ages, particularly the developing Catholic social ethical thought of the past century. We teach with Pope John Paul II that "Christians, in particular, realize that their responsibility within creation and their duty toward nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith." (*The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*, hereafter EC, § 15)

We hope that the values we express, the issues we raise, and the insights we offer will serve as a catalyst for further discussion toward the resolution of the complex issues of the Columbia River Watershed. We invite people to explore with us the implications of the Christian idea of human stewardship of creation, and to effect a spiritual, social and ecological transformation of the watershed.

I. The Rivers of Our Moment

When people travel in the Columbia River Watershed they see areas of pristine beauty, where the handiwork of God is hardly touched by human interventions. They see areas of ordered beauty, where people have worked well with the land and water in their care. And they see areas of blight, where people have disregarded their responsibilities to their Creator, their community and their environment.

Contradictions in human behavior are evident throughout the region. There are beautiful farms and deteriorated riverbanks; degraded forests and landscaped community parks; chemical and radioactive wastes seeping into the rivers; and conscientious children cleaning streambeds. In areas of Canada, extremes in river levels that prevent the existence of both natural ecologies and human enterprises are caused by dams built primarily to meet U.S. needs for energy and at times for flood control. In both countries, we share the watershed with members of the animal kingdom. We are stewards of this ecosystem with its diversity of life. What is the current condition of our region?

Throughout the past century industrial development provided needed goods and jobs in the watershed and beyond. Sometimes this development has resulted in harm for the watershed. Dams provide energy, and aluminum plants provide airplane parts. But the construction and use of these human structures have been accompanied by the loss of fishing-related enterprises. U.S. dams provide irrigation, but dams north of the border have resulted in flooded Canadian lands and communities, depriving families of their homes, farms and businesses. Modern technology has provided better living, but has also produced chemical and radioactive waste storage sites that pose serious threats for the area.

The endangerment and possible extinction of the area's animal and fish species are of notable concern in our day. The specific causes of, and remedies for, salmon endangerment and extinction are hotly debated in the region.

Indigenous peoples of the watershed -- called First Nations in Canada and Native Americans in the United States -- have unique cultures and insights. But native peoples have been targets of racism, and experience economic hardships. The terms of treaties made with them, such as the 1855 treaty with the Yakamas in the United States, often have not been respected. Indigenous peoples in the region seek the freedom to exercise fishing and water rights once thought to be guaranteed by treaties.

Agriculture is a valuable contributor to community life and to the economic well-being in our region. Some operations currently are partially dependent on irrigation water and energy supplied by dams. Owner-operated family farms are on the decline, with consequent impacts on rural businesses, schools and communities. Agricultural chemicals are used to control pests and increase profits, but these can also be sources of pollution of land and water. Unmanaged entry of livestock into rivers can damage riverbank habitat and harm aquatic life. Responsibly run family farms, and responsibly managed corporate agribusiness operations, are important in our region as sources of food and as stabilizing economic influences. Their well-being is vital to the economic life of the watershed.

Mining has provided jobs and funded schools, but its residues sometimes leave the land and waters tainted. In the watershed, one finds examples of huge cleanup sites as well as environmentally dangerous working conditions. By contrast, there are also

industrial operations that stand as models of respect for people's health and which exemplify a proper stewardship of the watershed.

Forestry has provided needed lumber for homes and industry, and jobs for loggers, mill workers, truckers, plant managers and support staff. In some places, timber harvesting and road construction harm local areas by causing increased runoff and sedimentation. Exemplary forest stewards are cognizant of the impact of their industry on the surrounding land and rivers, as well as on the workers and communities where their business is located.

Working people are concerned about finding or keeping employment in the watershed. Land-related occupations such as farming, fishing, forestry and shipping are directly linked to the flowing waters of the river network. Many other jobs are tied to them as well. The economy is dependent on the health of the regional ecosystem. There are limited land and water resources, despite seeming abundance, especially in arid areas. Political, business, labor and religious leaders are striving collaboratively, in some areas, to integrate the needs of communities, workers and the environment.

Consolidation of ownership of land and commercial enterprises occurs in the region. People are seeking clear ethical guidelines and standards to promote just property distributions, appropriate access to land and water, and an equitable sharing of regional goods.

Recreational uses of the land provide needed rest and recuperation for people. Environmental impacts of various types of recreational pursuits are being assessed. People need places for quiet reflection, meditation, appreciation of God's creation, relaxed fishing and rigorous exercise. Other creatures need habitat for shelter and reproduction.

We are blessed in the diversity of our peoples and of our land. A renewed appreciation for both is contributing to increased community well-being and ecological health in our region.

Signs of Hope

We see signs of hope amid the problems of the watershed. Many people live responsibly from, and work with, the gifts and goods of the Columbia and its tributaries. Many understand that their own or others' actions have caused harm. They are striving to guide human activities and shape corporate operations and community consciousness with the ethics of stewardship of creation.

We see signs of hope in the scientific studies of agricultural, fishing, transportation and energy needs. Renewed hope is evident in a new consciousness among government officials and business entrepreneurs about the impact of past abuses of the rivers' environment and their expressed intentions to avoid similar abuses in the future. There is hope in the various proposals for carrying out a responsible cleanup of the devastation wrought by various operations of the past. Various conservation and species-strengthening measures bode well for the future.

Efforts to use profits from U.S. dam operations to compensate Canadian communities most heavily impacted are a sign of a stronger sense of justice. The compassionate and constructive exchange of ideas by people of diverse and sometimes competitive interests is more and more common. Greater community involvement, by

which local citizens reflect on local issues and seek to address them, shows an appropriate concern and responsibility for the common good.

Spiritual and Social Consciousness

Our awareness of the presence of God, who is lovingly concerned about creation, and our openness to God's grace enlightening and strengthening us, enable us to confront the conditions that concern us, and to affirm and commend the signs of hope that we see.

One of the key concepts that applies to our entire discussion is simply respect. Industry must respect people and nature and take particular care to be cognizant of its impact on the common good. People must exercise a basic respect for one another, for God, for other creatures and for the environment. Individuals also need to respect the rights of others, including those engaged in agriculture, mining, forestry and the like.

We must become increasingly aware of the needs of people, our neighbors; of the sanctity of life, from conception to natural death; and of the integrated ecosystem whose benefits and complexities we share. We are called to relate to people as neighbors and to our shared place as our common home. We recognize our responsibility for this place, a sign of God's creative power that is blessed by God's presence. We are responsible to God and to the community and we are responsible for the creation around us.

