

# CANADA – BRITISH COLUMBIA

## WATER QUALITY MONITORING AGREEMENT

### WATER QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF Columbia River AT WANETA (1979 – 2005)



Prepared by:



Prepared for:

B.C. Ministry of Environment  
and  
Environment Canada

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Environment Canada  
Environnement Canada



Ministry of  
Environment

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Columbia River watershed is located in the southeast corner of British Columbia. Water quality measurements for the Columbia River at Waneta (16 km south from Trail, B.C.) are from samples collected at the Cominco water quality monitoring site from the left bank. The drainage area at this point is 102,852 km<sup>2</sup>, with the Rocky Mountains to the east and the Purcell Mountains to the west. The river flows in the Rocky Mountain Trench and is used for drinking water, irrigation and industry and supports populations of cutthroat, rainbow, bull, and eastern trout and whitefish. Cirque glaciers in the high Purcell and Rocky mountains drain to the Columbia River and the glacial silt imparts a gray, muddy colour to the river at times. This is alleviated by the time the water reaches Waneta due to the settling provided behind the reservoirs constructed for electricity generation.

Water quality in this reach of the Columbia River is influenced by effluent discharges from the Teck-Cominco Metals Smelter and Fertilizer plant, primary-treated sewage from the City of Trail, and secondary-treated sewage from Fruitvale and Montrose, and upstream dams and reservoirs. There are also non-point source discharges from agriculture, urban development, forestry, transportation and stream bank erosion.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

- Turbidity levels in this reach of the Columbia River are very low, due to the settling that occurs behind the hydro generation facilities.
- Several metals that exceeded guidelines on occasion had higher concentrations that correlated with higher turbidity levels. At those times, metals were likely in particulate form and not biologically available. Such metals included aluminum, chromium, copper, iron, lead, selenium, silver, and zinc.
- There appear to be a number of declining trends through time in the Columbia River at Waneta, notably for fluoride, cadmium, iron, lead, phosphorus, zinc and barium. All of these trends, with the exception of barium, were noted in a

previous report (Pommen, 2002). Declines in cadmium, fluoride, lead, phosphorus and zinc were at that time attributed to abatement measures at the upstream smelter and fertilizer plant. Decreases in aluminum and iron were potentially at last attributed to trapping effects of upstream dams. The reason for the barium trend, which was also noted upstream at Birchbank, is not known at this time. A number of other apparent changes (decreases) can also be seen, but are believed to be artifacts of decreasing detection limits.

- Water quality in the Columbia River at Waneta would be characterized as being good for both the protection of aquatic life and source waters used for drinking. This is likely due in large part to the settling out of particulate matter behind the upstream dams. There are often measureable fecal coliform counts at the site: water treatment would be required (as in all cases) prior to use as a drinking water source.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We recommend monitoring be continued for the Columbia River at Waneta since it serves as the last station on for the Columbia River before it crosses the International Boundary.

Water quality indicators that are important for future monitoring are:

- flow, water temperature, specific conductivity, pH, turbidity, nutrients, total dissolved gas and dissolved oxygen,
- appropriate forms of metals for comparison to their respective guidelines, and
- other variables related to drinking water such as colour.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The graphs in this report were prepared by Sacha Wassick of Environment Canada. The draft report was reviewed by Andrea Ryan of Environment Canada. We thank these individuals for their contributions to improving this document. Any errors or omissions are the responsibility of Tri-Star Environmental Consulting.

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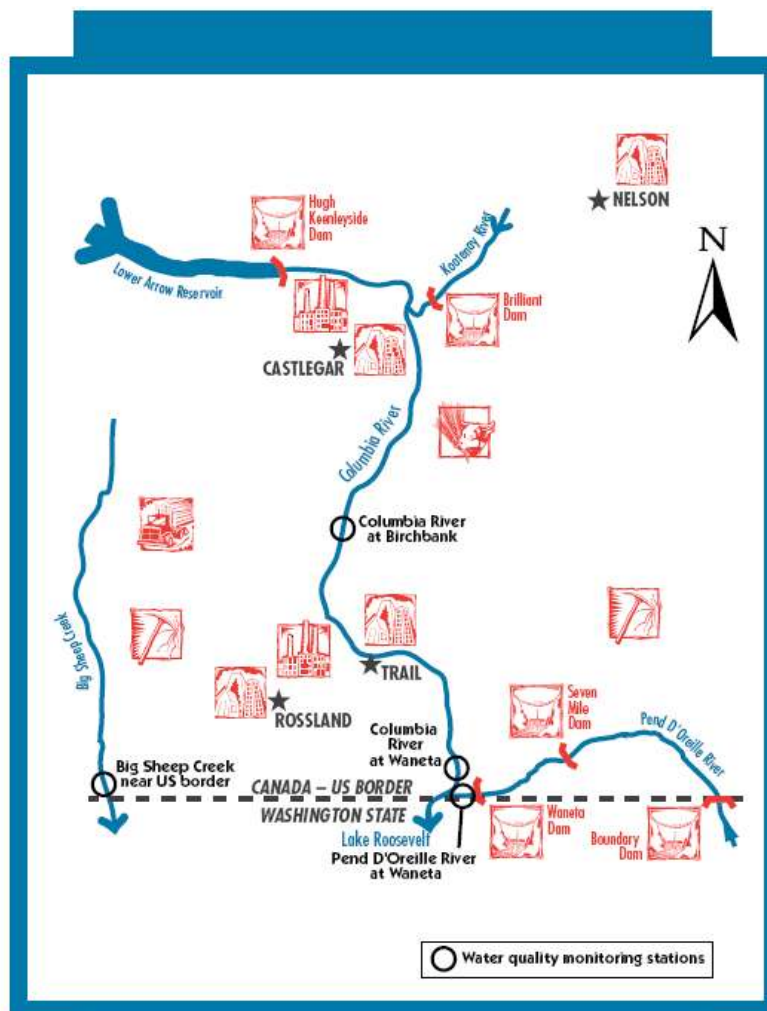
## INTRODUCTION

Since 1985, B.C. Ministry of Environment and Environment Canada have been cooperatively measuring water quality at a number of locations in British Columbia. The express purposes of this joint monitoring program have been to define the quality of the water and to determine whether there are any trends in water quality. The data are based on samples collected by local interested and committed residents called “lay collectors” who are trained by Environment Canada or B.C. Environment staff, provided training for safety, and audited every year to ensure that samples are collected according to standard protocols.

The Columbia River watershed is located in the southeast corner of British Columbia. Water quality measurements for the Columbia River at Waneta (16 km south from Trail, B.C.) are from samples collected at the Cominco water quality monitoring site from the left bank. Its coordinates are 49.016 N and 117.60” W. The drainage area at this point is 102,852 km<sup>2</sup>, with the Rocky Mountains to the east and the Purcell Mountains to the west. The river flows in the Rocky Mountain Trench and is used for drinking water, irrigation and industry and supports populations of cutthroat, rainbow, bull, and eastern trout and whitefish. Cirque glaciers in the high Purcell and Rocky mountains drain to the Columbia River and the glacial silt imparts a gray, muddy colour to the river at times. This is alleviated by the time the water reaches Waneta due to the settling provided behind the reservoirs for electricity generation.

This assessment is based on up to 26 years of water quality data collected during 1979-2005. The data were plotted on a graph over time, along with the relevant water quality guidelines. The graphs were inspected for "environmentally significant" trends - where the measurements are increasing or decreasing over time and the levels are close to the guidelines, or are otherwise judged to represent an important change in water quality. These trends are further evaluated to ensure that they were not caused by measurement errors, and to identify their causes.

Water quality in this reach of the Columbia River is influenced by effluent discharges from the Cominco Metals Smelter and Fertilizer plant, primary-treated sewage from the City of Trail, and secondary-treated sewage from Fruitvale and Montrose, and upstream dams and reservoirs. There are also non-point source discharges from agriculture, urban development, forestry, transportation and stream bank erosion.



**FIGURE 1: COLUMBIA RIVER AT WANETA**

## **WATER QUALITY ASSESSMENT**

Data for the Columbia River at Waneta have been collected on a weekly frequency for most of the period of record. In addition, quality assurance samples (blanks and replicates) are collected three times per year. These results for each variable were used in this assessment to identify potential outliers that should be removed from consideration of trends, and to “flag” questionable data in the database ([www.waterquality.ec.gc.ca](http://www.waterquality.ec.gc.ca)) as to possible or likely errors.

The state of the water quality was assessed by comparing the values to the B.C.'s approved and working guidelines (if guidelines exist for the variable) for water quality (B.C. Ministry of Environment, 2006a and b), and by looking for any obvious trends in the data. Any levels or apparent trends that were found to be deleterious or potentially deleterious to sensitive water uses, including drinking water, aquatic life, wildlife, recreation, irrigation, and livestock watering were noted in the following variable-by-variable discussion below.

When concentrations of a substance cannot be detected, we have plotted the concentration at the level of detection. We believe this to be a conservative approach for assessing possible trends. We have normally plotted each variable against either turbidity levels or specific conductivity, whichever we believe from experience may be correlated with the particular variable of interest. Sometimes, we have plotted the same variable for two or three different periods of time, usually to highlight periods of time when analytical detection limits may have improved. In such cases, one plot will include the entire period of record for the variable. As well, there are times when measurements were not taken for some reason. In these cases, straight lines will join the two consecutive points and may give the illusion on the graph of a trend that does not exist.

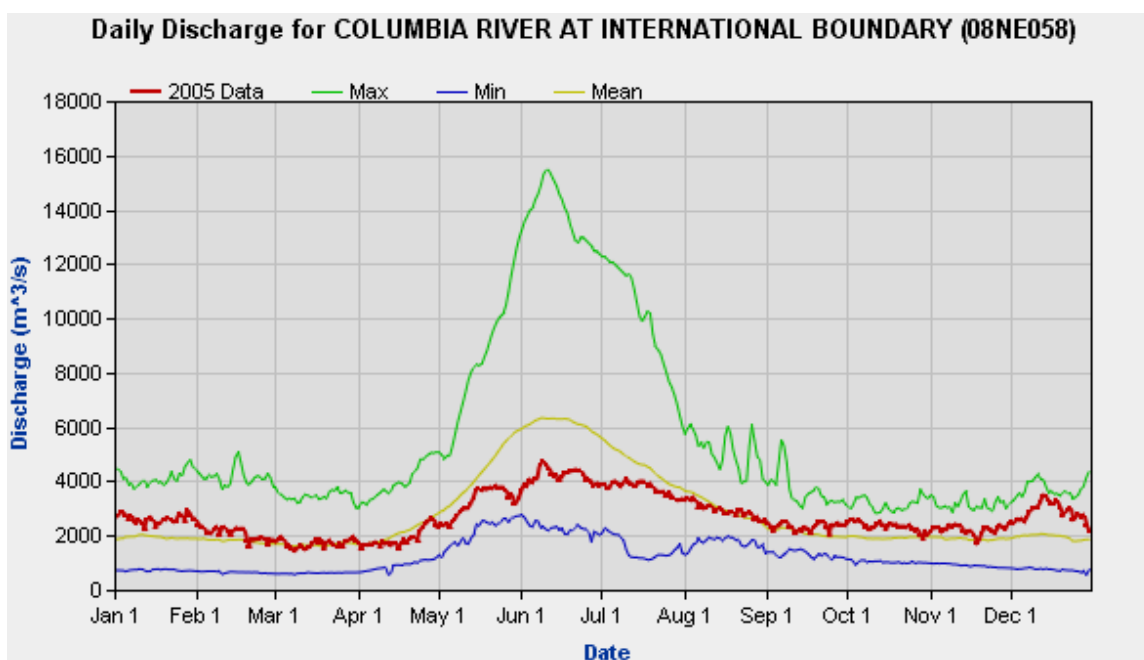
In some cases, testing for the presence of a variable has been terminated after a certain period. In general, this has been because a previous data assessment and review has

indicated that collections of these data are not warranted for this station. For other variables, concerns about concentrations may have only arisen in recent years.

The following water quality indicators were not discussed as they met all water quality guidelines (if guidelines exist) and showed no clearly visible trends: ammonia, boron, bromine, nitrite, and tin.

The following water quality indicators seemed to fluctuate through the year according to turbidity concentrations, but were below guideline values (if guidelines exist) and had no other trends: antimony, arsenic, barium, beryllium, bismuth, dissolved organic carbon, cadmium, cobalt, gallium, lanthanum, nickel, phosphorus, non-filterable residue, thallium, and vanadium.

Other water quality indicators seemed to fluctuate through the year according to the specific conductivity of the water. For dissolved forms of many of these indicators, they would be a part of the measured conductivity, and this is to be expected. These types of indicators that were not measured above guideline values (if guidelines exist) included: dissolved inorganic carbon, calcium, chloride, fluoride, potassium, lithium, molybdenum, nitrate/nitrite, dissolved nitrogen, niobium, rubidium, filterable residue, fixed filterable residue, extractable silicon, silica, sodium, strontium, and uranium.



**FIGURE 2: WATER SURVEY OF CANADA FLOW DATA FOR COLUMBIA RIVER AT INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY (1938-2006)**

**Flow** (Figure 2) values are controlled by releases from the dams upstream. Peak flows occur during the months from May through August, with lowest flows being recorded in the November through April period. Maximum flows can exceed 6,000 m<sup>3</sup>/s and be as high as about 15,000 m<sup>3</sup>/s.

**Aluminum** (Figures 3 and 4) concentrations are related to turbidity, with highest total and extractable concentrations being measured during periods of higher turbidity. (Turbidity is generally quite low in the river.) Total and extractable concentrations occasionally exceed the guidelines to protect aquatic life; however, the guidelines are expressed as dissolved aluminum. For this reason there is likely no concern in the river with respect to aluminum. An apparent downward trend in aluminum was noted over time, which had identified in a previous (Pommen, 2002). This trend may in part be due to the trapping effect of upstream dams and reservoirs.

**Alkalinity** (Figure 5) concentrations generally fluctuated with specific conductivity as would be expected. Alkalinity was usually greater than 40 mg/L, indicating that the river is well buffered for acidic inputs.

**Cadmium** (Figures 17 and 18) concentrations exhibit a declining trend that had been noted in a previous report and attributed to abatement measures at the upstream smelter and fertilizer plant in Trail (Pommen, 2002).

**Colour (True)** (Figure 23) concentrations generally met the drinking water guideline for source waters; however, one value in the late 1980's exceeded the guideline. Colour is not considered to be a concern in the Columbia River.

**Chromium** (Figures 24 and 25) concentrations appeared to fluctuate with turbidity levels. When it was measured as total chromium, it occasionally exceeded the guideline for hexavalent chromium in 2001; however, when improved detection limits were available all total and extractable concentrations met the guideline. Chromium is therefore not likely a concern in the river.

**Copper** (Figure 26) concentrations generally fluctuated with turbidity. Some values exceeded the B.C. guideline for maximum concentrations; however, the frequency of values that exceed the guideline has been reduced in recent years when the analytical detection limit was lowered. This is an expected outcome from reducing detection limits.

**Fluoride** (Figure 27) concentrations exhibit a declining trend that had been noted in a previous report and attributed to abatement measures at the upstream smelter and fertilizer plant (Pommen, 2002).

**Iron** (Figures 28 and 29) concentrations fluctuate with turbidity and occasionally exceeded guidelines for the protection of aquatic life and source waters used for drinking.

The frequency of values that exceed the guideline has been reduced in recent years when the analytical detection limit was lowered. This is an expected outcome from reducing detection limits. An apparent declining trend in iron was noted, and had been identified in a previous report (Pommen, 2002). At that time the trend was attributed potentially at least in part to the trapping effect of upstream dams.

**Lead** (Figures 34 and 35) concentrations fluctuated with turbidity but occasionally exceeded the guideline for maximum concentrations. As with other variables, the frequency at which values exceeded the guideline was reduced considerably when analytical detection limits were reduced. No values have exceeded the guideline since about 1994. A declining trend in lead at Waneta had been noted in a previous report and attributed to abatement measures at the upstream smelter and fertilizer plant in Trail (Pommen, 2002).

**Selenium** (Figures 51 and 52) concentrations usually met all guidelines; however, one extractable value in 2003 exceeded the CCME guideline. This may be erroneous since all total values were about one-third this value. Selenium values generally fluctuated with turbidity.

**Silver** (Figures 55 and 56) concentrations were generally low and fluctuated with turbidity levels. Values often exceeded the CCME guideline when higher detection limits were used to measure silver; however, since 2003 when detection limits were lowered significantly, only one total and one extractable concentration exceeded the guideline. The CCME guideline is set at the same level as the B.C. guideline for the mean concentration over a 30-day period: this latter guideline that was met.

**Temperature - Water** (Figure 60) fluctuated with air temperatures, and peaked in the summer months near 20° C. Peak values generally were below the maximum weekly average guideline for streams with unknown fish populations; however, these warm summer temperatures at times were the guideline for source waters used for drinking.

**Turbidity** (Figure 64) often exceeded the guideline for source waters used for drinking with no treatment other than disinfection. Values are generally low for a river the size of the Columbia; however, the levels are ameliorated by the dams and reservoirs upstream from Waneta.

**Zinc** (Figures 69 and 70) values fluctuated with turbidity. Individual values often exceeded the B.C. guideline for mean concentrations that are to be averaged during a 30-day period. Values appear to have declined from those values measured in 1995 and those in 2005. This declining trend had been noted in a previous report and attributed to abatement measures at the upstream smelter and fertilizer plant in Trail (Pommen, 2002).



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- Ministry of Environment. 2006a. British Columbia. A Compendium of Working Water Quality Guidelines for British Columbia. Environmental Protection Division, Ministry of Environment. Victoria, B.C.
- Pommen, L.W. 2002. Water Quality Assessment of Columbia River at Waneta (1979 - 2000). Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection and Environment Canada.

