

When Clean Up's a Mess

Laced with radioactive isotopes, volatile solvents, and heavy metals, Northern Oregon's Lake Loch is one of America's most polluted bodies of water. Clean up efforts are underway, but the end seems a long way off.

The Federal government had promised to clean up Lake Loch by next year, but now officials of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are saying remediation work may not be completed until August 2020.

"It's ridiculous that it's taking so long," said Ritchie Flint, 52, a resident of nearby Vista View, Washington. "All we hear from the government is double-speak about who will get it done and when."

Responsibility for the lake has been a political football batted around government for decades.

In 1976 the Pentagon took responsibility for Lake Loch because radioactive contaminants were traced to nearby Kardinwolg AFB. The air force had stationed nuclear-armed bombers there throughout the 1950s and 60s.

After the creation of the U.S. Department of Energy in 1977, secretary of energy Chloe Yerbins announced that DOE would be dealing with the site by way of a Lake Loch Clean-Up Initiative.

1980 saw Pres. Carter make a memorable visit to the site wearing a T-shirt that read, "Lake Loch Glow-in-the-Dark Fishing Club." On that occasion, a deputy secretary of the interior announced that the lake would become the responsibility of the Bureau of Reclamation.

In 1992, after years of inaction, Ms. Lucille Ghenz published *The Glowing Waters: Lake Loch As A Lesson In Bureaucratic Bungling*. The book led to new rounds of recriminations, and an investigation that was opened by the Oregon State Water Quality Board. That investigation, however, was closed in 1995. No report was issued.

In 2003, two tornados hit the lake - one of which was an F-5. The storms had the effect of spreading contaminants over a very wide area. The newly created Department of Homeland Security took responsibility for Lake Loch as a disaster site. But no cleanup work was ever undertaken by DHS.

Worldwide attention focused on Lake Loch in 2005 when seven-year-old Jason Pintler wrote to the Pope about his concern for the earth's environment in general and Lake Loch in particular. A few months later, the EPA announced it would treat Lake Loch as a "superfund" site.