II. The Rivers through Our Memory

The second step in spiritual, social and ecological transformation is to reflect on the waters of our memory as they are expressed in regional and religious traditions. The history of the Columbia Watershed is described in people's written and oral stories, and is evident in geological formations and biological diversity.

Regional Traditions

In the watershed, the natural physical laws instilled in creation by God control the tectonic plate collisions, floods, glaciers and earthquakes that shape the land and waters. Migrations of animals and people have given new forms to the land, and brought about new relationships among creatures and between creatures and the earth.

Human communities entering the watershed adapted to, or altered, natural settings. Along the Columbia River, the first peoples in the region (even though they were sometimes in conflict with each other over village, hunting or fishing sites) generally adapted themselves to Che Wana, the Great River. They knew a continuous river, undivided by political boundaries. They fished for salmon, hunted wild game and gathered roots and berries to sustain themselves.

Native religions taught respect for the ways of nature, personified as a nurturing mother for all creatures. They saw the salmon as food from this mother, and the river as the source of their life and the life of the fish. They adapted themselves to the river and to the cycles of the seasons. Among the Wanapum, the River People, some elders were set apart as dreamers and healers, respected for their visions and healing powers.

Europeans and Euro-Americans made their way west beginning in the 16th century. An American explorer, Captain Robert Gray, renamed the great river "Columbia" in 1792. Trappers and traders came to provide the basis for a United States claim to the river region and to establish new forms of commerce in the area. After the

trapping of beaver and other fur-bearing animals ceased to be profitable, new immigrants entered the region, established homesteads and towns, and turned to agriculture and to salmon as sources of food and livelihood.

Unregulated fishing and cannery industries seriously depleted salmon supplies. The River People were forced to live a modified way of life on severely diminished lands, with less abundant salmon runs. Eventually, dams on the Columbia-Snake river system, and open sea fishing operations in the Pacific Ocean had further impacts on the species. In 1957, the opening up of the Dalles Dam destroyed Celilo Falls, a tremendously important Native American fishing area.

Besides these human interventions, climatic changes could impact salmon populations. Regional and global warming, which alters water temperatures and salmon predators' habits, may also accelerate declines in salmon populations.

Human communities in the watershed have oral and written memories of its ongoing history. In this community memory there are elements of a community conscience, a moral sense of appropriate social interaction developed over time and adapted to and lived in each new era. Responsible community memories recall not only moments of achievement, but also moments of social insensitivity.

Regional people in the United States have community myths about the West -- myths about rugged individualism; absolute ownership "rights"; a narrow economic way of valuing places, things and even people; and a myth that the West was "won" without government assistance. Such myths sometimes make it difficult for people to understand the importance of ecosystems, and the benefits of government policies to conserve natural goods for the whole community.

Religious Traditions

Peoples of the rivers have a religious memory. In the Catholic tradition, that memory includes biblical and Church teachings about human responsibilities for creation.

God, who alone can create, invites people to participate in divine creativity. Thus, humans have a unique role. In the physical universe, they alone are consciously able to be caretakers of creation. In the physical order, only humans, with the abilities granted to them, can understand creatures soaring in the heights or swimming in the depths, and can come to know the laws of biology, chemistry and physics that influence creation. They are called to use these understandings to describe, celebrate, develop and care for creation. They are created in the image and likeness of God and are commissioned as stewards of God's created and beautiful universe.

Created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), humans are to recognize that all of God's works and creatures, as they emerge from God's creative loving power, are "very good" (Genesis 1:31). God cares for these creatures.

At the end of the Genesis flood story, God makes a covenant, whose sign is the rainbow, with "every living creature" and with "the earth" (Genesis 9:12-13). Wisdom says of God: "You love all things that are ... your imperishable spirit is in all things!" (Wisdom 11:24; 12:1). Job reveals God's providence for all creatures (Job 38-41). In the Psalms the poet calls upon all creation to "praise the Lord" (Psalm 148).

The author of Sirach exclaims: "How beautiful are all God's works! Even to the spark and fleeting vision! The universe lives and abides forever; to meet each need, each creature is preserved. All of them differ, one from another, yet none of them has [God]

made in vain, for each in turn, as it comes, is good; can one ever see enough of their splendor?" (Sirach 42:23-25).

In the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus notes that God cares for the birds of the air and the flowers of the fields as well as for people (Luke 12:24-28). In the Letter to the Colossians we are taught that God was pleased through Christ "to reconcile all things ... whether those on earth or those in heaven" (Colossians 1:20). People are called to live in God's presence solicitous of the wondrous works of God: the earth and the earth's inhabitants.

Stewardship is the traditional Christian expression of the role of people in relation to creation. Stewards, as caretakers for the things of God, are called to use wisely and distribute justly the goods of God's earth to meet the needs of God's children. They are to care for the earth as their home and as a beautiful revelation of the creativity, goodness and love of God. Creation is a "book of nature" in whose living pages people can see signs of the Spirit of God present in the universe, yet separate from it.

The individual members of the human family are called to respect both creation and Creator and are responsible for that part of the earth entrusted to their stewardship, whether by property rights or other legal or managerial responsibility. They are to take care of the earth out of respect for the Creator who loves all creatures, and out of a charity that calls us to love our neighbor.

Our unique role in creation as God's stewards carries with it a serious responsibility for service to God and to creation. As Jesus teaches us, when we are given positions of responsibility, we are called to serve and not to be served by those in our care; we are not to "lord it over them" (See Matthew 20:25-28.) We neither worship creation nor are worshiped by creation; we relate to creation as its stewards, with the unique responsibilities that God has entrusted to us.

Creation provides the opportunity for spiritual contemplation because it is from God and reveals God. The natural world of creation is not itself to be worshiped. It is not an autonomous being, but a revelation of the wondrous power and love of its Creator. In the created universe we may perceive the brush strokes of a loving God.

The bishops of the United States have voiced this sentiment in *Renewing the Earth*, declaring that the Christian vision of the universe -- "a world that discloses the Creator's presence by visible and tangible signs -- can contribute to making the earth a home for the human family once again." And in eloquent words the bishops of Alberta, Canada, in their statement: *Celebrate Life: Care for Creation*, teach that "the abundance and beauty of God's creation reveal to us something of the generosity of the Creator. God is present and speaks in the dynamic life forces of our universe and planet as well as in our own lives. Respect for life needs to include all creation."