# Water Quality Assessment of the Columbia River at Waneta 1983-2005

Figure 3  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Aluminum Total and Extractable

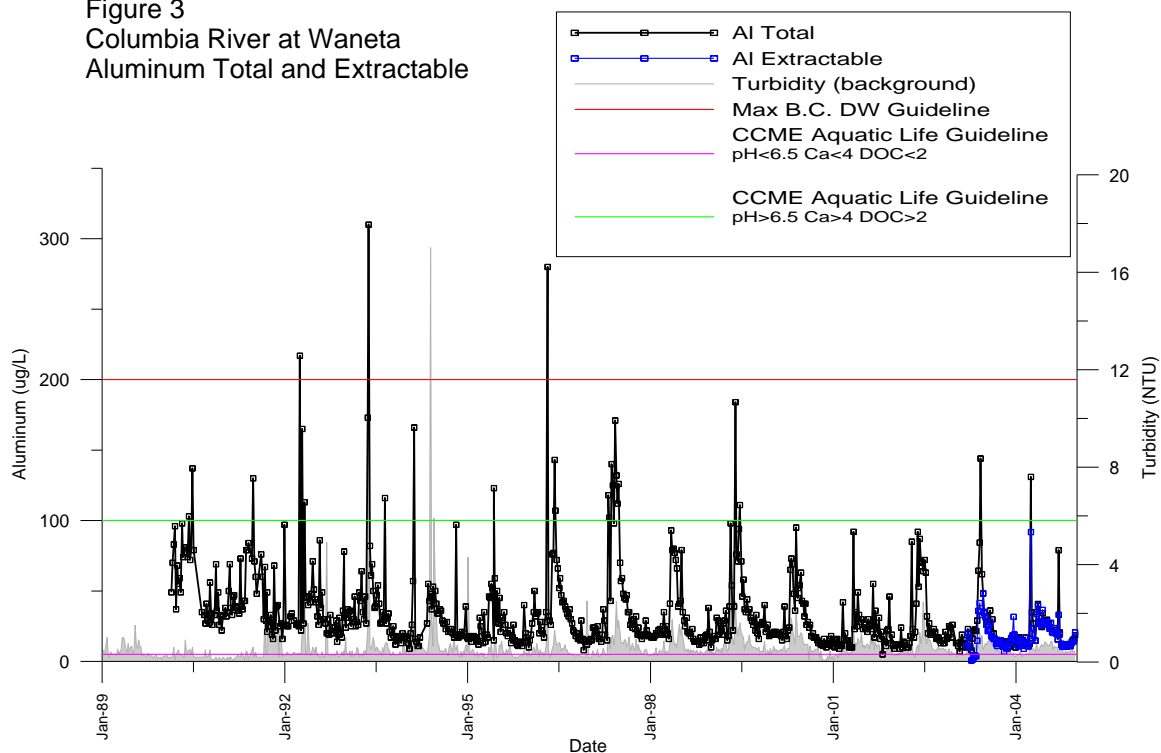


Figure 4  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Aluminum Total and Extractable  
2001 - 2006

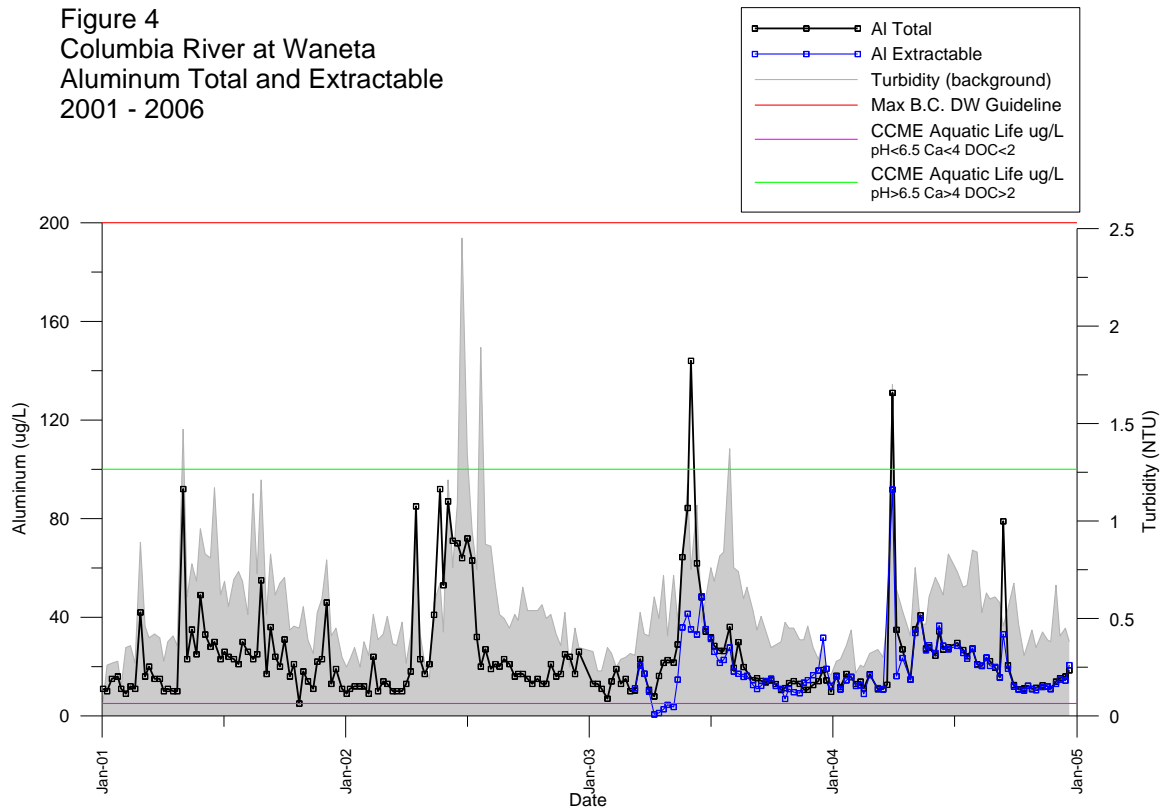


Figure 5  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Alkalinity - Total

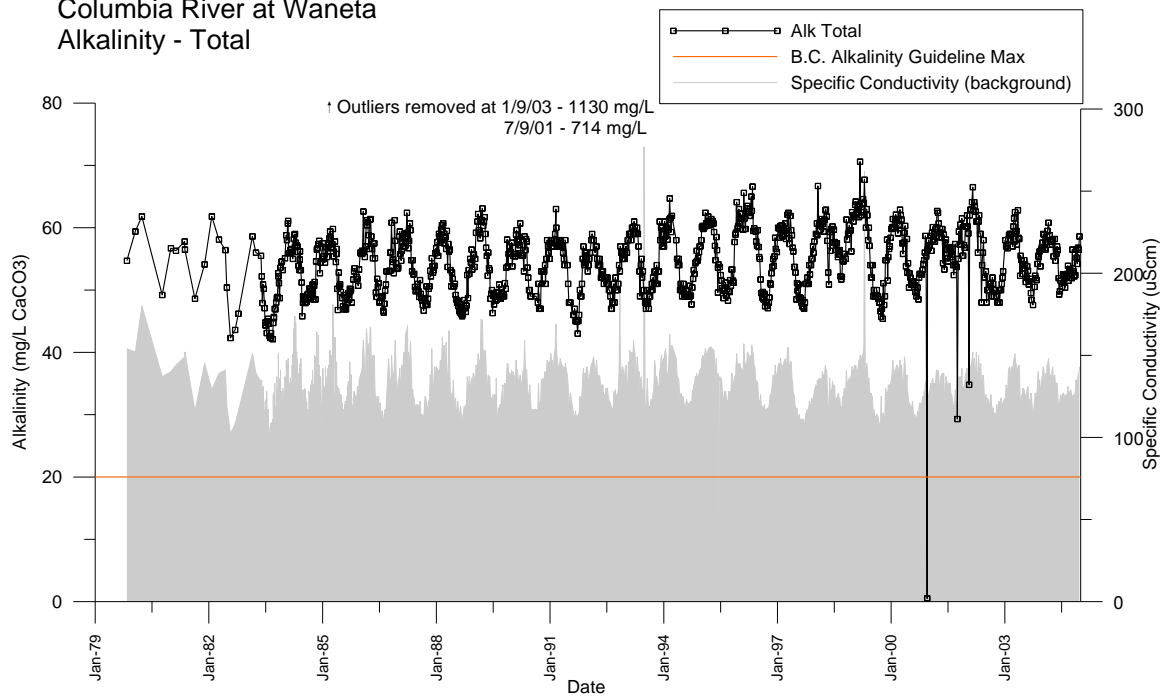


Figure 6  
Columbia at Waneta  
Ammonia - Dissolved

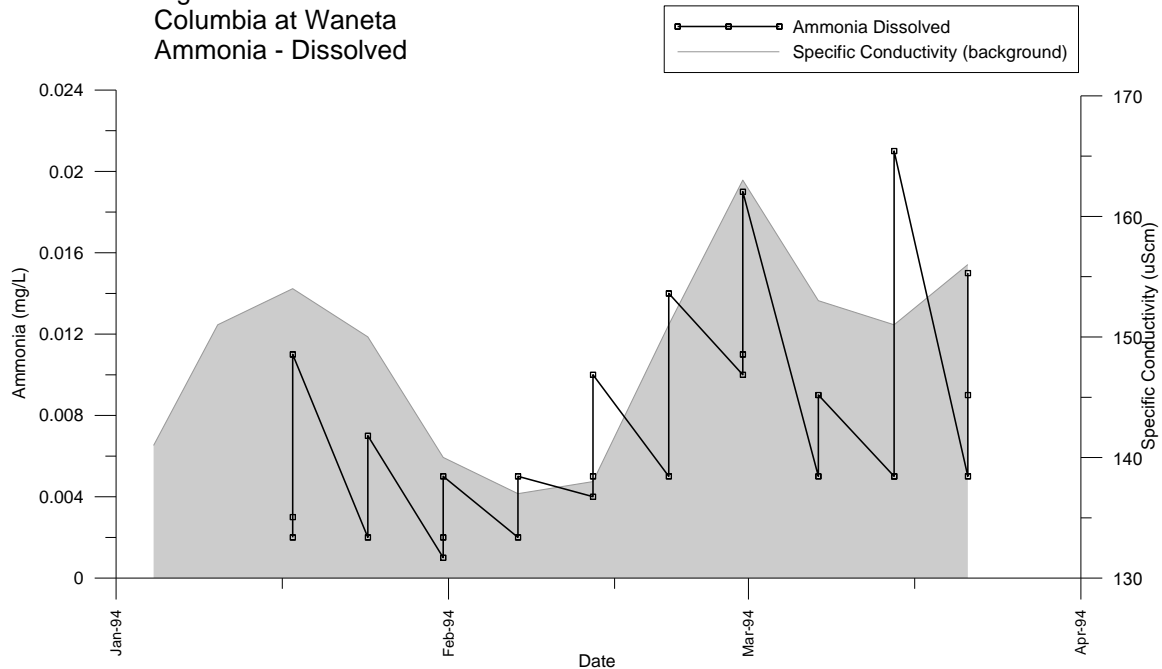


Figure 7  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Antimony - Total and Extractable

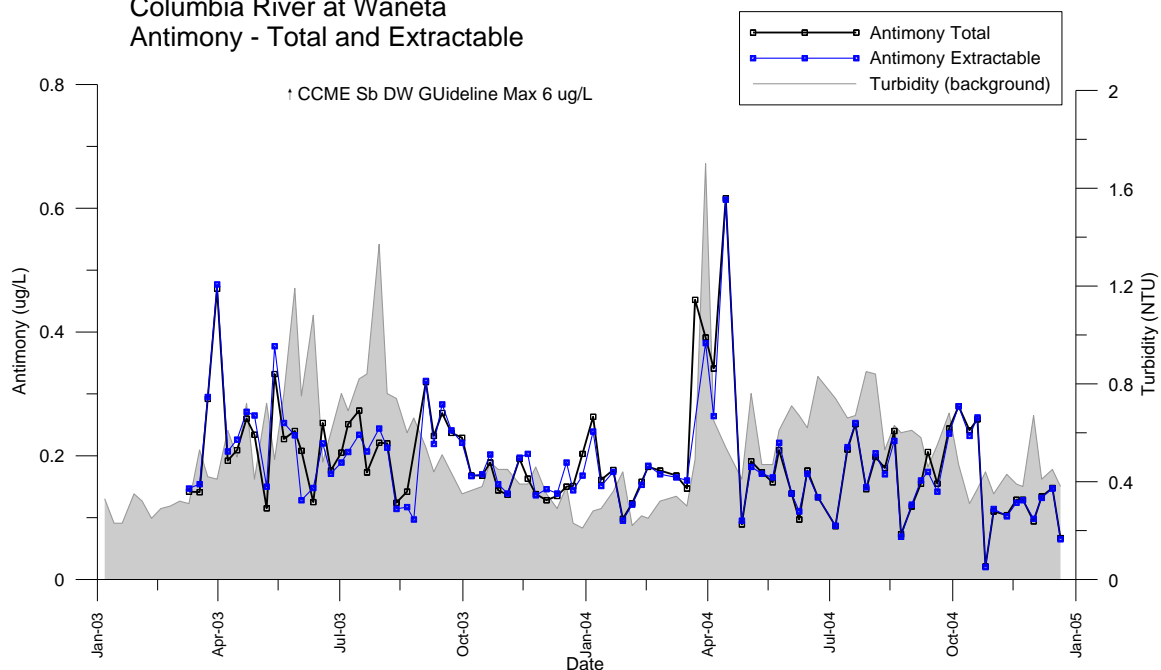


Figure 8  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Arsenic - Total and Extractable  
1979 - 2005

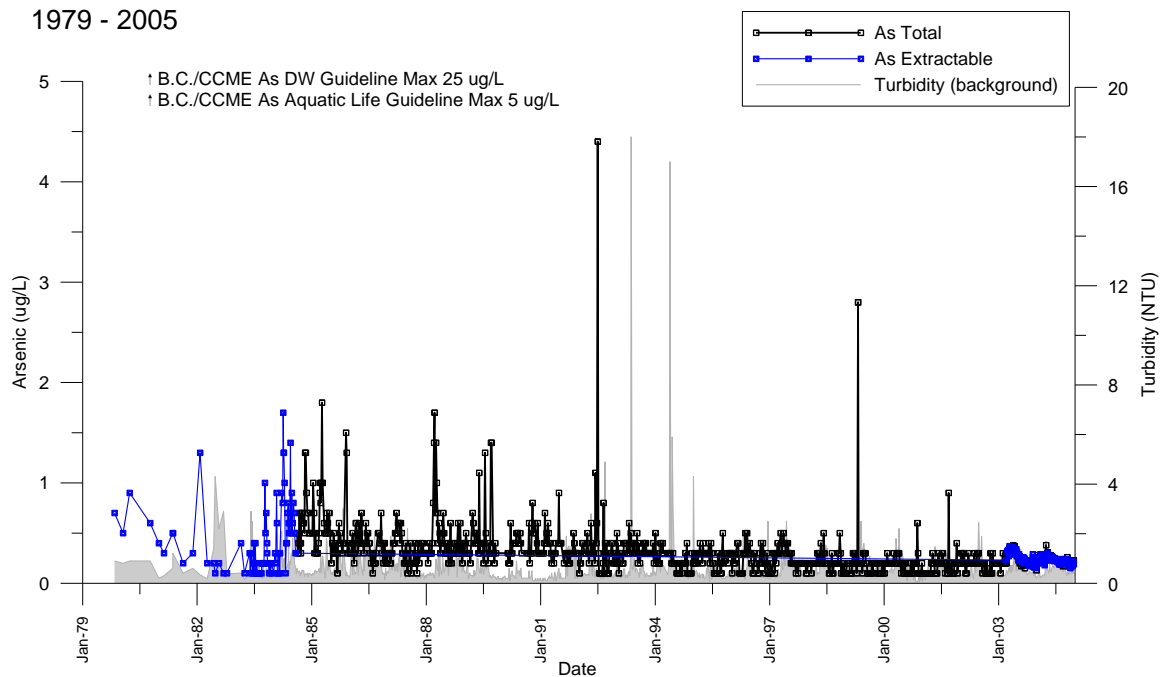


Figure 9  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Boron - Total and Extractable  
2003 - 2005

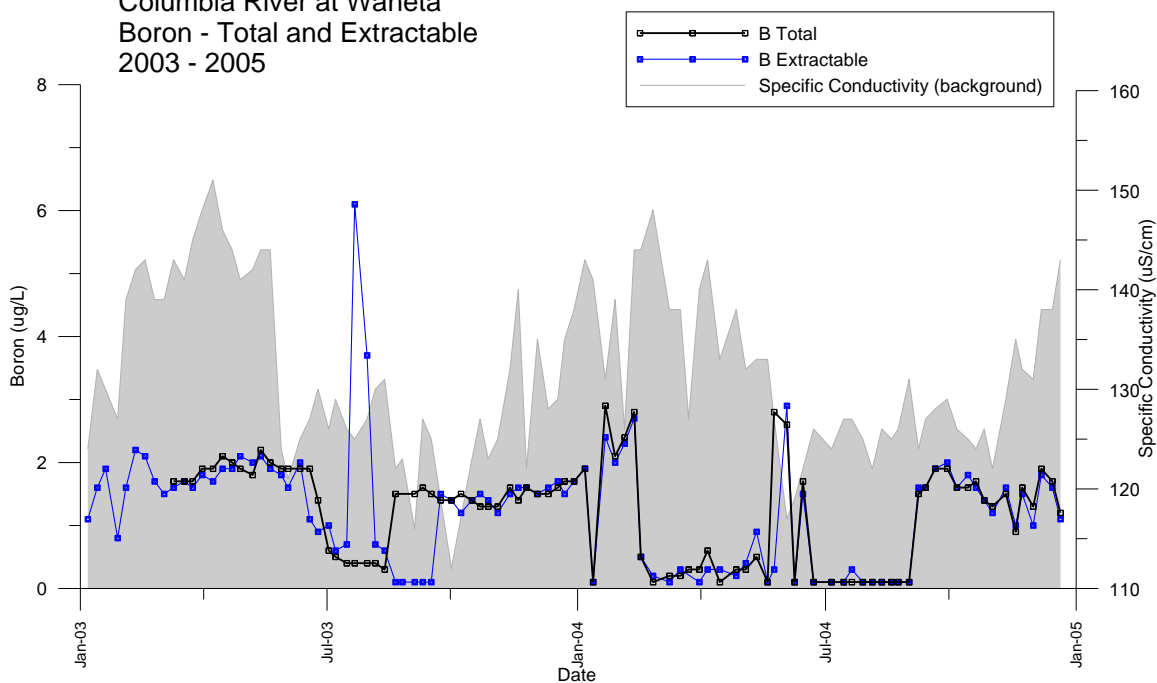


Figure 10  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Barium - Total and Extractable  
1990 - 2005

