

## **Darigold to Pay \$2 Million Penalty and Reduce Water Pollution in Settlement with Columbia Riverkeeper**

***Darigold, Inc. facility agrees to remediate water pollution to the Lower Yakima Valley and pay \$2,000,000 to the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation for projects benefiting water quality***

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

Media Contact:

Teryn Yazdani, Staff Attorney

[terynd@columbiariverkeeper.org](mailto:terynd@columbiariverkeeper.org)

(503) 933-7636

**Sunnyside, WA (April 13, 2026)**—Darigold, Inc. (Darigold) agreed to a settlement with nonprofit Columbia Riverkeeper to resolve a federal Clean Water Act lawsuit and reduce pollution in the Yakima River Basin. As part of the settlement, Darigold agreed to pay \$2,000,000 to the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation to restore water quality in the Yakima River and offset harm from years of unlawful pollution.

“This is an incredible victory for clean water and should lead to lasting improvements to the Yakima River Basin,” said Teryn Yazdani, staff attorney for Columbia Riverkeeper. “Clean water is a basic human right, and every corporation must do its part to protect local rivers and comply with laws that protect public health and the environment. We are thrilled that Yakama Nation Fisheries can complete on-the-ground improvements in the impacted waters with penalty funds from this settlement.”

“In recent years, an aquatic plant named Water Stargrass has emerged as a critical water quality issue in the lower 60 miles of the Yakima River,” stated Tom Elliott, Yakama Nation Fisheries Project Manager. “This native plant, which acts like a weed because of flow regulation and legacy agricultural nutrients, takes over and dominates large stretches of the river, converting it to a pond-like environment during the warm season. These water quality problems in turn degrade fish habitat, leading to difficult and delayed fish migration.”

Columbia Riverkeeper sued Darigold in the summer of 2025 to hold the company accountable for over four years of unlawful pollution at Darigold’s large dairy processing facility, located in Sunnyside, Wash.\* Under the Clean Water Act, corporations and other entities cannot release pollution to local rivers and other waterbodies unless they have a permit. Those permits typically require that the company monitor pollution and comply with restrictions on the amounts and types of pollution released into local waters.

In the recently filed consent decree, Darigold agreed to submit and implement an engineering report that must be approved by the Washington State Department of Ecology to ensure compliance with the Clean Water Act. Darigold also agreed to pay additional penalties to the Yakama Nation for any exceedances occurring from two of the facility's discharge points for a period of eighteen months.

“The Yakima River is a large, important tributary to the Columbia River, and protection of its water quality is vital to the overall health of the Columbia,” states Yazdani. “Yakama Nation, Washington, communities, and many stakeholders have worked for decades to restore the Yakima River for fish and many other uses. Our settlement with Darigold is one of many important steps to protect and restore a shared resource.”

The Columbia River Basin, an area the size of France, accumulates pollution from industry, wastewater treatment plants, and runoff from agricultural lands, logging, industrial sites, and city streets. As a result, the Columbia River and many tributaries are severely degraded by pollution.

When asked how SEP funds would be used, Elliott said, “The Yakama Nation will use settlement funding from Darigold to help reduce the area and influence of Water Stargrass infestations, as part of a long-term strategy currently being developed. Reducing the amount of Stargrass cover directly improves water quality and fish habitat. This project will be part of a decades-long program of fisheries restoration by the Yakama Nation and partners in the Yakima River basin, supporting the recovery of healthy and harvestable population levels for anadromous fish species.”

Columbia Riverkeeper was represented in the case by attorneys at the firm Kampmeier & Knutson, PLLC.

Under the Clean Water Act, there is a mandatory 45-day period when the United States Department of Justice can weigh-in on the proposed consent decree. After this passes, the court can enter the consent decree as a finalized court order. The consent decree is effective upon a judge's signature.

*\*The pollutants include but are not limited to Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD5), Chemical Oxygen Demand, Total Kjeldahl Nitrogen, Total Nitrogen, and Total Ammonia—all of which can cause low dissolved oxygen downstream of discharges. Low dissolved oxygen is harmful to aquatic life and can threaten the survival of fish that depend on cool, oxygenated waters.*

**Resources:**

- [Link to Consent Decree](#)

- [Link to Complaint](#)

**Language Access:** Columbia Riverkeeper is able to provide free language translation services to meaningfully engage in our work. To learn more or request these services, please reach out to [Finance & Administration Director Siobhan O'Halloran](#) and [info@columbiariverkeeper.org](mailto:info@columbiariverkeeper.org) to ensure we receive your request and have the opportunity to provide a timely response.

*Columbia Riverkeeper is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, EIN 91-1583492*