Each portion of creation can be sign and revelation for the person of faith, a moment of grace revealing God's presence to us. Our minds and spirits can catch glimpses of God in moments of solitude, reflection and grace in God's wondrous creation.

The Columbia and the Common Good

As the whole universe can be a source of blessing or revelation of God, so also the commons of a local place can be revelatory. In a setting such as the Columbia River Watershed, the signs of God's creativity and presence are abundant. The startling beauty

of a snowcapped mountain or a colorful sunset, a river valley or a starlit night, the sight of a well-kept farm integrated with its surroundings or the free flight of a bird -- all point beyond themselves to the Creator of the universe. In words taken from the Book of Wisdom in the Hebrew Scriptures: "From the greatness and the beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen"(Wisdom 13:5).

Signs of God's presence are evident in all of creation. When we are open to the Spirit of God we may experience the loving presence of God among us.

In biblical teachings and the Christian tradition the earth is intended by God to provide for the needs of peoples as they live in complex and diverse ecosystems. The Bible teaches that people should distribute property and goods justly. In the book of the Acts of the Apostles in the Christian Scriptures, a description of an early Christian community in Jerusalem states that the members "had all things in common" (Acts 2:44) so that the needs of all might be met.

The documents of the Second Vatican Council likewise reference the common good: "The state has the duty to prevent anyone from abusing his private property to the detriment of the common good. By its nature private property has a social dimension which is based on the law of common destination of earthly goods" (*The Church in the Modern World*, § 71, 1965).

Our present Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, declared that "private property, in fact, is under a 'social mortgage,' which means that it has an intrinsically social function, based upon and justified precisely by the principle of the universal destination of goods" (*On Social Concern*, § 42).

Living Water

The Bible and our Christian tradition teach us about the benefits of water, which is seen both literally and figuratively as a giver of life. A key phrase used in these sources of our spirituality is "living water." In the Hebrew Scriptures, living water meant water that is flowing free and pure; it is contrasted with water from wells or cisterns, which tended to be stagnant and undesirable.

In the Christian Scriptures, Jesus appropriated the term "living water" to refer to himself as the source of genuine spiritual life. He applied this symbol to himself because he knew that people depend on water for their survival as individuals and as communities; that water slakes thirst and quenches fields and livestock as well as wild creatures. Water, used in religious ceremonies, gives life to our spirits, too. It is the element used to symbolize spiritual cleansing and a sign of God's grace conferred upon us.

Water was present at significant actual and symbolic moments of God's revelation to humanity. The prophets of old envisioned a place where spiritual waters and earthly waters flowed together, with the earthly waters a symbol of the spiritual. Isaiah proclaimed, "I will pour out water upon the thirsty ground, and streams upon the dry land; I will pour out my spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing upon your descendants" (44:3), and "All you who are thirsty, come to the water!" (55:1). And Ezekiel (47:1-12) saw water flowing from beneath the temple and becoming a river along whose banks trees grew abundantly. He added that "Wherever the river flows, every sort of living creature that can multiply shall

live, and there shall be abundant fish, for wherever this water comes the sea shall be made fresh." Ezekiel's vision is recalled later by the seer of Revelation (1-2).

Jesus was baptized by John in the flowing waters of the Jordan River (Mark 1:9). At the temple, Jesus exclaimed: "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says, 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him.' (John 7:37-38). Jesus told the Samaritan woman that he gives "living water" to those who ask (John 4:4-15). Water flowing from Jesus' side at his crucifixion is richly symbolic; by his death he offers eternal life to all (John 19:31-37). Jesus told his followers to make disciples of all nations, "baptizing them" with water (Matthew 28:18-20). The living water offered by Jesus for our spirit and the living water in God's creation for our body are both life-giving waters -- one natural, the other supernatural.

The Columbia River and its tributaries are intended by God to be living water: bountiful and healthy providers for the common good. The water itself is to be a clear sign of the Creator's presence.

Church Teachings about the Land

In the Catholic tradition, for more than a century, church leaders have developed teachings on social justice. Social justice for people and proper respect for the earth are now seen as related issues. The Catholic bishops of the Midwest state that "the way in which we relate to the land will affect the extent to which the land will continue to provide our sustenance and livelihood" (from *Strangers and Guests*); and the Catholic bishops of the United States teach that "the fundamental relation between humanity and nature is one of caring for creation" (*Renewing the Earth*).

Similarly, Pope John Paul II instructs us that "[There should be a priority of] the preservation of the environment over uncontrolled industrial expansion" (Canada, 1984), and that "the Bible speaks again and again of the goodness and beauty of creation.... The ecological crisis is a moral issue" (*The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*, 1990, § 14, 15).

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops took up these themes, calling for respect for regional ecologies. These Church teachings point to the need to work for justice for people, and proper stewardship of the earth's goods.

In the United States, Canada, and globally, a majority of the earth's goods are controlled by a minority of individuals. While many people lack life's basic necessities, others have more than an excess for a lifetime. This gross imbalance is harmful to humanity and, to the extent that singular individuals have consumed more than a reasonable share of earth's resources, they have harmed creation. Good stewards of creation use what they need and recognize that others, both those presently living and future generations, have a right to enjoy the fruits of the earth as well.

As people have become more absorbed by material things and less conscious of spiritual and social relationships, consumerism has replaced compassion, and exploitation of the earth has replaced stewardship. There is a need for a spiritual conversion to a better and deeper sense of stewardship for God's creation and responsibility for our communities. This global reality touches our watershed, and it is important to take stock of it and envision a transformed future for our region.

III. The Rivers in Our Vision

We live in a literal watershed and are simultaneously at a figurative watershed moment, a time of making important decisions that will impact, into an unforeseeable future, this place we call home and habitat. It is now important to envision how we can rise to meet our responsibility to care for the waters in the present, and for the future.

In the third step of spiritual, social and ecological transformation, we imagine together what we would like the watershed to be. This is an idealized dream and we recognize that, as such, it is not immediately practicable. Nevertheless, in order to preserve our watershed we must posit a hope and a dream and strive to build toward that best possible world.

We must begin with the Author of creation and ask: How will we be images of God and care for that part of creation entrusted to us? How can we ensure that a rich sense of God's presence prevails? How can we assure that spiritual living waters, as well as clear and pure literal living waters, continue to flow in our region?

As we ponder these questions, we can imagine diverse and contradictory possibilities for the watershed of the future. With a hopeful heart we can envision economic stability, ecological integrity and regional sustainability. This can be a reality if we are good stewards of God's earth.