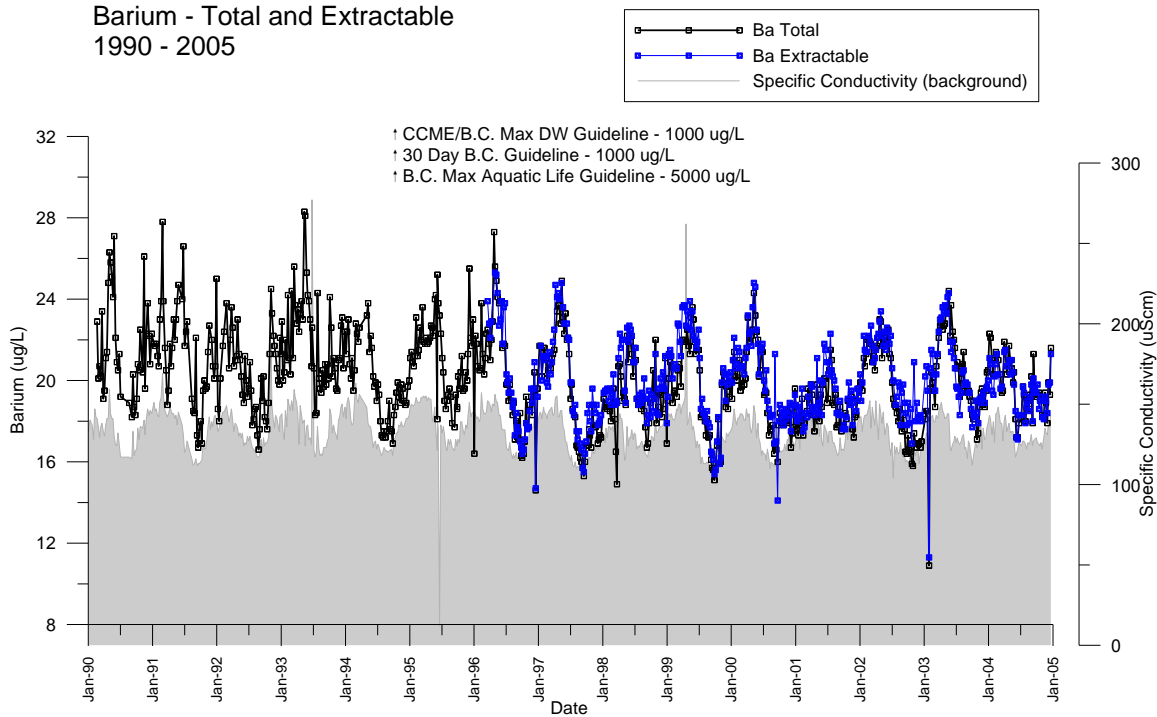


Figure 11  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Beryllium - Total and Extractable  
1990 - 2005

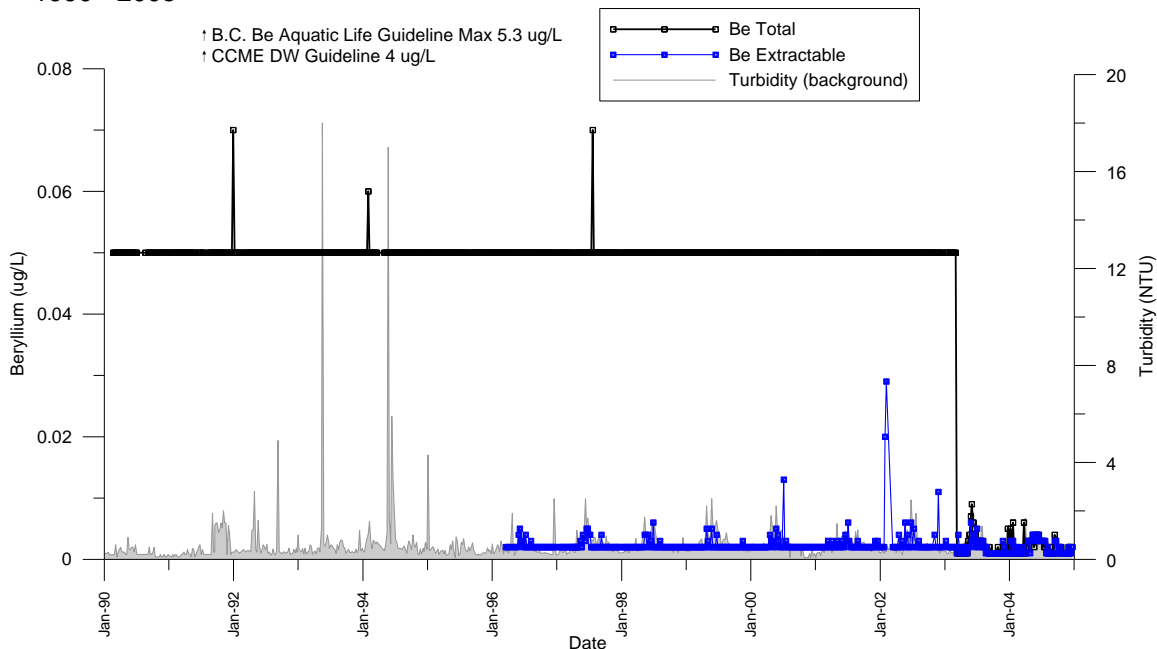
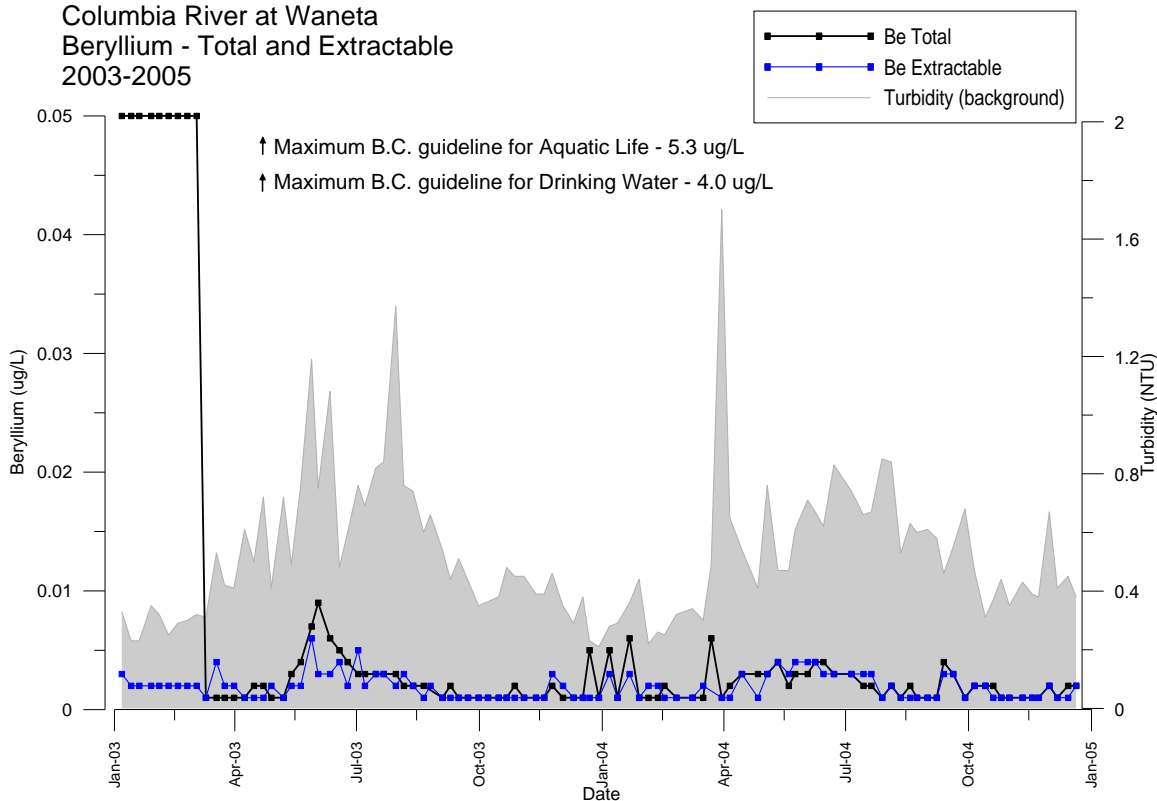
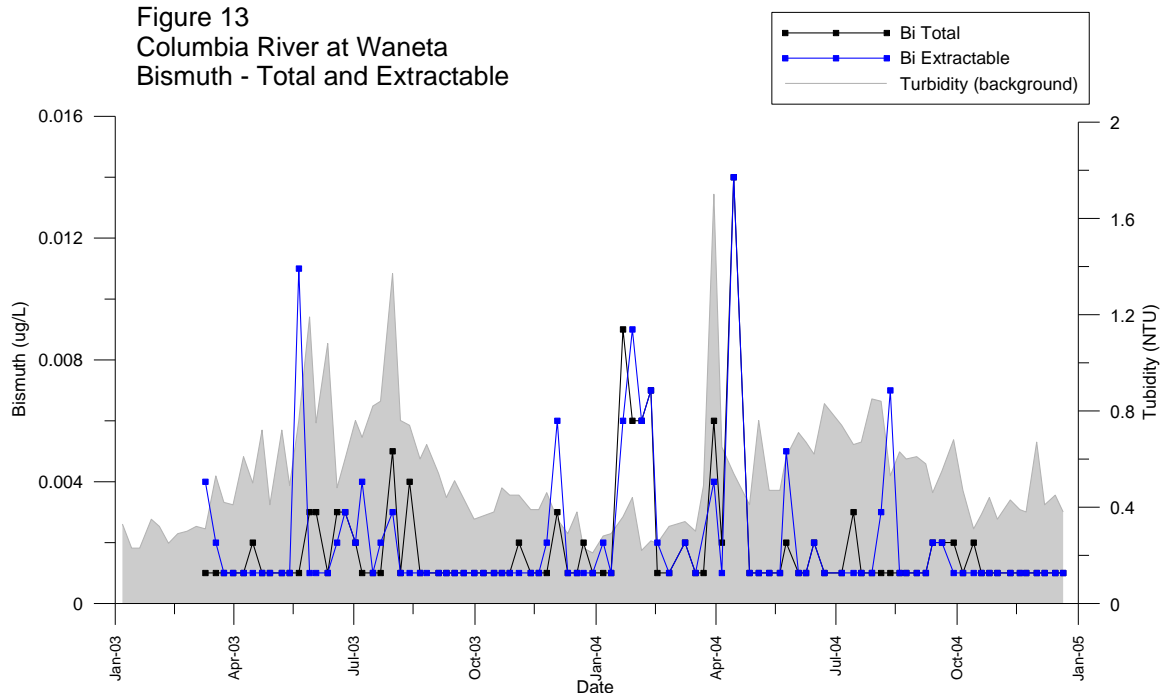


Figure 12  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Beryllium - Total and Extractable  
2003-2005



# Water Quality Assessment of the Columbia River at Waneta 1983-2005

**Figure 13**  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Bismuth - Total and Extractable



**Figure 14**  
Columbia at Waneta  
Bromine - Dissolved

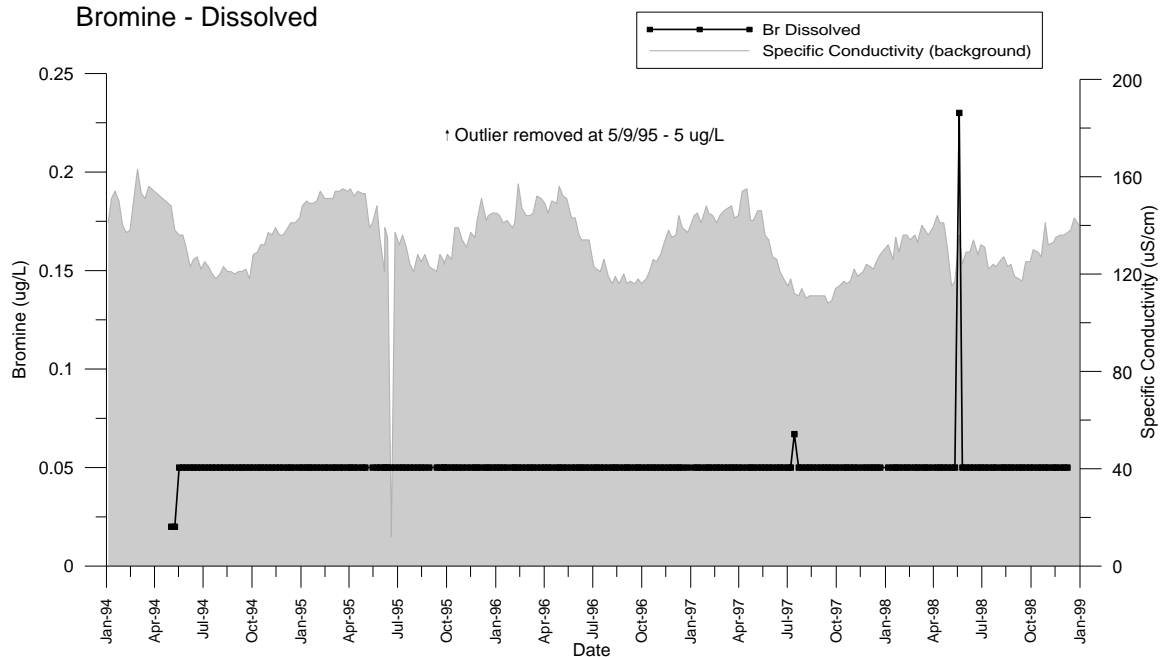


Figure 15  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Carbon Dissolved Organic  
1997 - 2005

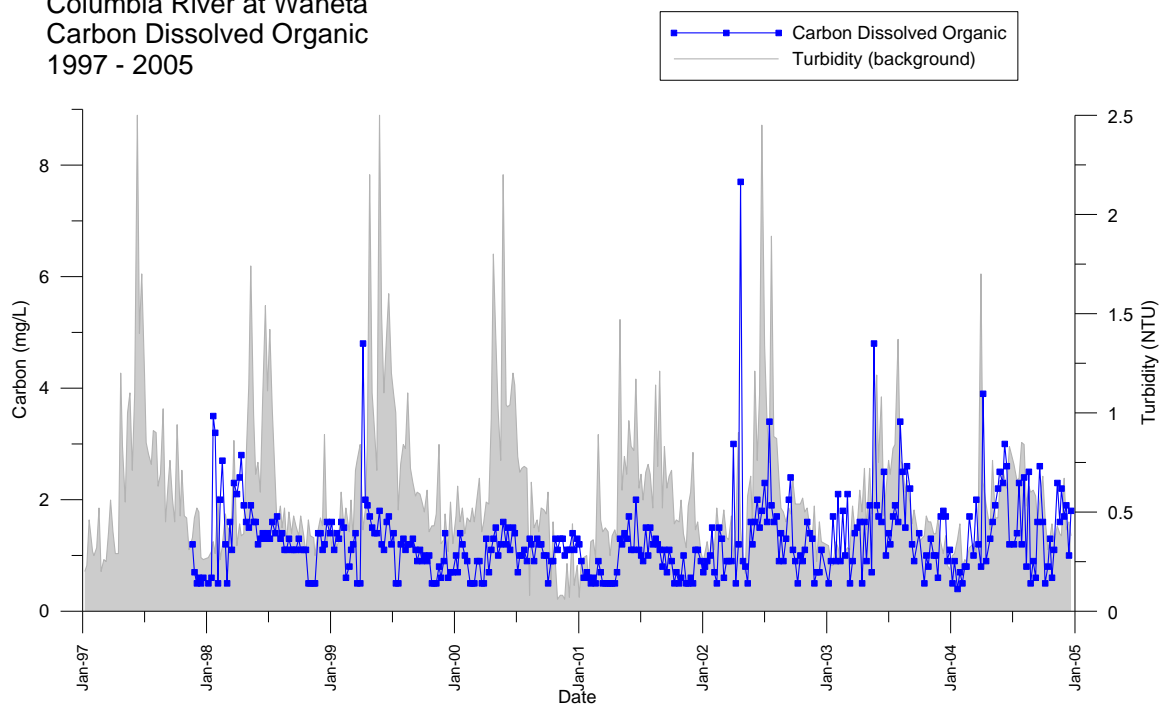


Figure 16  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Calcium - Dissolved and Extractable

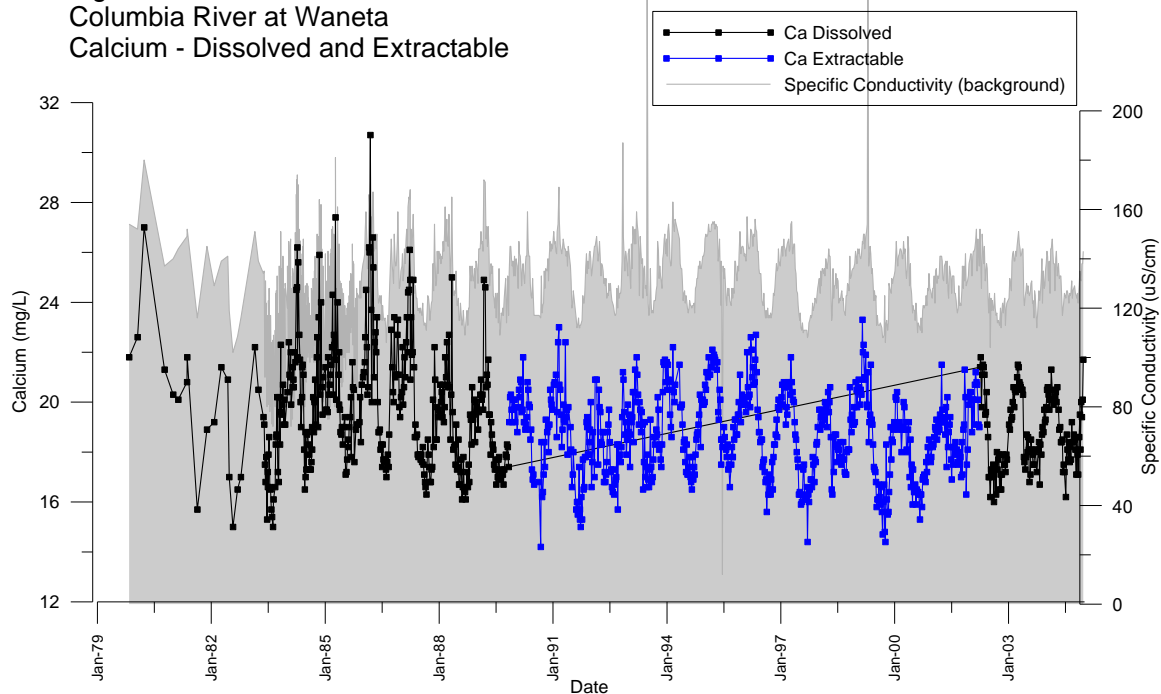




Figure 17  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Cadmium - Total and Extractable  
1979 - 2005

