

Miller JD. et al. Willamette River Basin Task Force: Recommendations to Governor John Kitzhaber. Bureau of Land Management: 1997 Dec. (Reviewed by Grace Wang)

This publication is a comprehensive review of conditions of the Willamette River and recommendations of methods to protect the river presented to the governor of Oregon in 1997. The authors include a diverse group of experts in various areas and interested citizens, who collaborated in the program known as the Willamette River Basin Task Force.

The goal of the project is to assess the current conditions of the river, study activities that affect the river, and formulate recommendations for future actions to maintain a healthy river. The study includes a geographical and historical review of the Willamette River, and then addresses current problems. One chapter in particular addresses human health. The Task Force sees three concerns regarding the river's effect on humans in the Willamette River Basin: drinking water, fish consumption, and water contact/recreation.

For drinking water, nitrogen contamination makes many areas' ground water unsafe. Pesticides and sediment from the February 1996 flood affect the tributary rivers. River quality of the main stem Willamette is poor; only upper portions are currently used for drinking. Current laws protecting drinking water exist, but do not seem to be sufficient for these areas. Fish in the river show high levels of mercury, dioxins, furans, and other toxins, causing change in morphology of some fish and making them unsafe for consumption. Portions of the Willamette River is considered unsafe for recreation due to fecal coliform and other bacterial contamination.

In addition to identifying the problems, the report also has suggestions on how to control further contamination and how to improve water quality for safer human contact.

Critique

This source should be very credible because the Task Force is a government-organized program ordered by Governor John Kitzhaber. It is a division of the Department of Environmental Quality. The preface states that the study is composed by a team of experts in various areas.

In addition to the topic of human health effects, the study also addresses many other areas of research, such as ecosystem health, human activities, recommendations for watershed management, and public outreach. This is a general study that can be of use to all groups. Also, the bibliography of this publication provides a rich resource of other potentially useful sources. The study is intended for a general audience, so the language is easy to understand.

The major drawback of this publication is that although it addresses many areas of concern, the studies include few details. In the Human Health section, for example, conclusions are qualitative rather than quantitative. It only lists a few toxins and fails to provide exact data of the levels of each toxin. Instead,

it vaguely states that such contaminations make the river "unsafe." Another drawback is that it is slightly outdated. The study was published in 1997, and actual research was conducted over a period of 18 months prior to publication. Since then, there may have been changes to conditions and laws of the river.

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