With sadness we can also envision ecological disaster and economic depression. This too can be a reality if we are not conscious of, and responsive to, our need to be good and faithful stewards.

In our watershed vision we choose to look with hope at what the watershed can be in the years and decades to come.

Spiritual Vision

In our hope-filled, spiritual vision, we see communities of faith exercising responsibility for the region. The biblical tradition states that ecological harm is caused by human sinfulness. In the Hebrew Scriptures, Hosea (4:3) and Leviticus (26:16-22) declare that the people's sins harm the earth. In the Christian Scriptures, Paul declares in the Letter to the Romans (8:22) that all creation, suffering from the effects of human sinfulness, groans for salvation.

In the present time, we envision individuals and communities honestly evaluating their conduct and objectively viewing its consequences to see how that conduct impacts the environment. This examination of conscience requires grace and honesty, integrity and humility, and it is an examination that each must make of his or her own actions. No one who has so much as irresponsibly disposed of a gum wrapper or an aluminum can is exempt from such an examination.

When every man, woman and child acknowledges individual responsibility for the well-being of the watershed, then the vision of a new earth described in Revelation 21-22 can come to pass. There, John relates that he saw living waters flowing beneath and nurturing a tree of life that provides fruit for food and leaves for medicine, for all peoples.

We envision a place where all peoples are treated justly and authentic stewardship is the norm. In this hope-filled vision, every man, woman and child acknowledges individual responsibility for the common good and the good of the commons as well as a responsibility toward their neighbors, resulting in a place of genuine peace and justice.

In that place, the place of our hopes and dreams, people will manifest a fidelity to their calling to be images of God and caretakers of God's creation. There people will recognize the inherent value of creation and the dignity of all living beings as creatures of God. There they will work for the well-being of generations yet to come. There they will be ready to make sacrifices for the common good. In that place, the place of our hopes and dreams, there will be genuine respect for life, especially human life, and a proper regard for the Creator.

Social Vision

In our hope-filled social vision for the watershed we see working people engaged in productive employment at living wages, and renewed communities integrated with their environment. In that hope-filled vision we see workers providing for their own needs and, in a spirit of sacrifice and compassion, helping to provide for the needs of the elderly, the young, the unemployed and underemployed, and the poor. There regional goods are distributed justly to meet regional needs, and local economies prosper.

Community consciousness is ever aware of, and community conscience provides for, the needs of the poor, weak and vulnerable, the "least of the brethren" loved by Jesus (Matthew 25:31-46). The peoples of the region, though in distinct local communities, are envisioned as a unit connected by the web of waters and integrated as one watershed community.

Ecological Vision

In our idealized ecological vision we see the Columbia Watershed community inhabiting an environment of clean land, clear water, and pure air. In that vision the ecology is altered only by the earth's natural colorations, seasonal variations, and people's responsible use of the earth's goods.

In the vision, the peoples of the region are conscious of their stewardship responsibilities. They conserve regional goods carefully. They work in factories that recycle resources, efficiently utilize inputs, have little or no waste materials that need disposition except to be recycled into other goods, and release clean emissions and cleaned effluents into the environment. They work to develop an international and intergenerational consciousness of, and respect for, the needs of the entire watershed -- its people, animals, birds, fish and plants.

In the vision, forests are managed wisely and trees and associated vegetation of varied ages and diverse types flourish. Timber harvesting is done responsibly, with minimal disturbance to the land and water and, along with lumber mills and other value-added enterprises, provides jobs. Paper manufacturers use production processes respectful of water quality and the health of the inhabitants -- human and animal -- of the watershed.

Here the vision of the prophet Isaiah is partially fulfilled: "The wolf lives with the lamb, the panther lies down with the kid, calf and lion cub feed together with a little child to lead them" (Isaiah 11:6).

In the vision any contention between industry and environment is discussed maturely, openly and calmly recognizing that the common goal is the well-being of the entire community of life and the promotion of the common good.

In the vision, fish populations are abundant, responding to human ingenuity and mutual cooperation. Commercial, recreational and private fishers continue to enjoy opportunities for providing a family meal, family livelihood or a family outing. People realize the interconnectedness of rivers and ocean, and understand their individual and community responsibilities to exercise proper stewardship for both. Negative impacts on fish populations from irresponsible commercial and industrial operations are no longer seen.

In agricultural operations, we envision that farms are carefully integrated into, and respectful of, their environment. Where feasible, farmers produce organic crops that safeguard water quality and the health of their families, consumers, livestock and local wildlife. Water is carefully conserved through innovative irrigation techniques. Energy is used sparingly and wind farms provide clean energy for the community and a supplemental income to traditional crops. Farmers' markets enable farm families to sell their produce directly to consumers.

Once again we see the vision of Isaiah as owner-operated family and cooperative farms complement larger agribusiness operations and together they produce abundant food for the region and the world, stimulate rural economies, and stabilize rural communities.

The vision for the future of the watershed extends to mine owners and managers who are seen as operating with a consciousness of their responsibility to care for creation and respect local community needs. Their acknowledgement of the need to promote the common good prompts them to assure that mine workers have good salaries and safe working conditions. They assure that mining processes do not endanger waters and aquatic life or pollute the air or land.

Individuals take stock of what metals they genuinely need for a healthy life, artistic enhancement and industrial use, and create a market where metals superfluous to human needs have no market and thus are not mined. In the vision, leaders in the mining industry acknowledge the need to reclaim mined lands and the neighboring waters for the benefit of local communities.

Visions, hopes and dreams are the blueprints for the future. The dreams enunciated above are a real challenge to present and future regional policies and practices. The linking of vision and practice must occur in specific historical projects. Collaborative efforts among individuals and communities must occur to make economic justice and ecological prudence a reality.

Convictions that Underscore the Need to Care for the Earth

In the presentation of our spiritual, social, and ecological visions for the Columbia River Watershed and, indeed, for other regions of the earth entrusted to us, we manifest certain underlying convictions. These are:

- * God is the Creator of the universe and maintains its existence through an ongoing creative will.
- * God's presence is discernible in all creation.
- * God has blessed and called "very good" all that is created.
- * God loves the community of life.
- * God's creatures share a common home.
- * God entrusts the earth to human care. People are stewards of God's world.

* God intends the earth's goods to be equitably shared.

IV. The Rivers as Our Responsibility

People throughout the Columbia Watershed seek good jobs, vibrant communities, a fair share of the earth's goods, and clean air, land and water. When they view the watershed with the eyes of faith, they recognize their responsibility to God to promote and protect these goods.