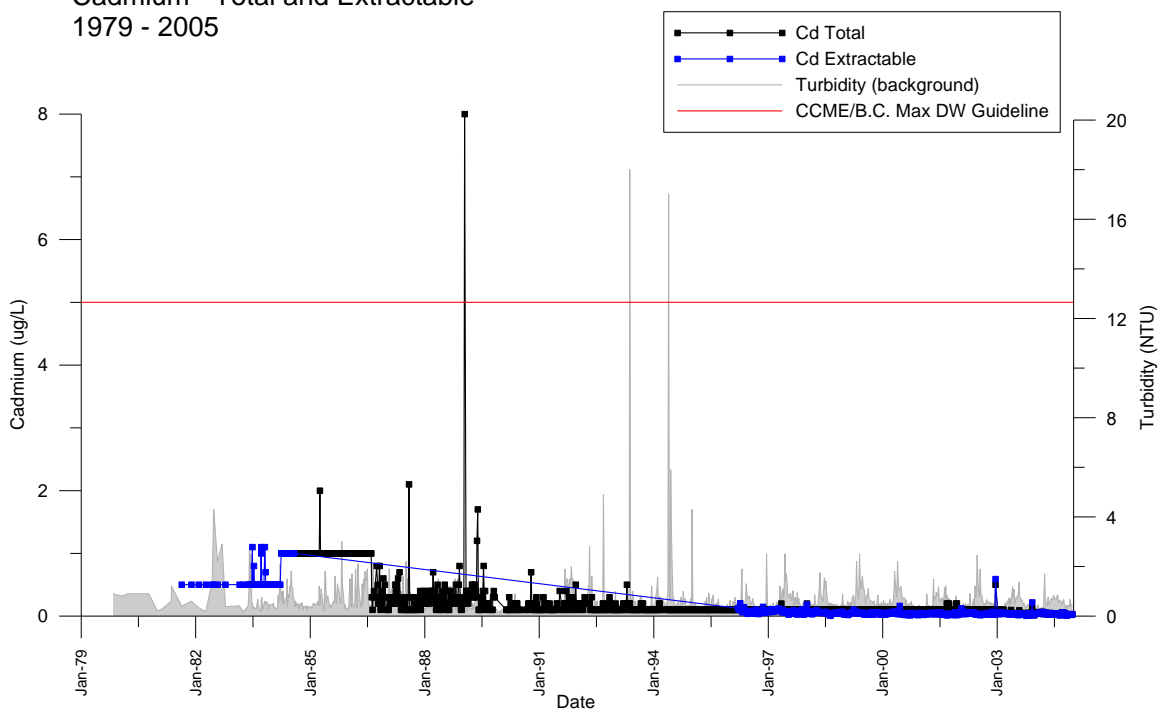


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Columbia River at Waneta  
Cadmium - Total and Extractable  
1996 - 2005

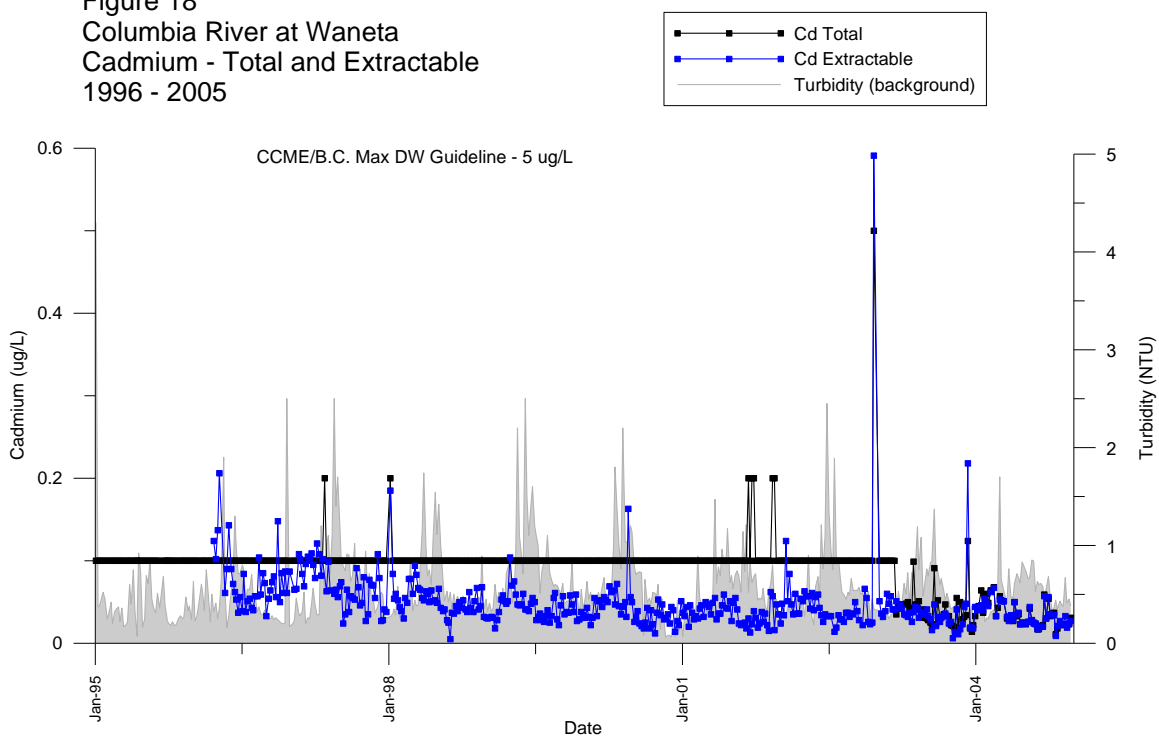


Figure 19  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Chloride - Dissolved

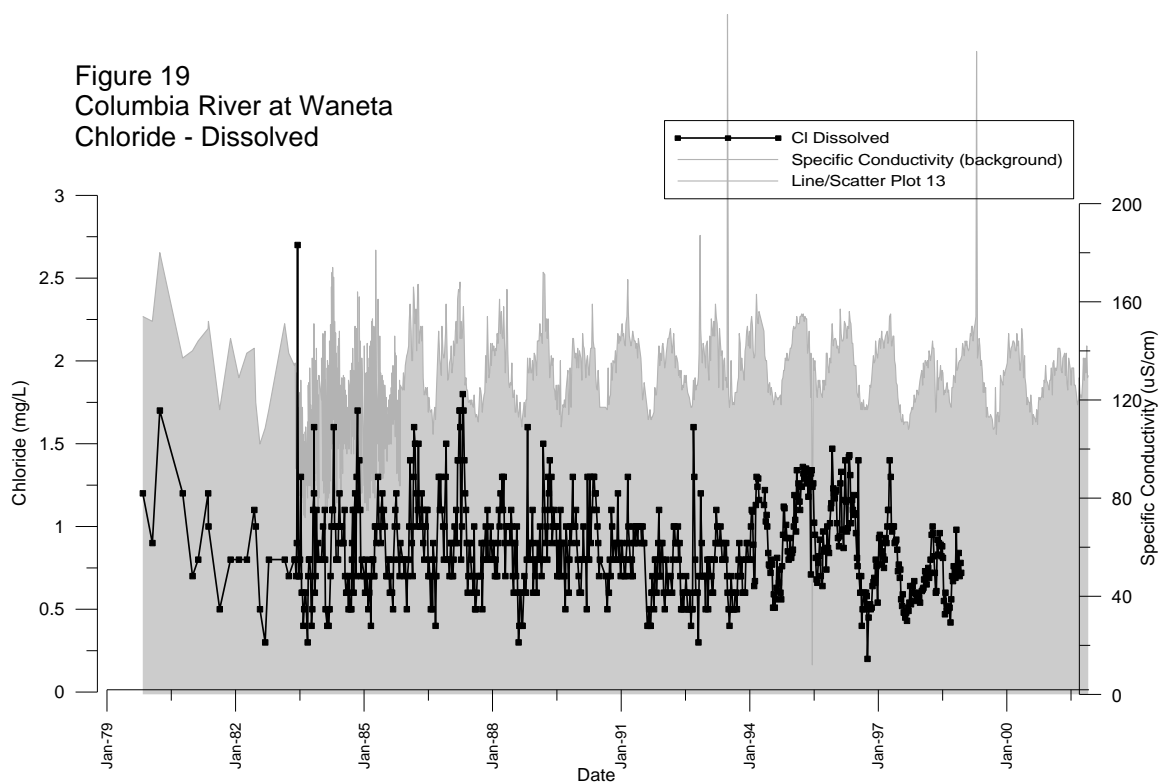


Figure 20  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Cobalt - Total and Extractable  
1990 - 2005

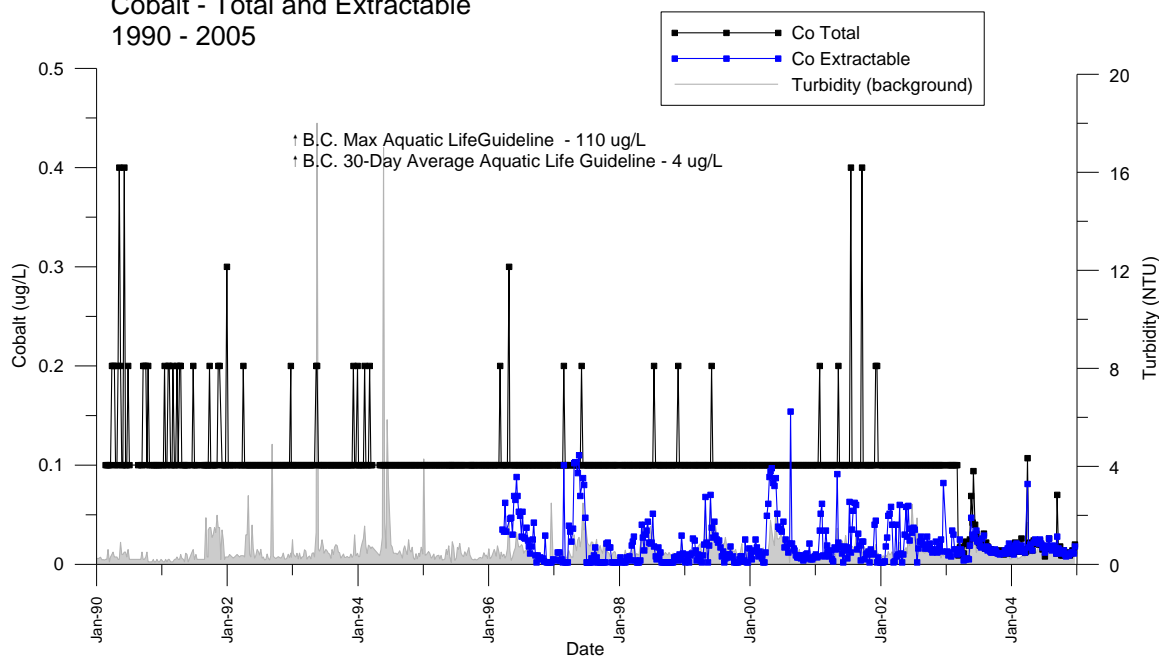


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Columbia River at Waneta  
Cobalt - Total and Extractable  
2003 - 2005

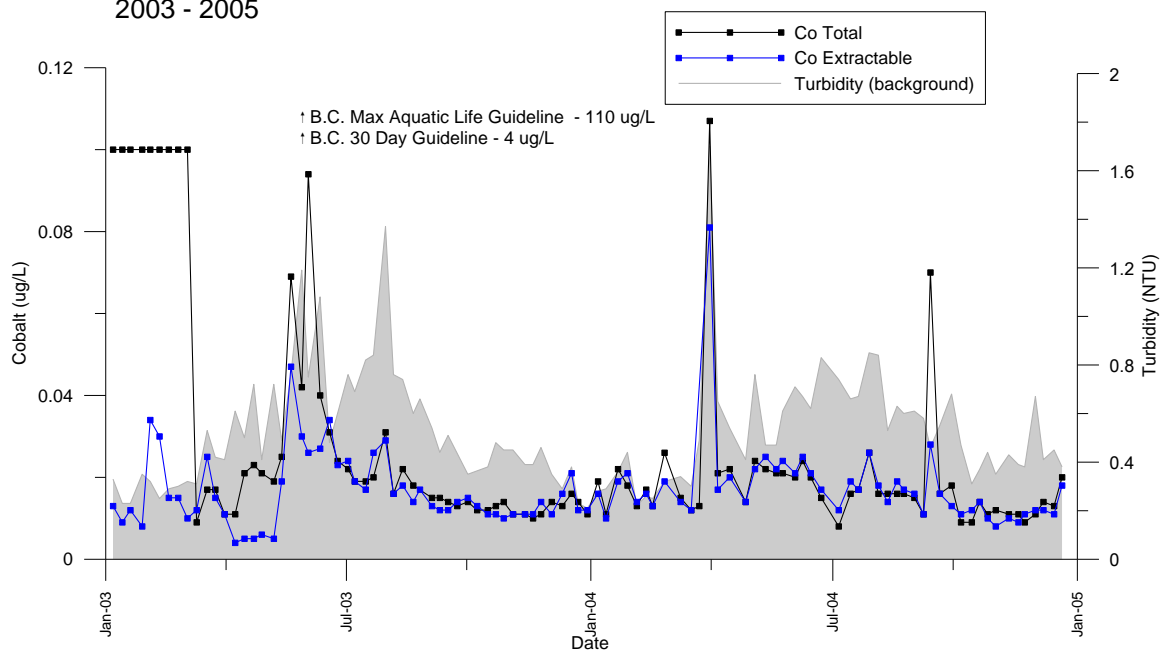


Figure 22  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Colour - Apparent

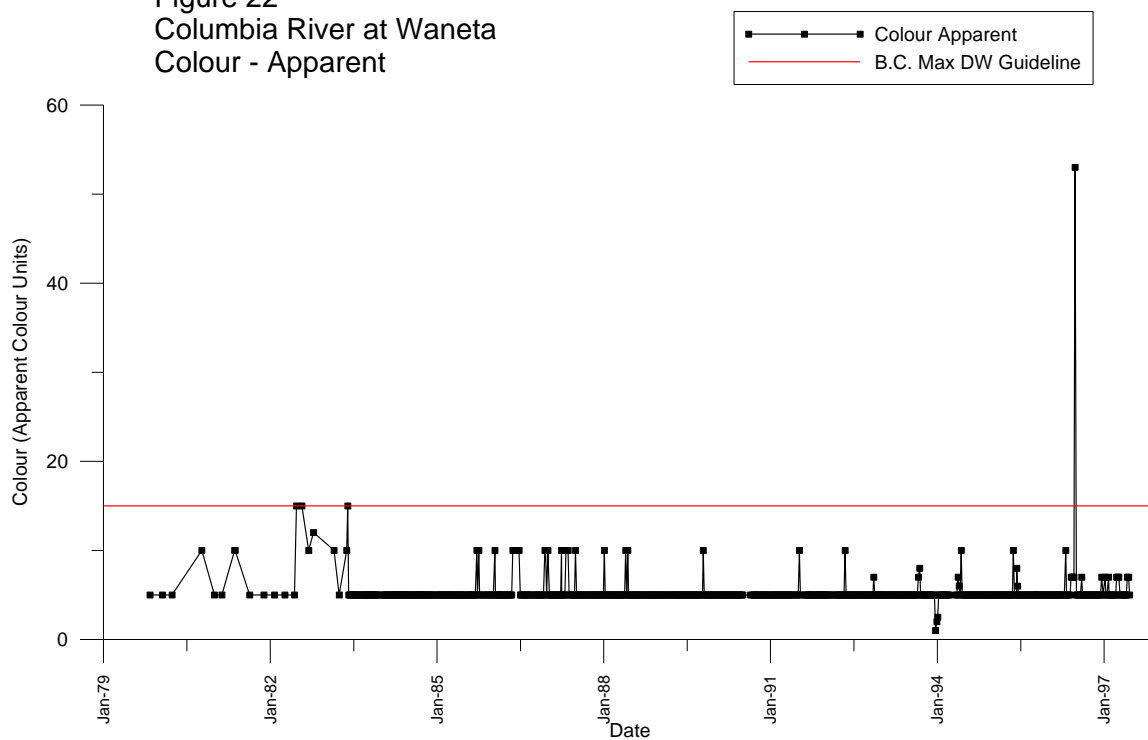


Figure 23  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Colour - True

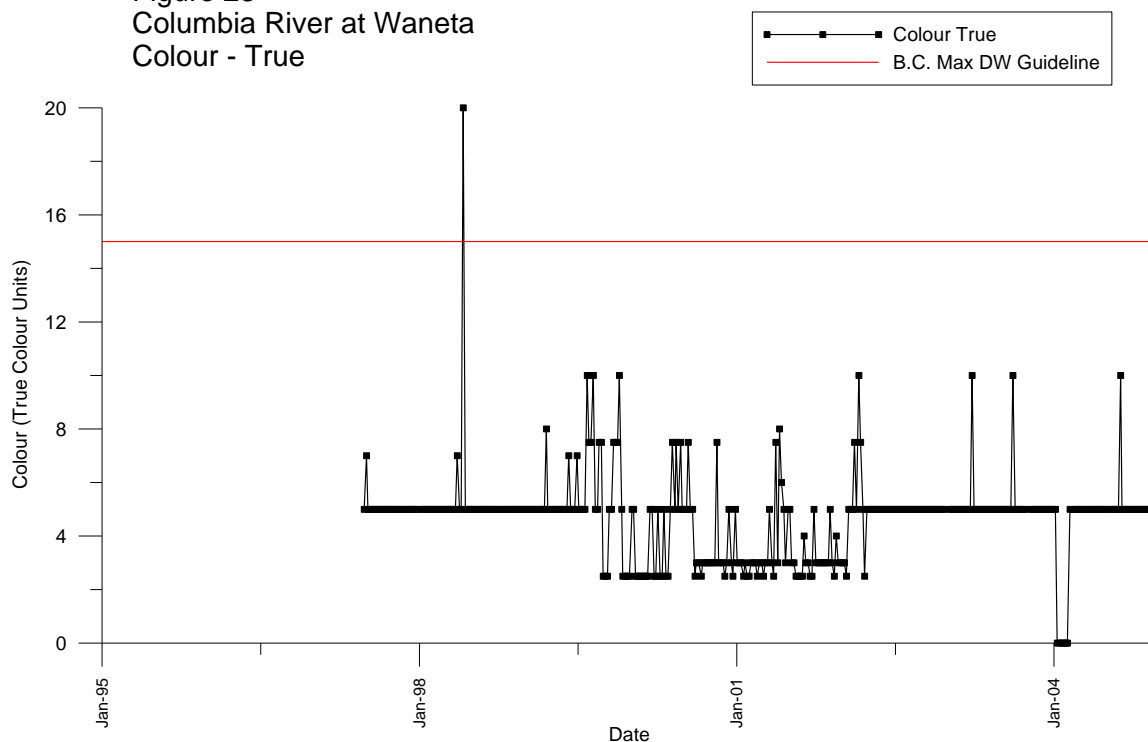


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Columbia River at Waneta  
Chromium - Total and Extractable  
1996 - 2005

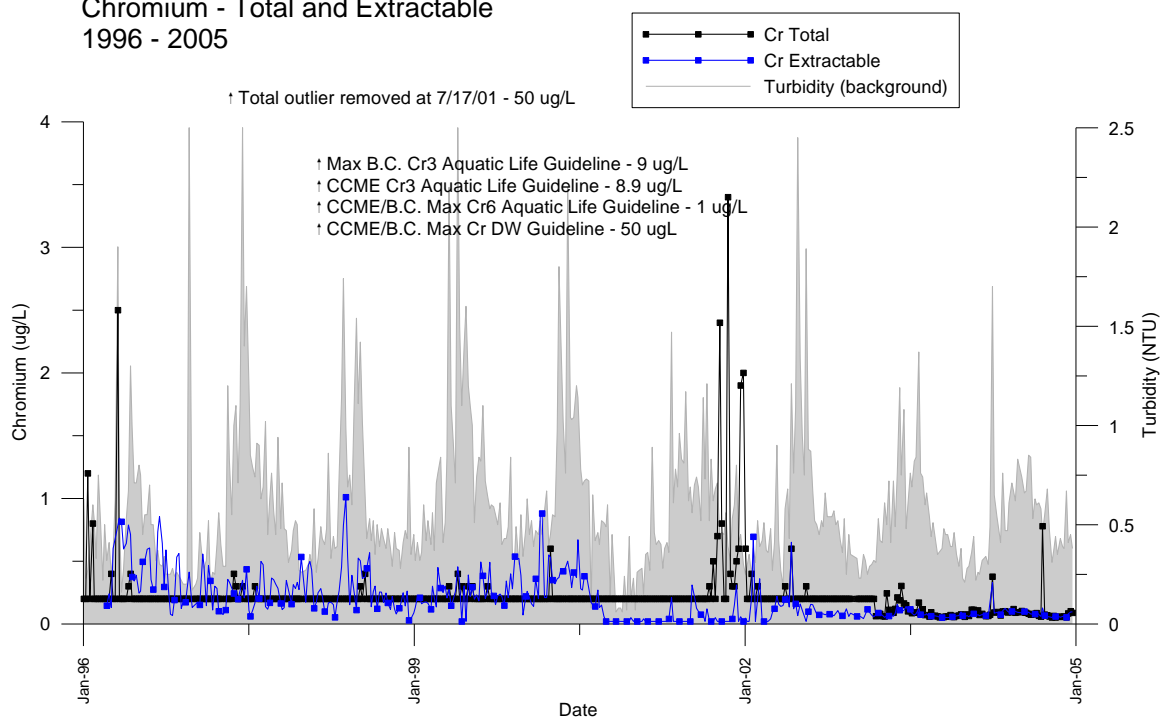


Figure 25  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Chromium - Total and Extractable  
2003 - 2005

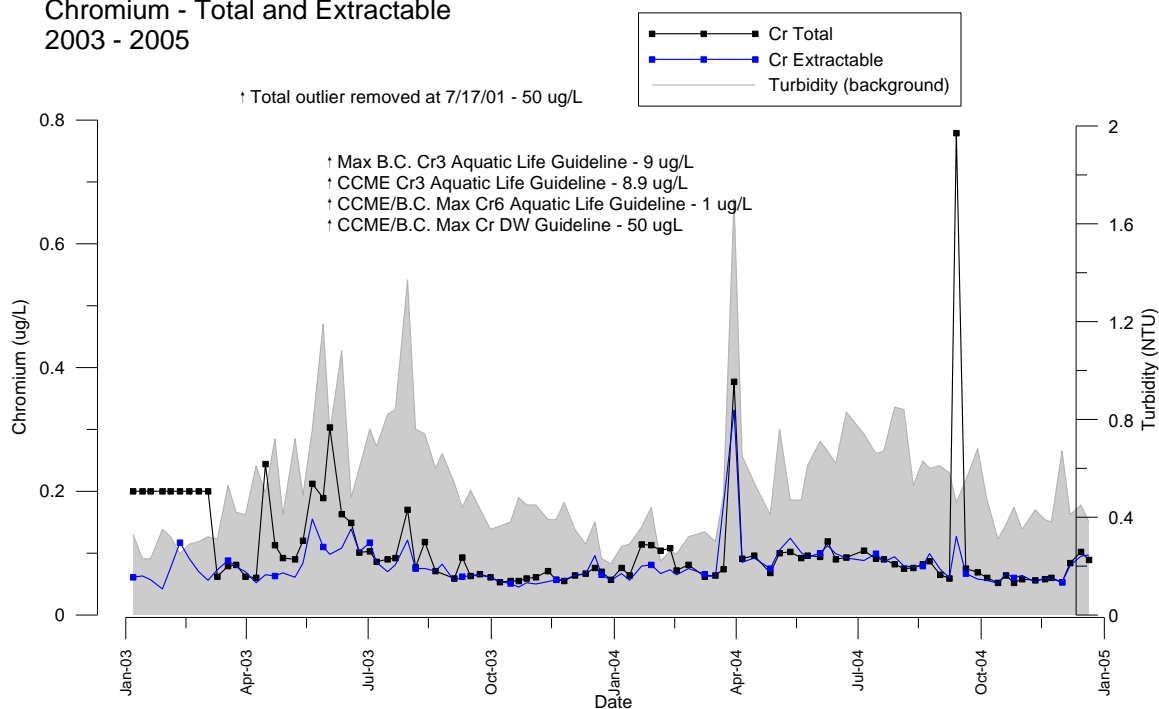


Figure 26  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Copper - Total and Extractable  
1979 - 2005

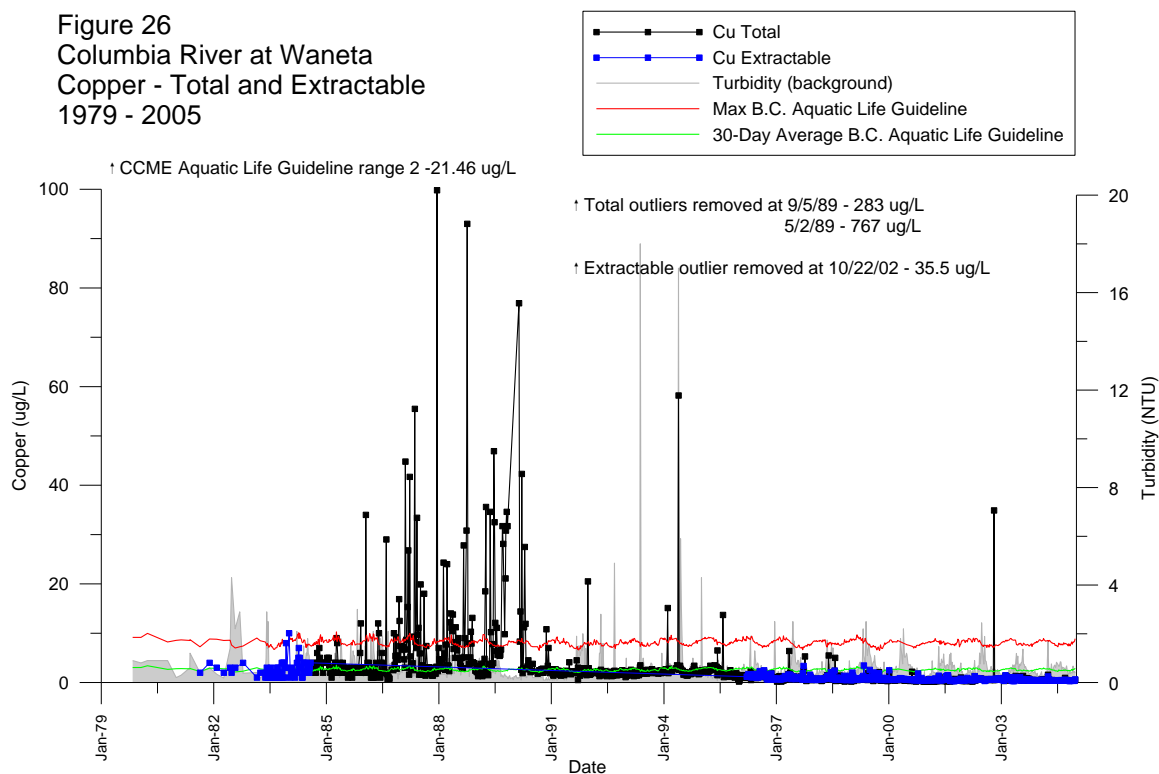


Figure 27  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Fluoride - Total and Dissolved

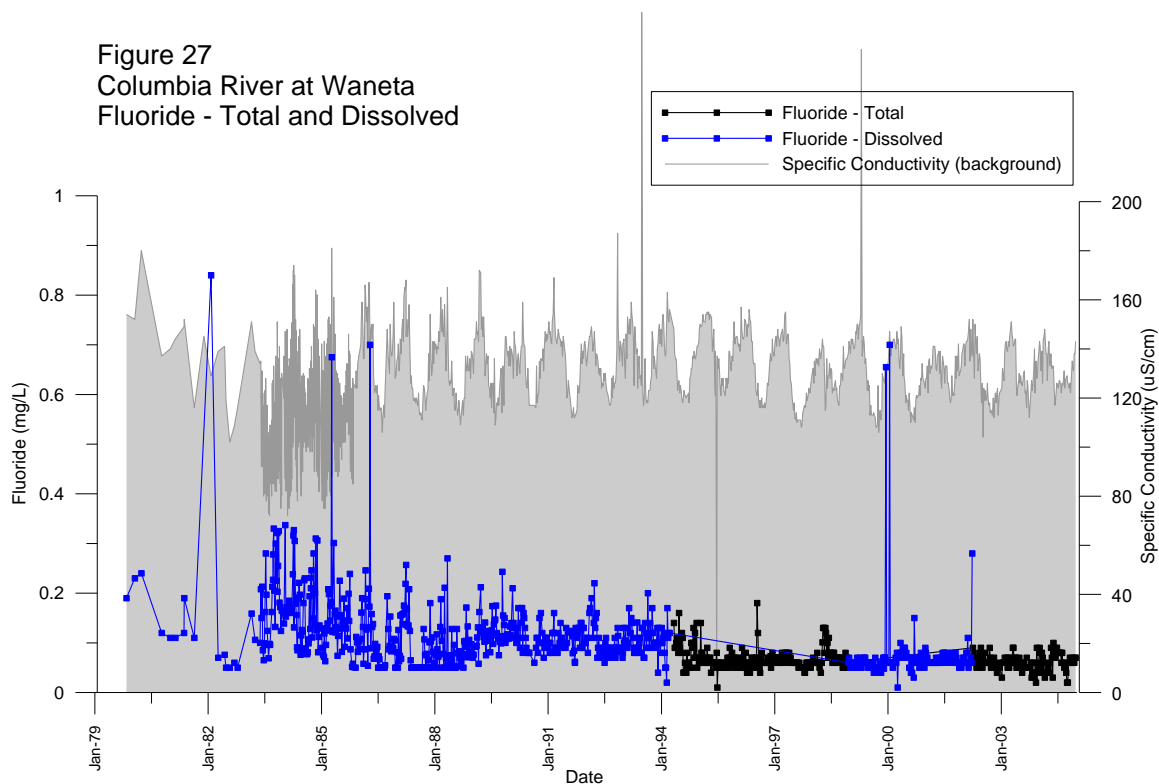


Figure 28  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Iron - Total and Extractable  
1979 - 2005

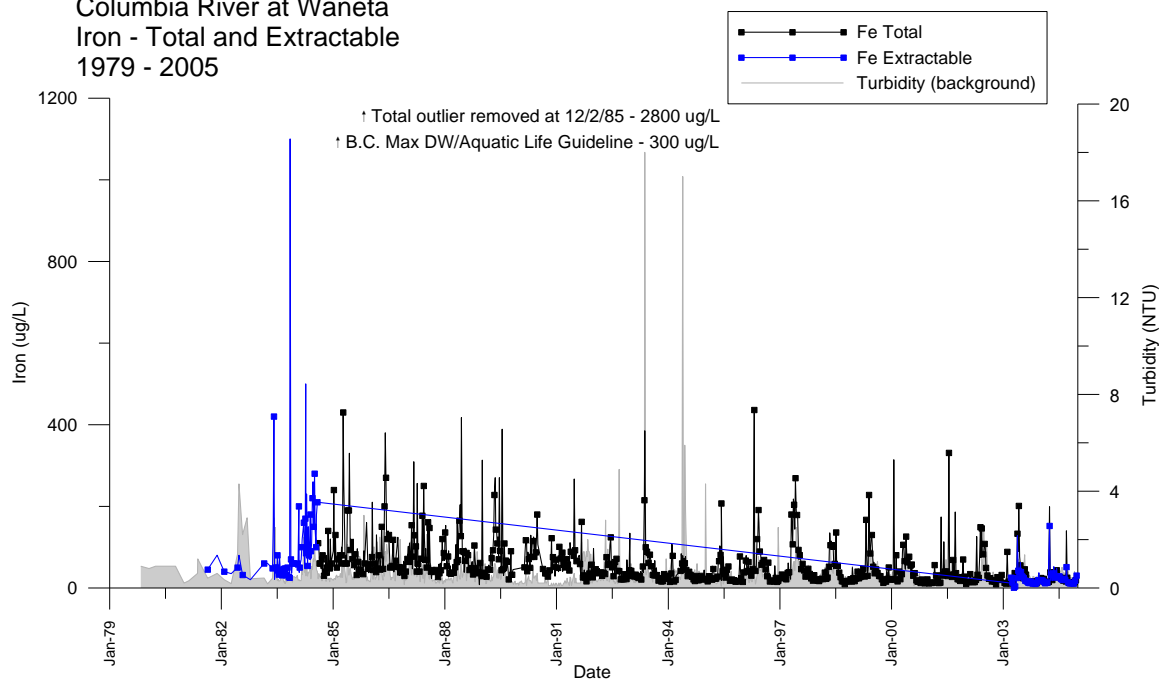


Figure 29  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Iron - Total and Extractable  
2003 - 2005