In this fourth step of the spiritual, social and ecological transformation of the watershed, we must act as a regional community to begin to actualize our ideals and vision. As in all areas of our lives, we need to fulfill our responsibilities to God, to creation and to each other in concrete, definable actions.

Community consciousness of present difficulties in the watershed can serve as the basis for improving local ecologies and economies. Local community experts need to work with balanced, reflective advisors to bring about greater ecological health and renewed economic strength.

We proposed above seven "Convictions that Underscore the Need to Care for the Earth." What are some of the ways these convictions may be acted upon? We offer the following "considerations" for community projects to renew the watershed.

Considerations for Community Caretaking

1. Consider the Common Good

In the concept of the common good, community and individual *needs* take priority over private *wants*. The right to own and use private property is not seen as an absolute individual right; this right must be exercised responsibly for the benefit of the owner and the community as a whole. Property must be used wisely as a trust from God to the civil owner. Public property use should reflect its status as a community benefit to be conserved as a good both in itself and for what it can provide to meet human needs.

The first and primary good to be preserved is the good of the individual person. Human life is sacred and the good of the community demands respect for that life. Environmental degradation can be particularly harmful to the unborn, the young and the elderly. The life in the womb is precious. The life of the elderly person is precious. The life of the disabled person is precious. The life of the seriously infirm person is precious. We call upon all men and women of good will to be good stewards of the human lives entrusted to them and to work diligently and respectfully to preserve this greatest of resources.

We urge all private property owners and all managers of public lands to be good stewards of God's land, to restore and conserve that land, and to promote human communities integrated with regional ecosystems.

2. Conserve the Watershed as a Common Good

The Columbia River Watershed is home to people and to a variety of other creatures. This shared habitat needs to be nurtured and carefully conserved if all its inhabitants are to live in an integrated and interrelated manner. Besides being a regional

shared space, the watershed provides food and other necessities, fostering the common good of all people who dwell here.

We urge people to be conscious of, and respectful toward, the watershed as our common home and as the provider of necessities for the good of the whole ecosystem. We encourage people to recall their responsibilities to God to be good stewards of creation, so that it might meet the needs of all its inhabitants, present and future; foster appreciation of God's creativity; and be a place of graced encounters with the presence of God.

3. Conserve and Protect Species of Wildlife

The presence and health of wildlife is in many ways a sign of the health of our ecosystems, of the well-being of the people and communities dependent on the ecosystems for their livelihood, and of our respect for God's creatures and creation. The presence and health of salmon and other species of fish in the Columbia-Snake system, in particular, is a sign of the health of the entire region.

Some urge breaching the four dams on the lower Snake River in order to improve the water environment for fish. Others advocate keeping the dams for energy and agricultural uses, and suggest other means of assuring the survival of fish and fish-related industries. The situation is very complex and unilateral answers appear to be inadequate.

Those involved in the debate and decisions must consider scientific studies, community needs and ecological impacts in making decisions which are ultimately political but which must stem from a spiritual and ethical base.

We urge that serious discussions and serious scientific research continue in order to assure the presence of a habitat suitable for the native fish of the region. Those discussions must always maintain a proper respect for God's creatures and a prudent consideration of the common good of the people of the area.

4. Respect the Dignity and Traditions of the Region's Indigenous Peoples

The indigenous peoples have a wealth of spirituality, culture and traditions that call forth a need for appropriate respect and preservation. We are brothers and sisters in God's creation and we are grateful to the First Nations and the Native Americans for the lessons they teach about respect for nature. We apologize for cultural insensitivities and lack of justice, both past and present.

Today, we extend an offer of peace and friendship to native peoples of our region. We pledge to work with them to seek equitable resolutions of conflicts over treaty rights, to work with them to enhance their engagement with other cultures, to foster their economic development and to participate with them to promote care for creation. We call upon the members of our parish communities, government officials, those with economic interests and the general public to join in these efforts.

5. Promote Justice for the Poor, Linking Economic Justice and Environmental Justice

The poor suffer more than other segments of the population from job loss, low wages, poor working conditions and environmental degradation. The Church, in the spirit of Christ, exercises a preferential, but not exclusive, option for the poor; that is, we are

called as a people to help them acquire justice, respect, and an inherent sense of dignity, and to participate in transforming economic and political structures to create a just society and a sustainable environment.

We urge the public and private sectors to work with the poor to secure employment at a living wage and in safe working conditions; decent and affordable housing; essential health insurance; educational opportunities; and a healthful environment. We urge the poor to become actively engaged in these efforts, and to explore cooperative enterprises in which they would be owners, managers, and workers and consequently share equitably in the distribution of profits and in the responsible care of God's creation.

6. Promote Community Resolution of Economic and Ecological Issues

Local community members are often most knowledgeable about local ecosystem dynamics. Such citizens are best able, sometimes with necessary technical assistance, to initiate community-based and community-oriented ecologically sustainable economic development, and to suggest areas of individual and community sacrifices to conserve resources for the common good. In those instances where serious damage has already been done to a local ecology we urge individual citizens, local governments, federal government agencies, educational institutions, local businesses, community organizations and parish communities to work together, cooperatively and patiently, in searching out appropriate solutions.

7. Promote Social and Ecological Responsibility among Reductive and Reproductive Enterprises

Reductive industries extract from the earth goods that are not renewable, such as metals and petroleum. Reproductive industries harvest from earth's bounty renewable goods such as timber and agricultural products. People living and working in areas in which these enterprises operate have a right to a clean and healthful environment.

Mining provides needed mineral resources and the jobs that produce them. We applaud the conscientious mine owners and operators who have used scientific data and economic projections to construct and operate mines that support working people and their communities while safeguarding ecosystem health. We thank mine workers who have, at times, risked their lives to benefit others: their families, their church and their communities. We urge mine owners and operators to be conscious of their responsibilities to local communities, downstream communities, and the environment in general when siting or operating mines built to meet human needs.

We commend timber industry owners and workers who provide lumber for people's needs, and engage in long-term sustainable timber practices that respect diverse wildlife habitat needs and the overall health of local ecosystems. We encourage timber interests, government agencies, and local communities jointly to evaluate the social and environmental impacts of present and proposed forestry practices and harvest allowances. We urge that the costs of U.S. logging operations be borne by the profiting private enterprises (in a way similar to Canadian policies) and not externalized to the taxpayers; and we encourage consideration of the needs of rural communities when environmental conservation is implemented.