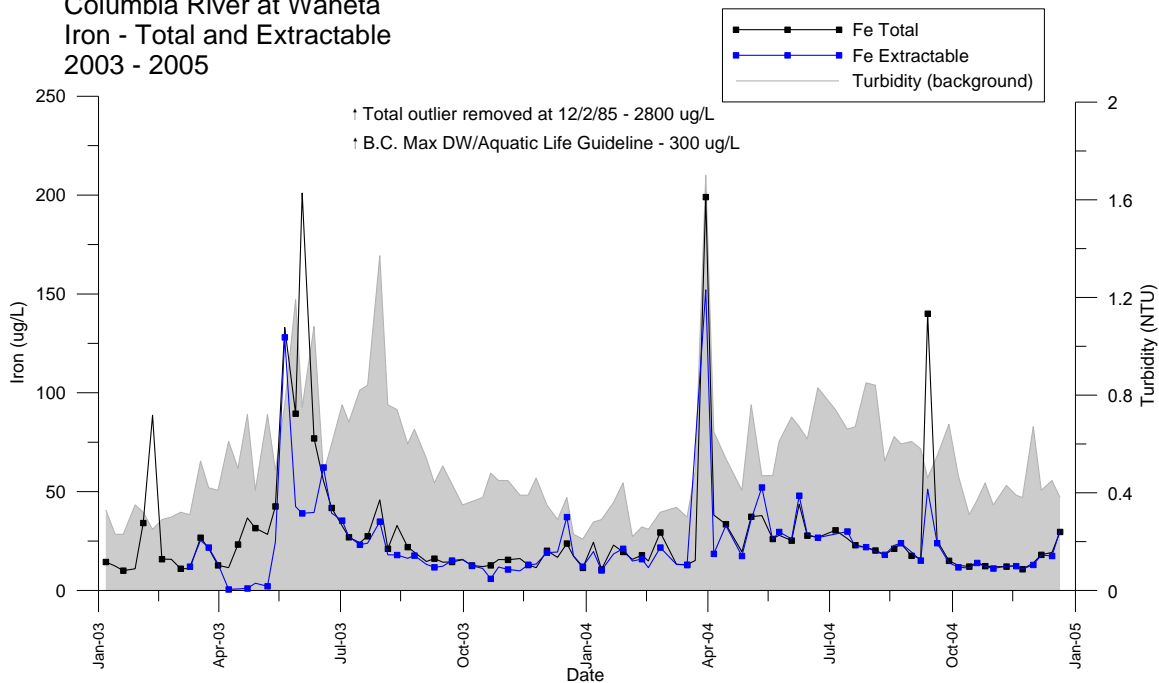
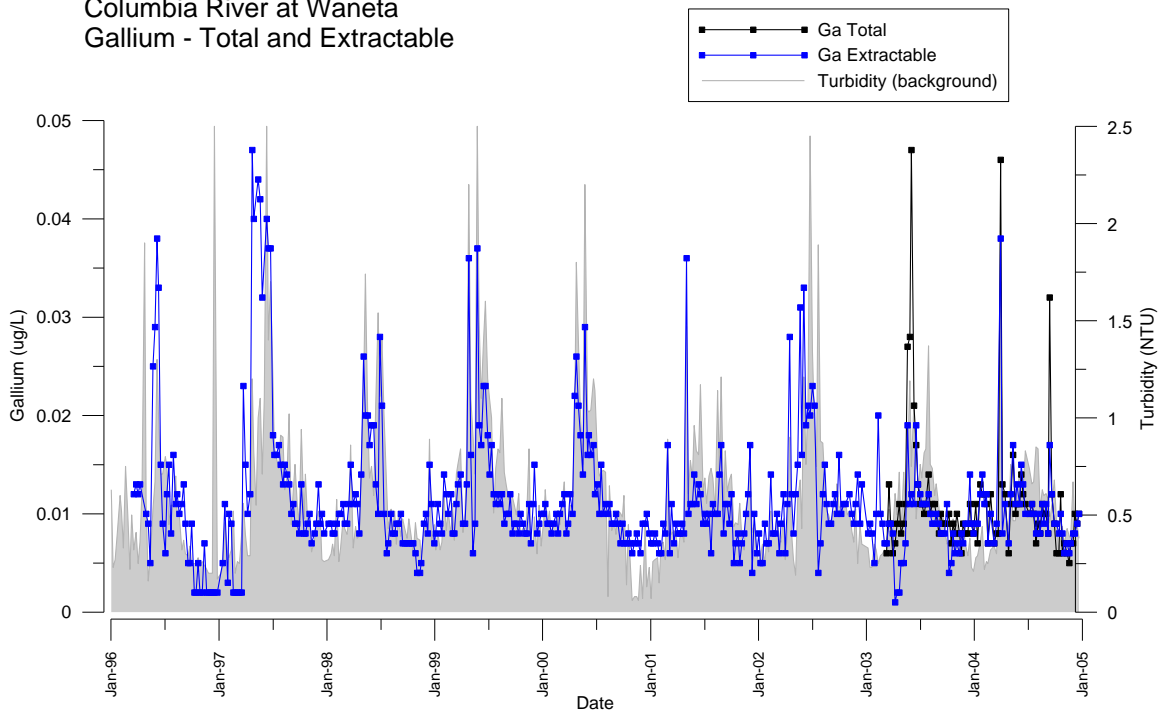


Figure 30  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Gallium - Total and Extractable



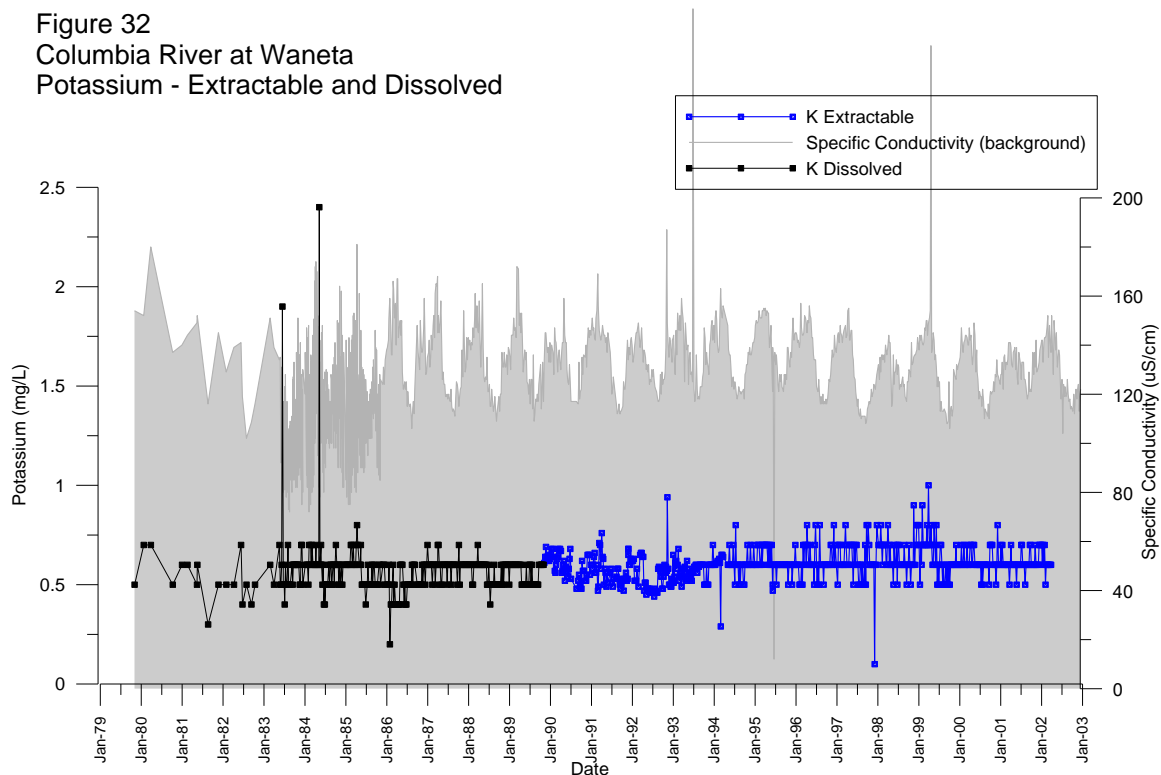
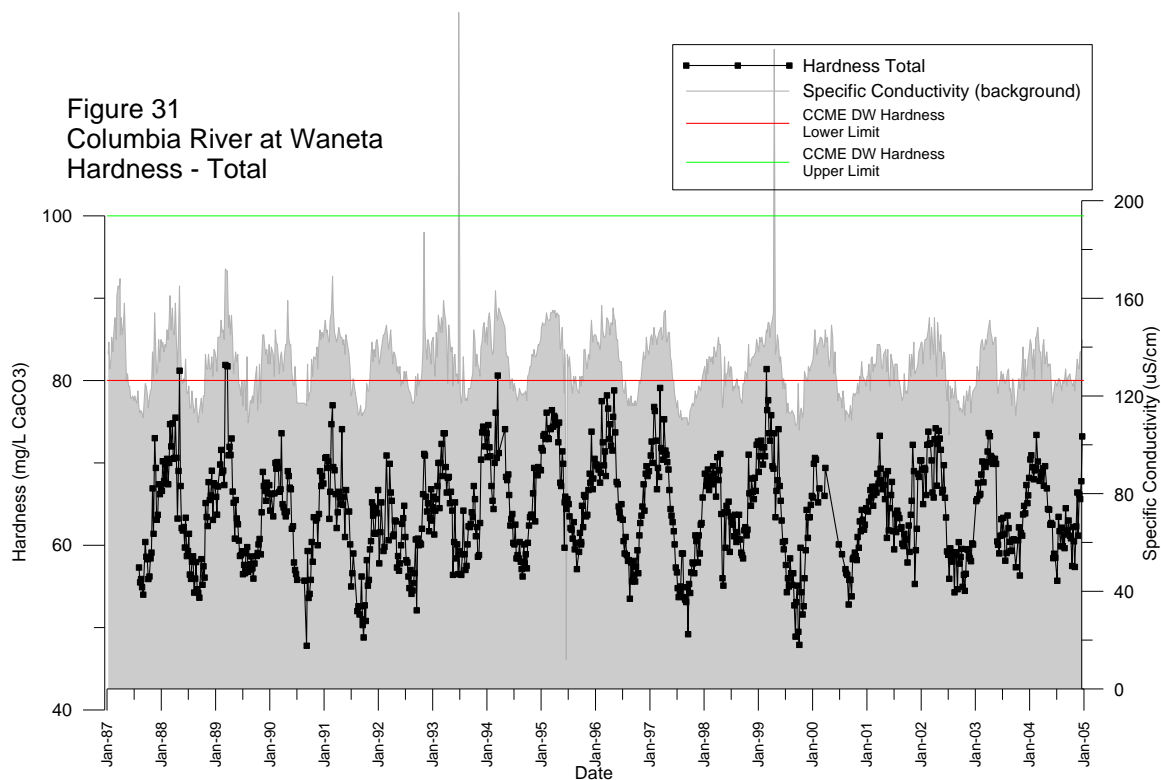




Figure 33  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Lanthanum - Total and Extractable

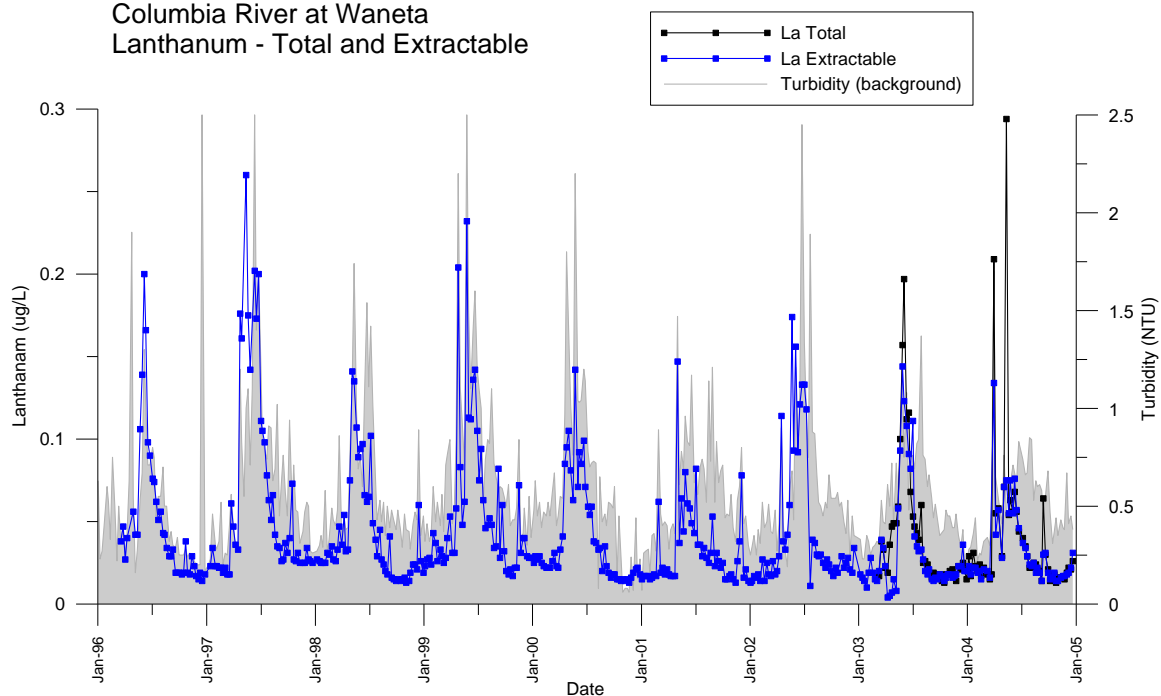


Figure 34  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Lead - Total and Extractable  
1979 - 2005

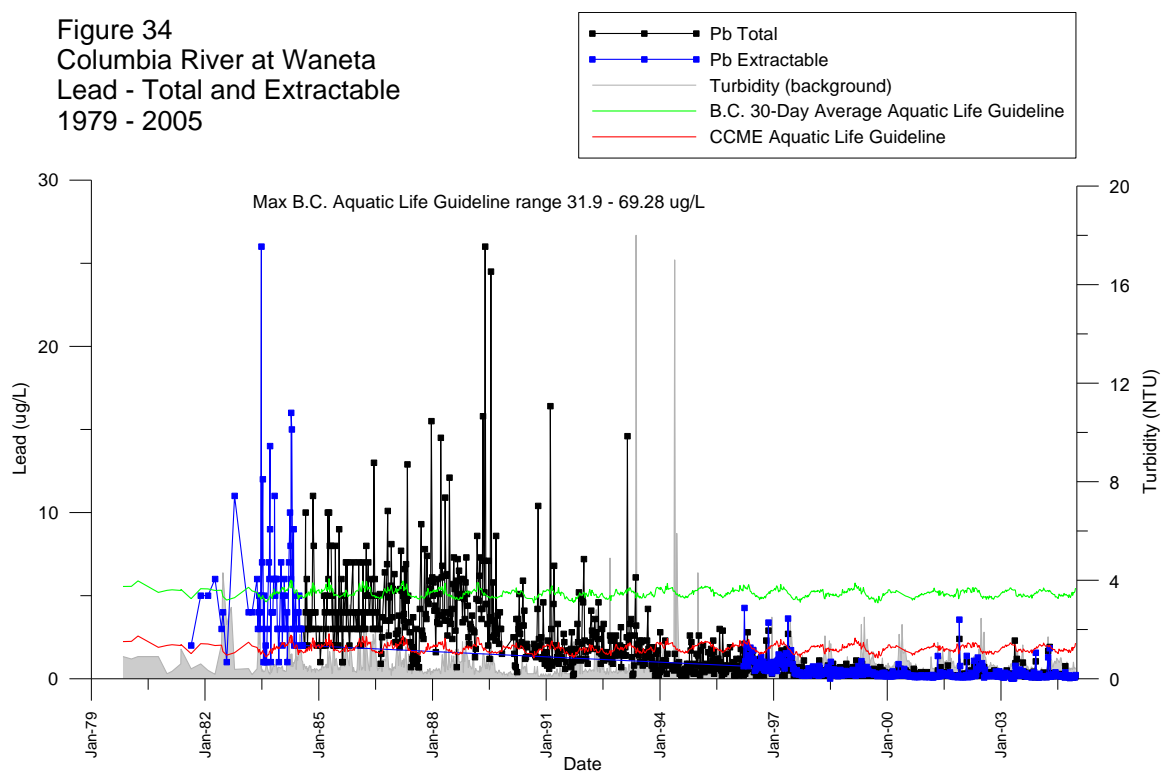


Figure 35  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Lead - Total and Extractable  
1996 - 2005

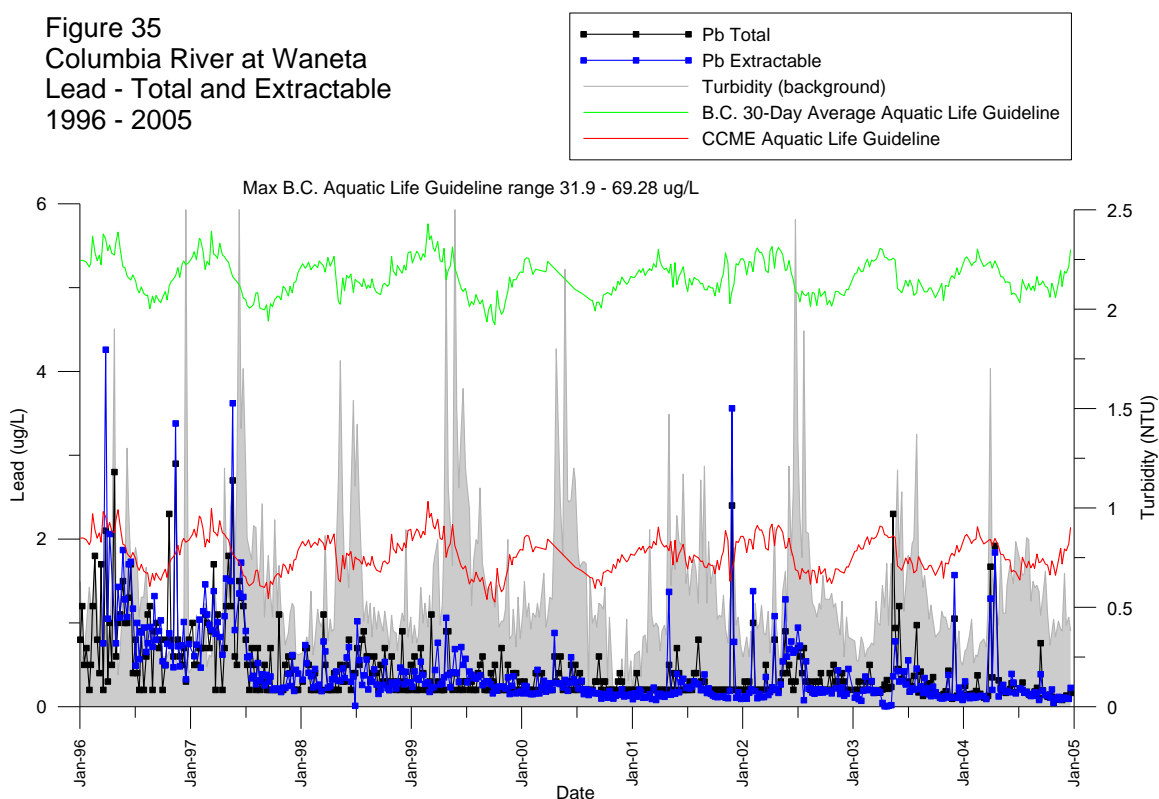


Figure 36  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Lithium - Total and Extractable