Agriculture is vital for food provision in the watershed and beyond. People engaged in renewable operations on farms, orchards, vineyards, and ranches work hard to provide the necessities of life for themselves and others. We applaud especially family agricultural operations that are integrated with local ecologies and interrelated with local communities.

We urge that government and banking policies and laws encourage family agriculture, including both private and cooperative enterprises, in the Columbia Watershed. We suggest that low-interest agricultural loans be linked to land, water and energy conservation practices and, as far as possible, to organic production techniques. We urge the implementation of economic policies designed to enable farmers to cope with the vagaries of weather and of national and international market demands.

8. Conserve Energy and Establish Environmentally Integrated Alternative Energy Sources

Energy conservation consciousness has increased in the watershed. Conservation practices by individuals and businesses, including diminished power use, the installation of insulation, and subsidized weatherization of the homes of low-income families, will certainly assist regional energy providers to continue to meet projected needs. Additional creative energy-saving initiatives are necessary, and new sources of energy need to be developed to supplement or, if ecologically or economically necessary, to supplant current systems. Solar power and wind power systems, for example, show promise of being efficient and low-cost electrical power sources if they are mass-produced and if government subsidies for other power sources are taken into account in parts of the watershed.

9. Respect Ethnic and Racial Cultures, Citizens and Communities

Our region is blessed with peoples of diverse cultures who, as individual citizens and cohesive communities, enrich the social fabric of our lives while contributing their labor to promote societal well-being. We are particularly concerned about the situation of Hispanic workers who sometimes receive low wages, endure unhealthy working conditions, and suffer discrimination. We need to celebrate the contributions of all the diverse peoples of the Columbia Watershed, and to explore joint projects for economic justice and ecological conservation.

We call upon the members of churches, in particular, and in a special way the members of Catholic parishes, to reach out to those who are of different races, ethnic groups and cultures to promote mutual understanding and cohesive communities. We expect these churches to be a leaven in the broader society, teaching by their example a respect for others that will extend into neighborhoods and communities.

10. Integrate Transportation and Recreation Needs with Sustainable Ecosystem Requirements

Reliable transportation utilizing airports, highways, waterways and railways is essential to the river region. Careful planning can ensure that transportation-related structures and space will meet regional needs without encouraging the sprawl and checkerboard development that can consume energy resources and weaken cohesive communities.

We urge rural and urban planners to determine carefully commercial, industrial, and individual transportation needs, to meet them with improved public transportation and enhanced private transportation, and to integrate them carefully into local ecologies.

People need recreation to rest from their labor and rejuvenate their spirit. Some people prefer pristine areas where they can enjoy God's creation with limited human intervention, while others prefer developed areas where they can responsibly utilize recreational means developed by human ingenuity.

People should keep in mind that recreation should not become more valuable than work, and that it is more than "fun." Recreation has a primary spiritual sense; it is an opportunity to encounter God. Our souls are restless, St. Augustine says, until we find God. In the watershed commons we can find God by leaning on what God has created in order to pass on to God for refreshment and true strength. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "the aesthetic value of creation cannot be overlooked. Our very contact with nature has a deep restorative power; contemplation of its magnificence imparts peace and serenity" (EC, § 14).

We urge that recreational uses of public lands be permitted in designated areas and in such a way that more intrusive motorized means of recreation be limited, in order to allow reflective people a restorative contact with the presence of God in pristine creation.

These considerations complement each other and exemplify the observations of Pope John Paul II that "the earth is ultimately a common heritage, the fruits of which are for the benefit of all" (EC, § 8); "the proper ecological balance will not be found without directly addressing the structural forms of poverty" (EC, § 11); and "the right to a safe environment is ever more insistently presented today as a right that must be included in an updated Charter of Human Rights" (EC, § 9).

If these projects succeed, the regional economy will be substantially enhanced, the regional ecosystem will be able to provide for the well-being of the community of living creatures, and regional employment and community viability will be improved.

Conclusion: Living Waters in the Columbia Watershed

As we study watershed land, air and water, we become aware of other members of the biotic community and the traditions and insights of regional peoples of the land. We come to recognize more fully the interrelatedness of life and the relationship of different lives to the environment in which they dwell. We come to know more than before and we recognize that we have much more to learn. Hopefully, after this reflection, we are a bit more aware of the sometimes delicate relationship we have with other people and of the responsibility we have for the other creatures of God in the watershed.

In the watershed of the future, we hope to see the best of the watershed of the past: living waters of God's creation flowing from meadows and mountains to the ocean while providing for the needs of God's creatures along the way. We ask all people of good will to imagine what they would like the watershed to be like in ten, fifty or one hundred years, and to work conscientiously to make that image a reality.

We hope and pray that the issuance of this letter will be beneficial for the Columbia Watershed. We hope and pray that it will contribute to a deeper respect for the

dignity of the human person. We hope that it will be a source of encouragement to people who care deeply for God's creation. We pray that people will be more reverentially grateful for the goods that the watershed provides and respect and assist those who depend on those goods for their livelihood. We ask that people use the watershed resources responsibly to promote the human community and the well-being of all people.

The reign of God proclaimed by Jesus is present and yet to come. Signs of its presence are evident in people's efforts to restore God's creation and live in harmony with the earth and all creatures, and in struggles to promote justice in human communities. The signs are yet incomplete but by the grace of God and the cooperation of humanity the struggle will be more energetically engaged and justice and peace can prevail. The watershed can be transformed through community commitments to concrete historical projects.

People live in the world of nature, not apart from it. They need to alter that world at times in order to provide for their needs. The means are now available to use regional resources more efficiently while doing much less harm to regional ecologies. We can live in greater harmony with our surroundings if we strive to become more aware of our connection to, and responsibility for, the creation that surrounds us.

The vision of a renewed earth in the Columbia River Watershed poses a challenge of grand scale. It parallels the challenges faced by the original natives or the challenges faced by the early Europeans. Living in and developing the watershed demanded courage, conviction, perseverance and vision.

These same qualities are demanded now as we enter the Third Millennium and present our vision for the Columbia River Watershed of the future. It is a vision that can be realized. It is a challenge as great as the Columbia River itself. It is a challenge worthy of the men and women who inhabit this watershed. It is a challenge that will test the resolve of us all.

Such a challenge can be met only with faith in God, faith in one another and mutual cooperation. Such a challenge can be met only if we implore the assistance of the God who creates the universe and who continually sends forth the Spirit for the ongoing renewal of the human race and for the renewal of the face of the earth.

Our prayer for the successful fulfillment of the vision for the Columbia River Watershed is simply: Lord, send out your Spirit and renew the minds and hearts of the people of the region so that, being renewed, they may cooperate with your Spirit and together renew the face of the earth.

Dated: The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, January 8, 2001

Signatures of the Bishops:

Archbishop Alex J. Brunett, Archdiocese of Seattle, Washington

Archbishop John G. Vlazny, Archdiocese of Portland, Oregon

Bishop Eugene J. Cooney, Diocese of Nelson, British Columbia

Bishop Michael P. Driscoll, Diocese of Boise, Idaho

Bishop Robert C. Morlino, Diocese of Helena, Montana

Bishop Carlos A. Sevilla, S.J., Diocese of Yakima, Washington

Bishop William S. Skylstad, Diocese of Spokane, Washington

Bishop Robert F. Vasa, Diocese of Baker, Oregon
Auxiliary Bishop Kenneth D. Steiner, Archdiocese of Portland, Oregon
Auxiliary Bishop George L. Thomas, Archdiocese of Seattle, Washington
Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen (Retired), Archdiocese of Seattle, Washington
Bishop Thomas J. Connolly (Retired), Diocese of Baker, Oregon

Appendix A: Pastoral Letter Project Process

The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good integrates Catholic faith and ecological responsibility. With the assistance of grants from the United States Catholic Conference Environmental Justice Program and the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, the project began in 1997 with the formation of an international Steering Committee. The Committee represented Canadian and U.S. watershed dioceses and Catholic colleges and universities. A series of "Readings of the Signs of the Times" was held in Washington, Oregon and British Columbia in which representatives of diverse constituencies -- industry, agriculture, fishing, education and native peoples -- presented their perspectives on regional needs. A draft of these perspectives was enlarged and enhanced by the advice of a wide range of consultants: theologians, natural and social scientists, and church representatives. A web site was established describing Project activities and inviting comments from interested people. An exploratory document, "The Columbia River Watershed: Realities and Possibilities," was released for discussion on May 12, 1999.

Subsequently, listening sessions were hosted by bishops from the Columbia River watershed.. Hundreds of people from all walks of life have participated in the process. All of their ideas and perspectives have been considered for inclusion, and have been reflected upon during the pastoral letter process in some way. A poetic statement about the Columbia River, entitled *Riversong*, is also included in the appendix. The letter is being disseminated through the Columbia River Pastoral Letter Project to provide an international, watershed-wide, ongoing conversation process: to care for creation, to resolve regional conflicts with respect, compassion and good will, and to promote sustainable ecological relationships linked with community economic benefits.

The Project Steering Committee

Bishop William Skylstad, Diocese of Spokane -- Spokane, Washington, Chair

Mr. Joseph Burns, Diocese of Baker -- Hermiston, Oregon

Mr. Robert J. Castagna, Oregon Catholic Conference -- Portland, Oregon

Rev. Scott Coble, S.J., Gonzaga University -- Spokane, Washington

Mr. J.L. Drouhard, Justice and Peace Office, Archdiocese of Seattle -- Seattle, Washington

Dr. Frank Fromherz, Office of Justice and Peace, Archdiocese of Portland -- Portland Oregon

Ms. Donna Hanson, Social Ministries Office, Diocese of Spokane -- Spokane, Washington

Dr. John Hart, Carroll College -- Helena, Montana

Dr. Loretta Jancoski, Seattle University -- Seattle, Washington

Dr. Steve Kolmes, University of Portland -- Portland, Oregon

Rev. Pat Monette, Pastor -- Westbank, B.C., Canada

Sr. Sharon Park, O.P., Washington State Catholic Conference -- Seattle, Washington

Rev. Ron Patnode, Pastor -- Sunnyside, Washington

Dr. Mark Petruncio, Heritage College -- Toppenish, Washington

Sr. Cecilia Ranger, S.N.J.M., Marylhurst College -- Marylhurst, Oregon

Mr. John Reid, Project Manager, Reid & Associates, Inc. -- Seattle, Washington

Ms. Yvonne Smith, Diocese of Yakima -- Wapato, Washington

Mr. Wes Towle, Diocese of Nelson -- Nakusp, B.C., Canada

Appendix B: "Readings of the Signs of the Times" and Listening Sessions

1. "Readings of the Signs of the Times"

The University of Portland, Portland, Oregon: November, 1997

Seattle University, Seattle, Washington: February, 1998

Hanford, Washington: March, 1998

Toppenish, Washington: May, 1998

Umatilla, Oregon: July, 1998

Castlegar, British Columbia: September, 1998

Spokane, Washington: February, 1999

Hermiston, Oregon: March, 1999

2. Listening Sessions*

St. Mary's Parish, Spokane, Washington: August, 1999

St. Paul Parish, Yakima, Washington: August, 1999

Columbia River Maritime Museum, Astoria, Oregon: October, 1999

St. Pius X and Holy Trinity Churches, Cedar Mill & Beaverton, Oregon: October 1999

Carroll College, Helena, Montana: October, 1999

Holy Family Church, Clarkston, Washington: October, 1999

Salish-Kootenai College, Pablo, Montana: November, 1999

* Many other parishes and community organizations sponsored sessions on their own

between June and December, 1999.

Appendix C: Resource Consultants

Loren Bahls, Helena, Montana

Diane Bergant, CSA, Chicago, Illinois

Rev. Carla Berkedal, Mercer Island, Washington

Russ Butkus, Portland, Oregon

Judy Byron, O.P, Seattle, Washington

Pat Clancey, Ennis, Montana

Carol Dempsey, OP, Portland, Oregon

Rev. John DuLong, Revelstoke, B.C.

Rev. Hugh Feiss, OSB, Jerome, Idaho

Walt Grazer, Washington, D.C.