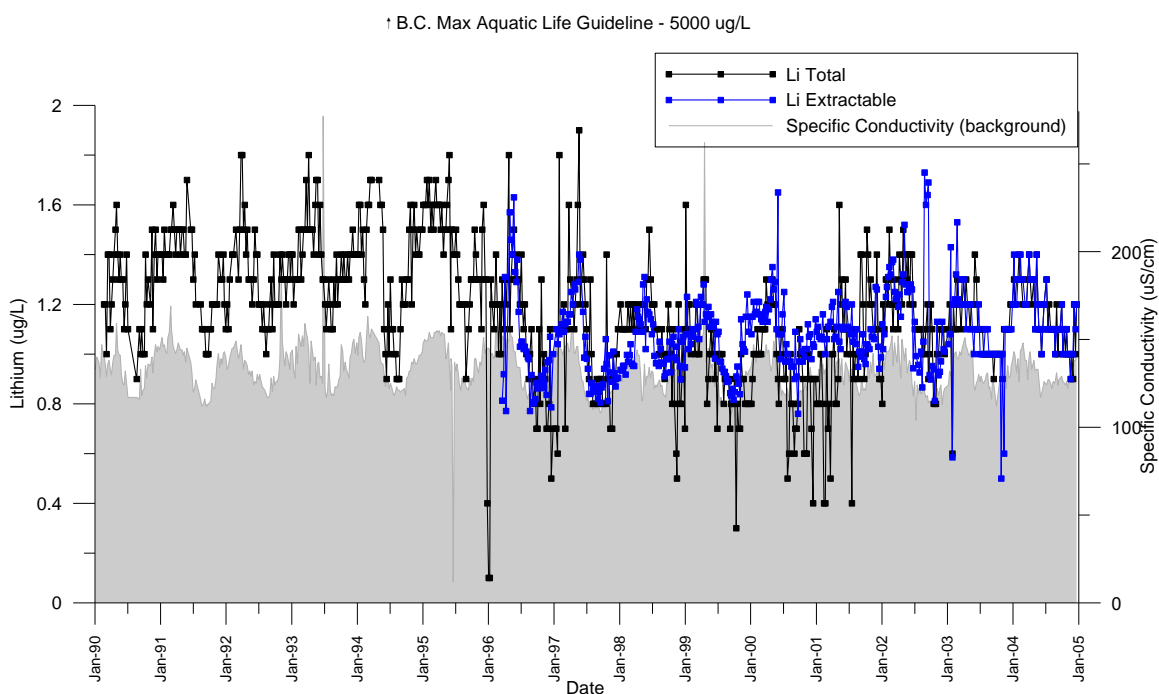


Figure 37  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Molybdenum - Total and Extractable  
1989 - 2005

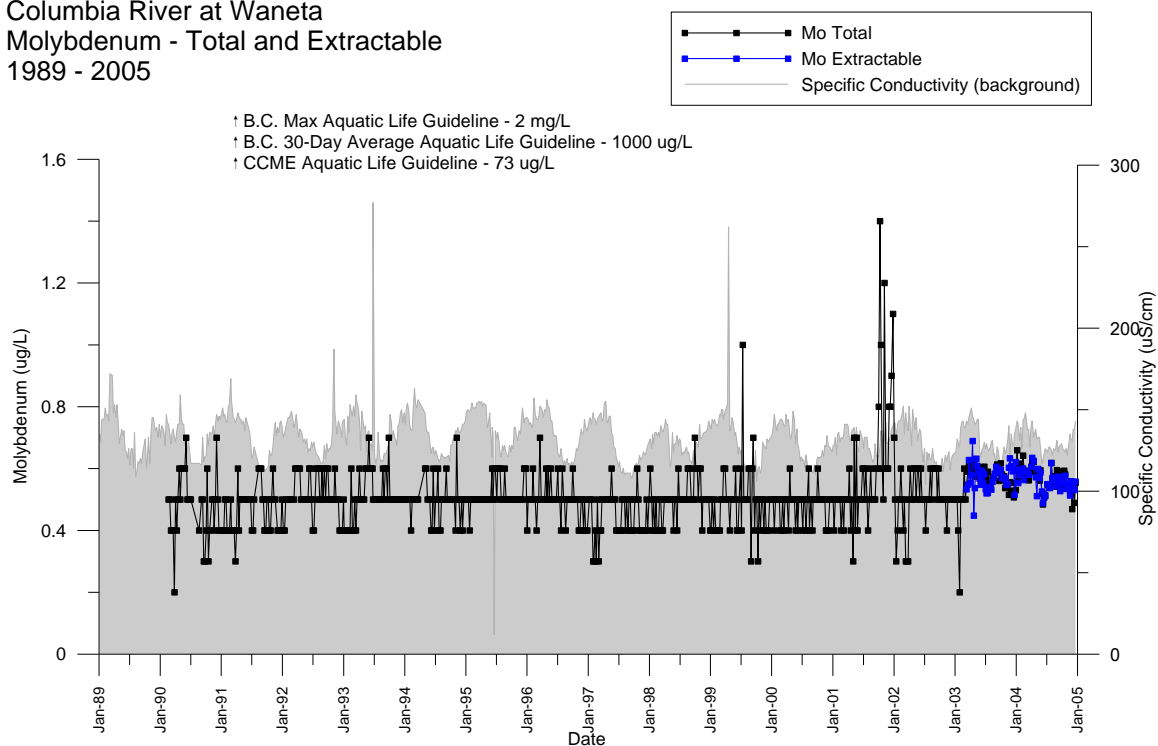


Figure 38  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Molybdenum - Total and Extractable  
2003 - 2005

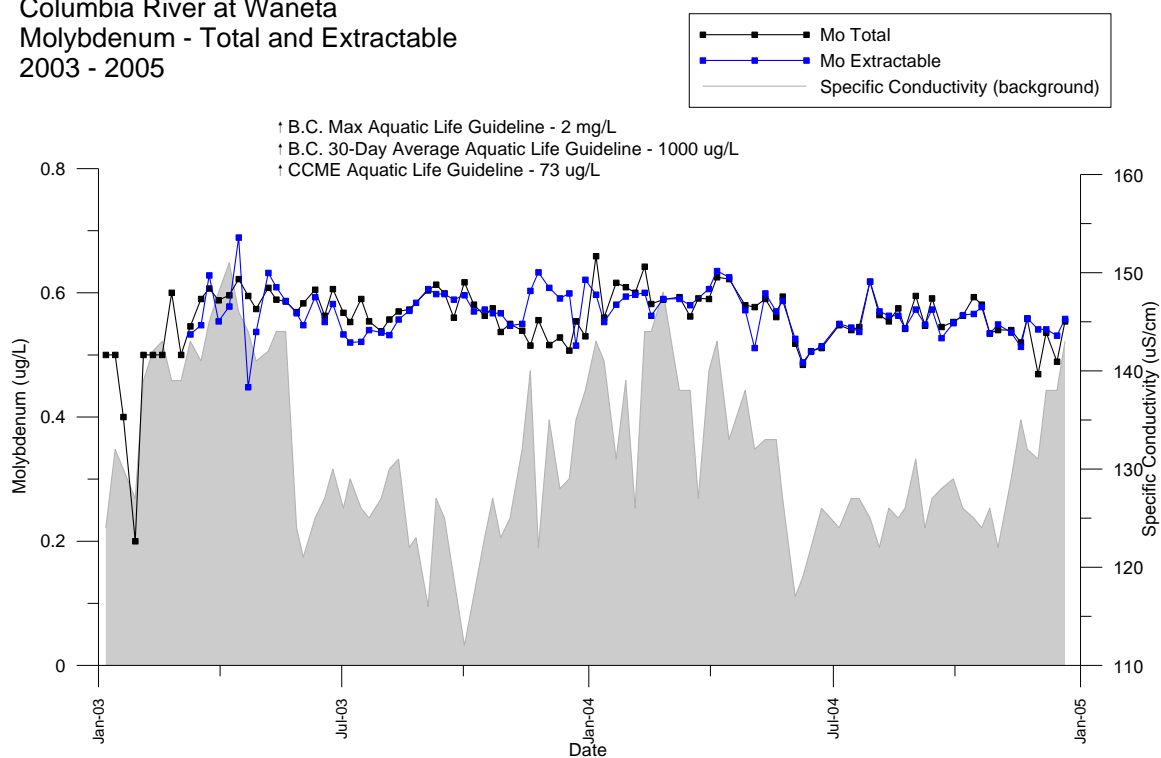


Figure 39  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Nitrogen - Dissolved NO<sub>3</sub> and NO<sub>2</sub>  
1979 - 1996

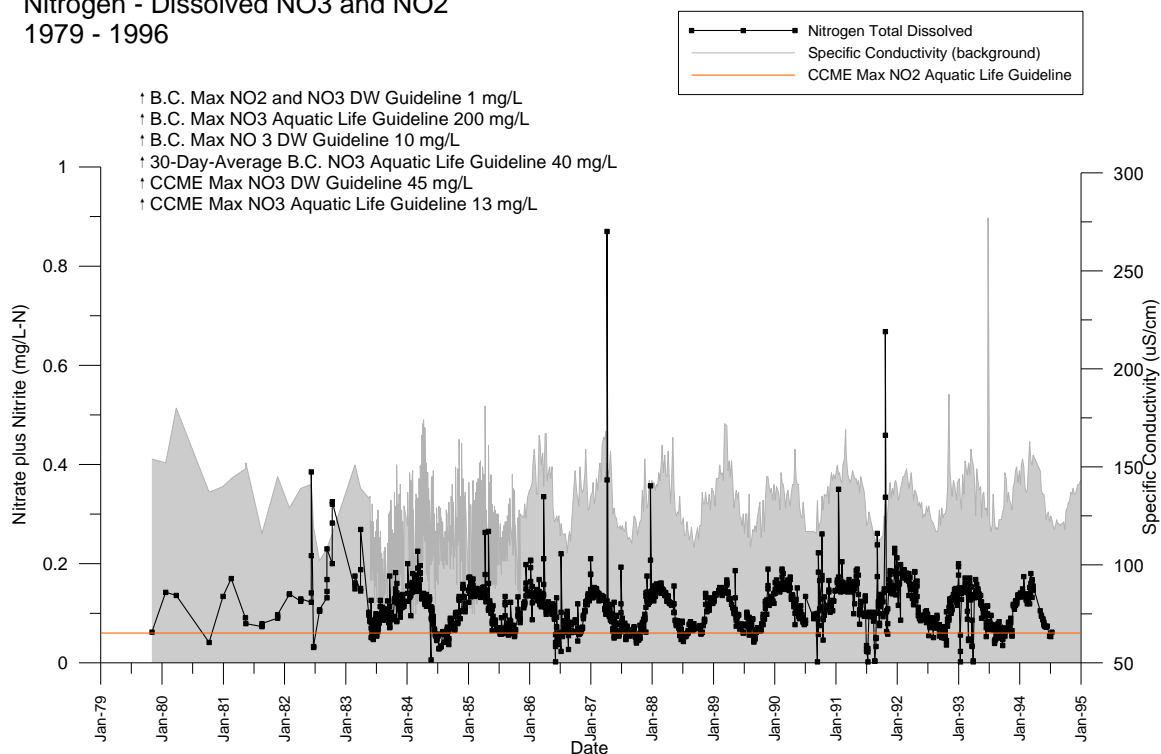


Figure 40  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Nitrogen - Total Dissolved

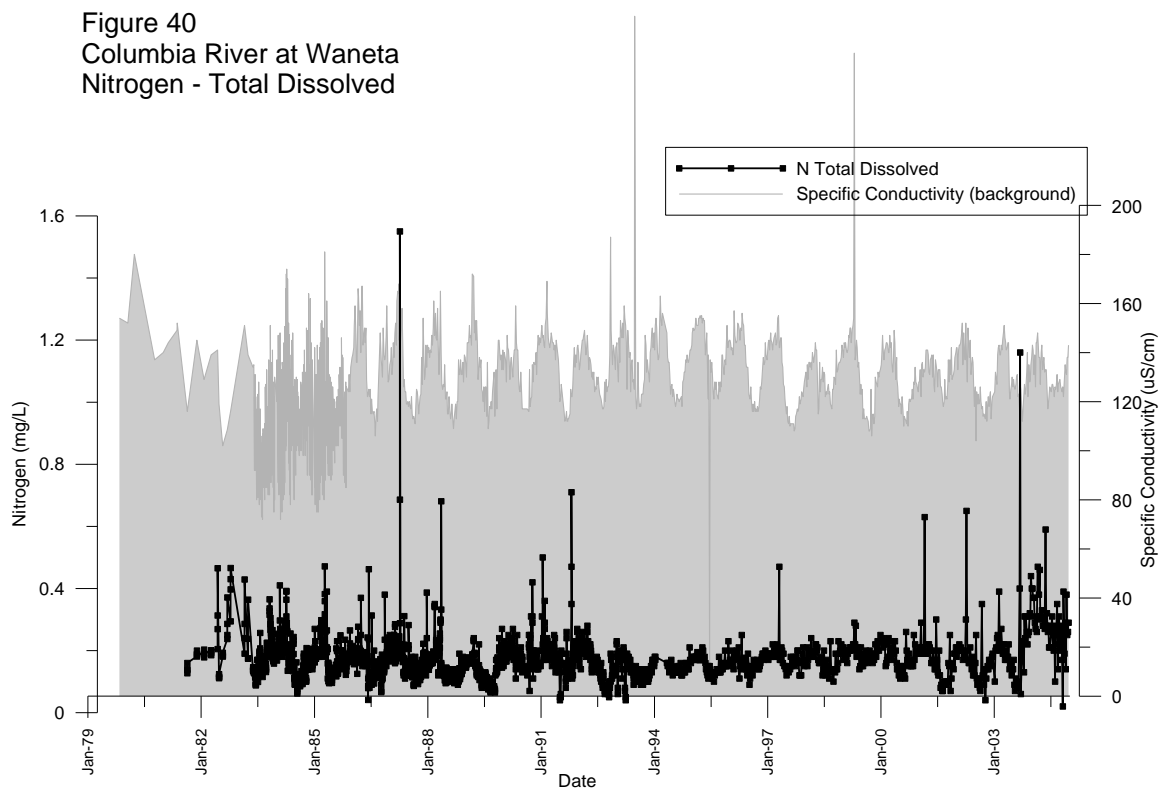


Figure 41  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Nitrogen - Dissolved Nitrate

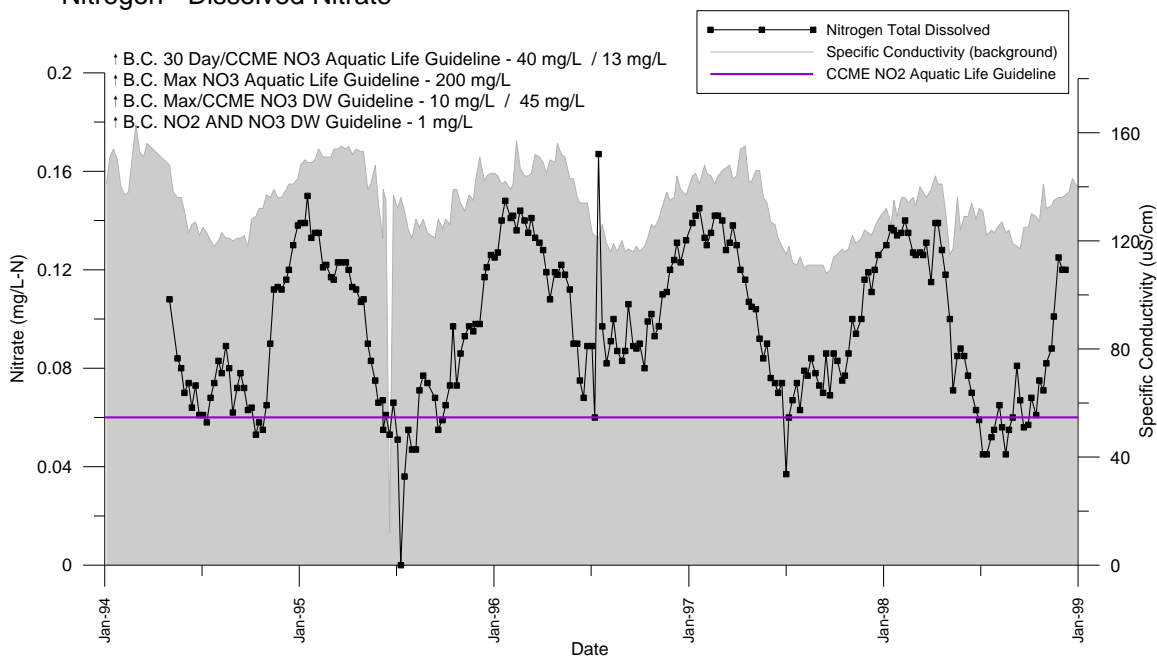


Figure 42  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Nickel - Total and Extractable  
1987 - 2005

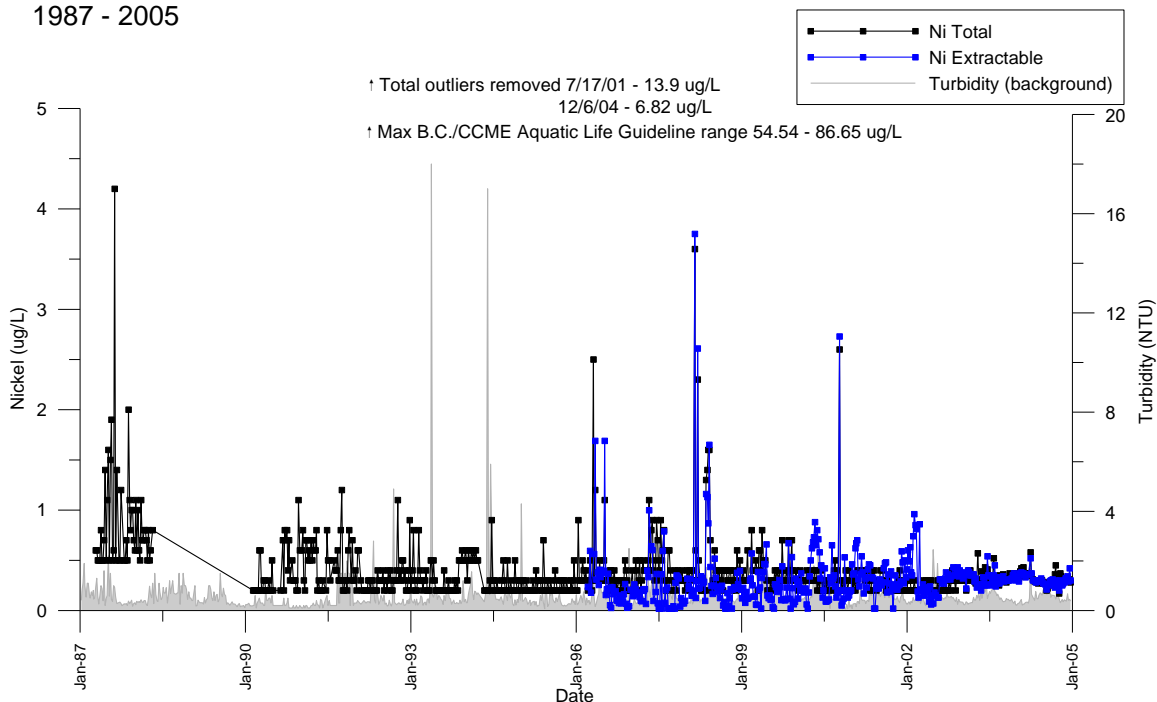


Figure 43  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Niobium - Extractable