Richard Harmon, Portland, Oregon

Chief Johnny Jackson, Underwood, Washington

Rev. Charles Lienert, Portland, Oregon

Jim Male, Portland, Oregon

Debrah Marriott, Portland, Oregon

David McCloskey, Seattle, Washington

Sallie McFague, Nashville, Tennessee
 Gary McNeil, Seattle, Washington
 Sabino Sardineta, Cornelius, Oregon
 Wilbur Slockish, Jr., The Dalles, Oregon
 Mary Jo Tully, Portland, Oregon

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Appendix E: The Project Web Site: www.columbiariver.org

Appendix F: A Poetic Reflection

Riversong

*In the beginning was the Word, who brought forth the cosmos,
 creating the stars and the worlds and the waters,
 a universe wondrous, dynamic and blessed.
 The Spirit breathed spirit enlivening the cosmos:
 over eons in waters the first life was born,
 then evolved yet new creatures, sent to air, onto land:
 the finned ones and winged ones, the rooted ones and legged ones
 all that had life emerged on the earth
 to give life in turn, passing through generations,
 diverse forms of beauty spread over the world.
 God said all creation was now "very good."*

*Then the Word who created the worlds and the waters
and the wondrous lives in them, came into this world;
was immersed in womb waters, was born among people;
in the Jordan was baptized, living waters poured on him;
came to teach us as Word by his words and his life,
came to tell us that we among creatures were called
–as images, dreamers, aware of creation–
to drink living waters of earth and the Spirit
to care for each other, all life and our home.*

*The Word spoke of water as living and flowing;
the grace of the Spirit called all to be one:
a sharing of goods and a life of compassion
a way to see all as our neighbors to love.*

*In regions afar from the Word's place of birth,
some ten thousand years before the Word's birth,
the Word in creation had forged different lands:
a sea far inland broke through its rock dam,
Lake Missoula went westward seeking out the Pacific
–shattered rock that seemed solid, plowed canyons in Earth,
and gave the Willamette the richest of soil–
left beneath and behind it a world now transformed
–a world of new lakes and new rivers, pure waters
a watershed reaching from meadows, through mountains,
a lifeblood of life-giving waters still bearing
in memory their turbulent flood time of birth;
among them a great river flowed, filled with salmon
a great singing river through Celilo splashed down
called first by first peoples, Che Wana, Great River,
and then called Columbia, the West's mighty river.*

*The waters, still living, rushed over the land,
revealing in beauty and life's diverse forms
the vision, the power, the presence of Spirit.*

*In their depths, on their surface and splashing in waves
salmon streamed, flickering flashes of silver in sunlight
leaping up falls, and gliding in currents
–Celilo's great height was a trial for all,
their challenge and triumph the great falls would be
their tails splashed the waters, their strength gave them wings
as they flew up the falls to conquer its heights
headed home to spawn offspring to pass on their life
then feed other creatures of air, land and water.*

*The rivers sang out then, a clear, mighty song,
the melodies played by their rapids were strong
–at Wapta, Celilo, Shoshone and Kettle,
and through the Grand Coulee and Hells Canyon rocks–*

*a symphony soaring through meadows and mountains
 – the Snake played it southward, the Blackfoot sang east,
 the Kootenay north, the Willamette far west—
 a chorus soon joined by the breath of the wind,
 by the cries of the birds soaring up in the air:
 the eagle and owl, merganser and magpie,
 osprey and raven, and other winged people;
 by the splashing of fish swimming deep in the waters:
 salmon went westward with the song of the young,
 while others swam eastward with songs of new life,
 and steelhead and other finned people sang too;
 by the branches of trees swaying in the air currents:
 the aspen, the larch, the Doug fir and cedar,
 the rooted ones all whispered words for the song;
 by the voices of all those who walk on the land,
 and drink of the waters, and feed in the forests:
 the mule deer, the elk, the black bear and lynx,
 and others who leap, crawl, or slither or run.
 God heard there in echo the words of creation
 that through all time call all the world into being;
 God said that the song of the rivers was good.*

*The waters, still living, flowed on through the eons,
 the Great River felt when the peoples arrived,
 and built there their homes, River People by name;
 they lived tuned to “Mother Earth’s” rhythms and nurture,
 the way of the Spirit they tried to live well
 and many were fishers and some were called Dreamers.
 Celilo their seasonal home came to be
 when the salmon leaped skyward, and surged through the waters
 coming back from their journey in the stormy Pacific
 to spawn in the old gravel beds of their birth,
 giving life among watershed waters of old
 which flowed south from marshes in Canada’s Rockies
 to unite with the west ocean beach’s strong tides.*

*The waters, still living, flowed on through the centuries,
 the shores of Che Wana new peoples made home,
 Columbia became the great river’s new name;
 they used nature’s goods in new ways and they prospered;
 but the old peoples then were displaced from their lands:
 Che Wana’s first peoples lost lives, fish and home.*

*Generations passed on and the Earth was transformed
 from meadows to farms, food and fiber for some,
 from forests to lumber and framing for houses,*

*from hillsides to aluminum plants for new airplanes,
 from mountains to atom-based plants and new weapons;
 some peoples cut ties with the rivers, their place
 –with the Spirit, the earth and each other as well–
 and the land in pain languished, groaning for its redemption;
 the song of the river was mournful, near mute
 the waters flowed slowly, less living for all:
 the voices of wind, birds and salmon, all life
 were fewer and softer than ever before;
 the peoples of sky, land and waters were weary,
 longing for visions and a new way of life.*

*A wind rippled rivers, the Spirit was whispering
 its breath touched the peoples of sky, land and waters:
 they turned from illusions, from dancing with death
 to follow its promise of new life to come.*

*The rivers flowed on, quickened now by the visions
 while sensing new projects being formed on the land;
 restored, renewed places, new habitats, homesteads
 soon came into being, with peoples now conscious
 of the presence of Spirit, of the rhythms of earth,
 of how they related, each one to each other.*

*The waters and watershed then were transformed:
 the rivers ran clear, strong, and living again;
 the peoples of the sky, the land and the waters
 lived each in relation to all and to earth:
 farmers and fruitful fields, fishers and fish,
 forests and foresters cared for each other,
 communities cared for the commons, their home,
 the common good all sought to work for as one;
 new energy sources soon came into being,
 that worked with earth's energy, sunlight and wind;
 industrial plants used old waste as new products,
 the air, land and waters were cleaned and renewed;
 economics and ecology through ethics were bound,
 eco-justice, eco-consciousness walked hand in hand,
 and communities called themselves neighbors again.*

*Che Wana and her sisters sang with joy, living waters,
 and peoples of the sky, land and swift flowing rivers,
 plants, birds, fish, animals, life in communion
 all lifted their voices and joined in the song.*

*God saw living waters and peoples who cared for them,
 sharing the life of the cosmos and commons*

*-the tree of life gave them its fruits for their food,
its leaves were their medicine, healing for all-
the riversong soared, then, on wind, over waves.
God blessed them, saying to them, "You are all very good."*