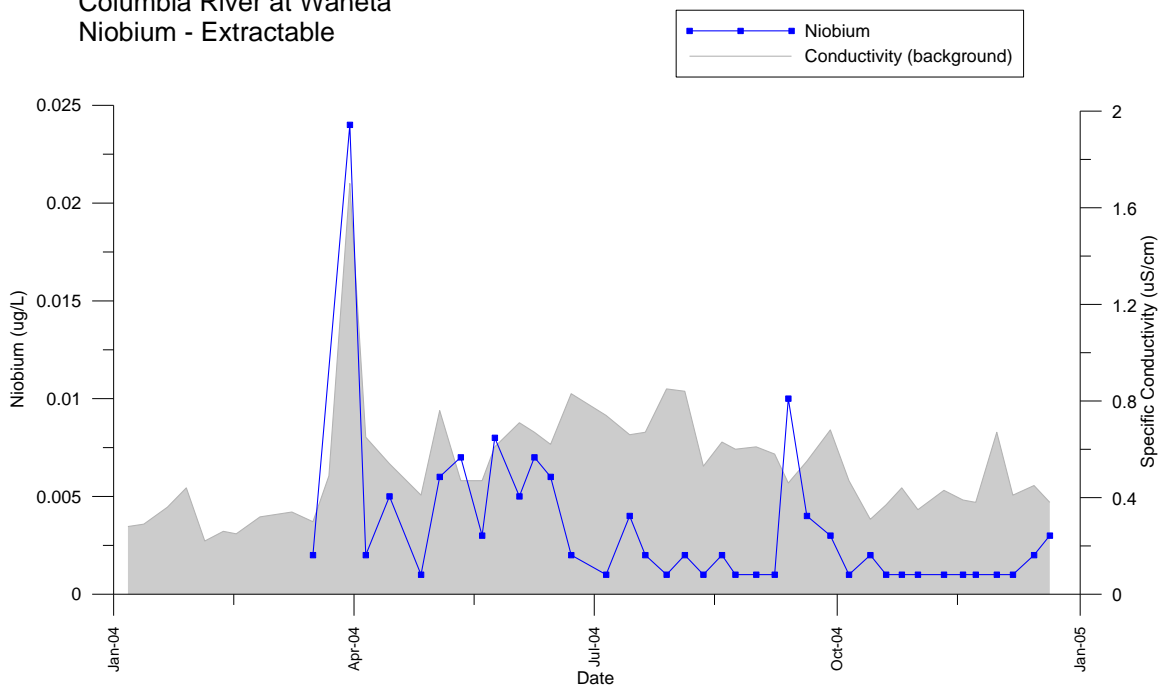
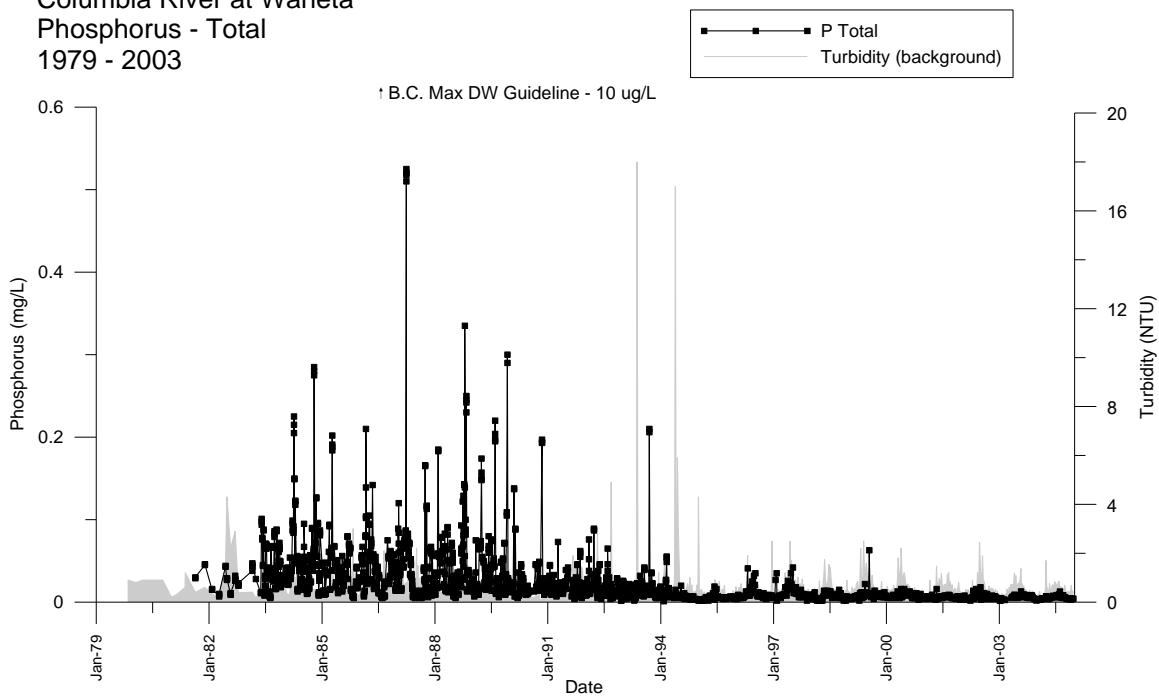
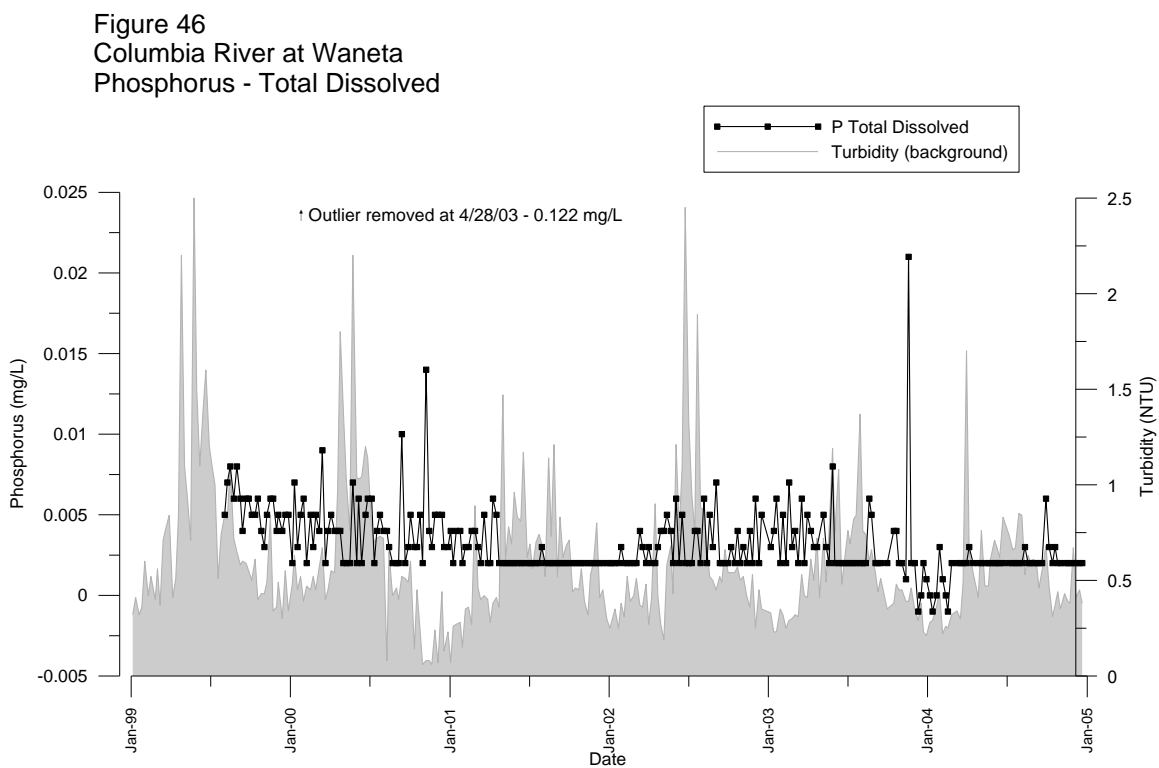
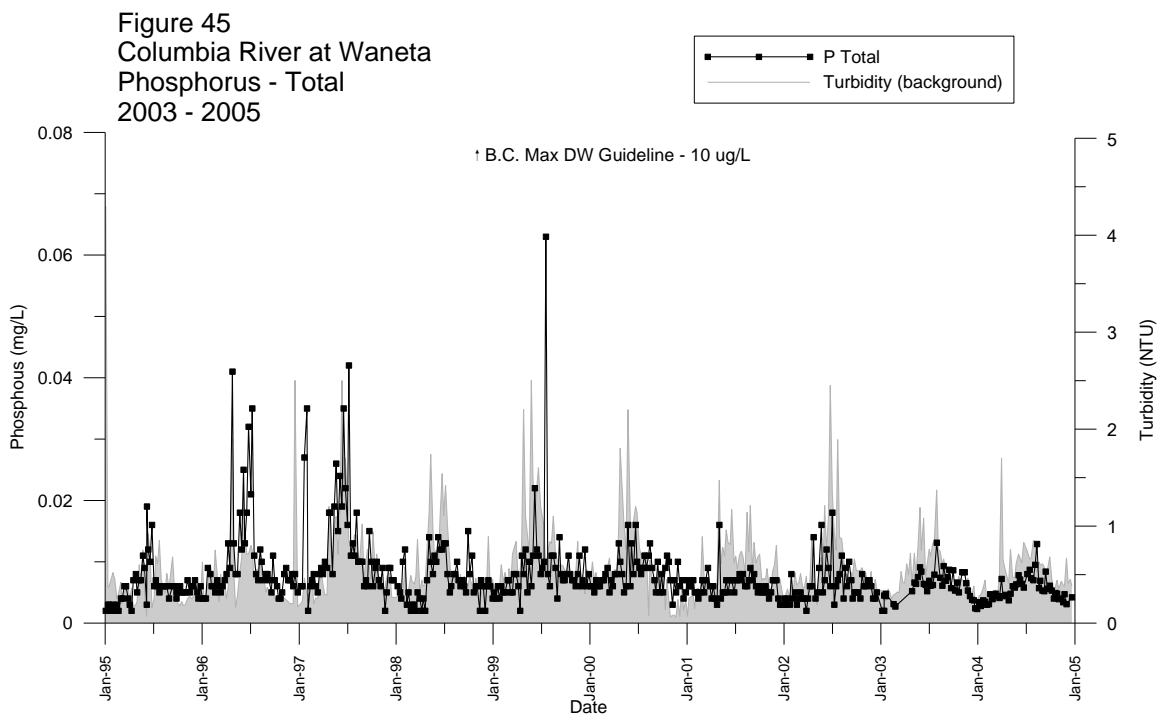


Figure 44  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Phosphorus - Total  
1979 - 2003





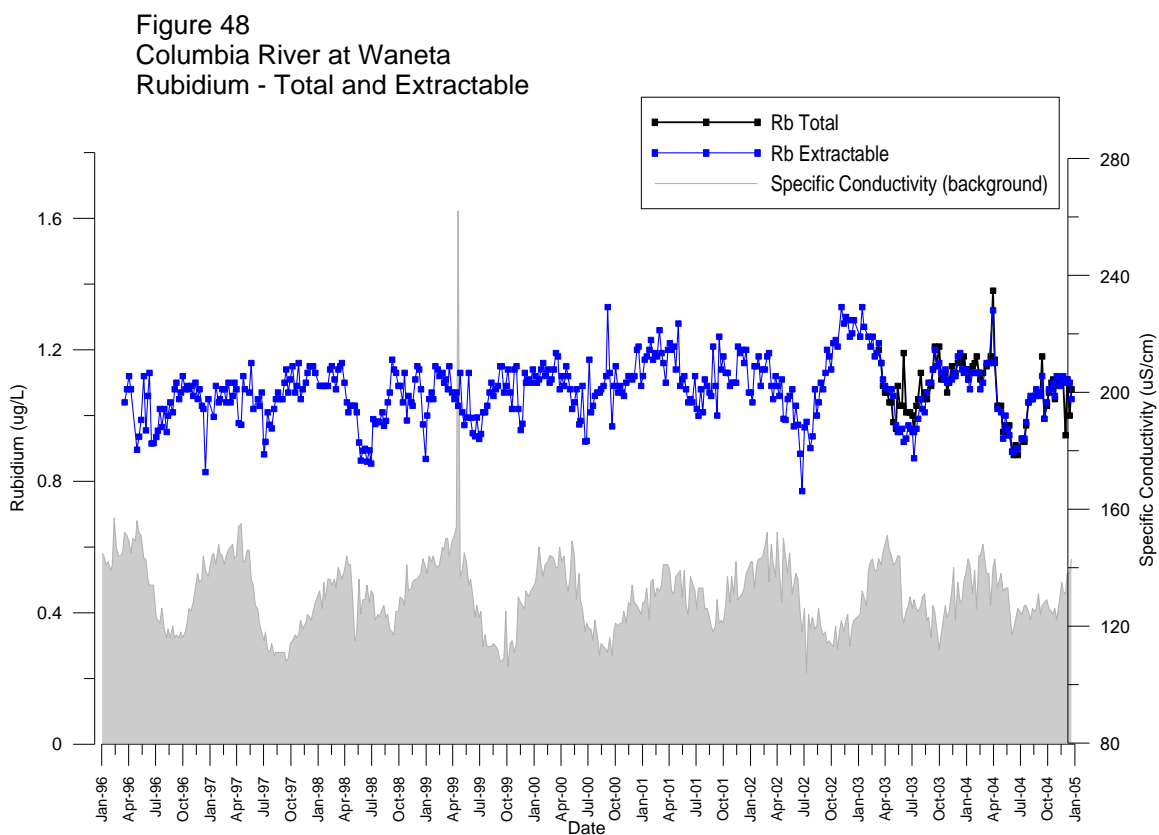
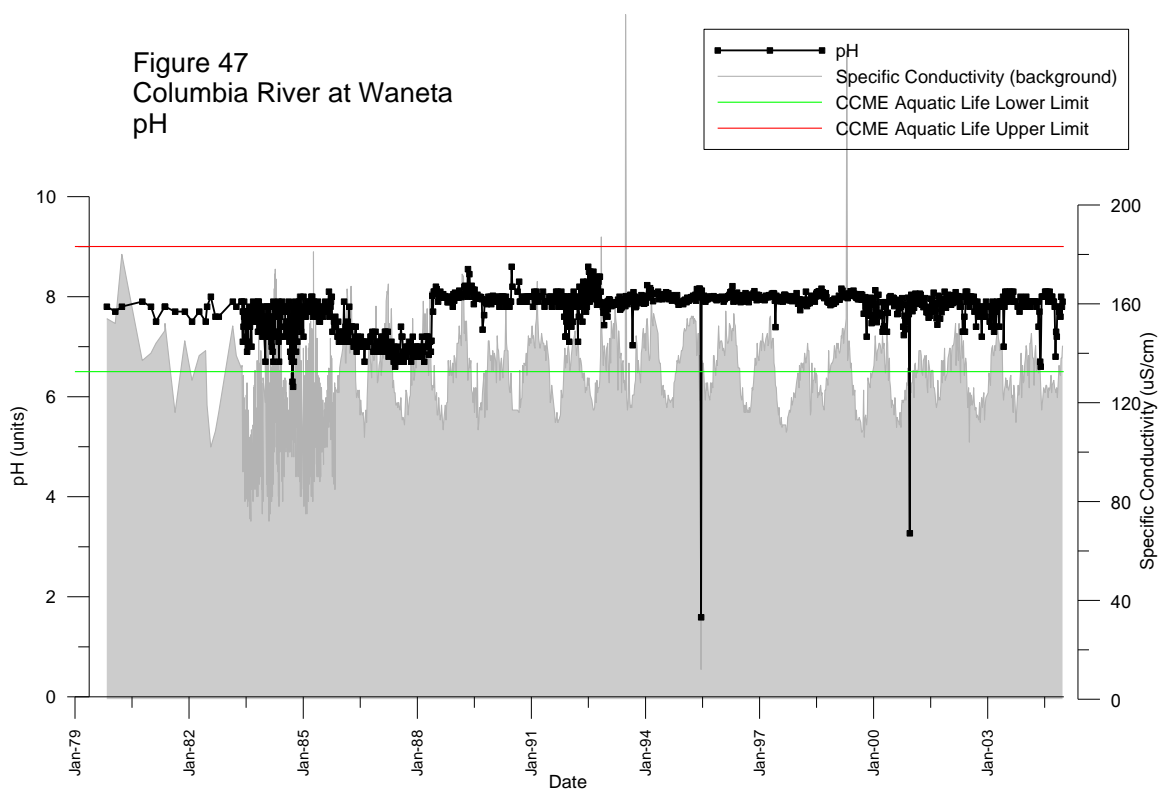




Figure 49  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Rubidium - Total and Extractable  
2003 - 2006

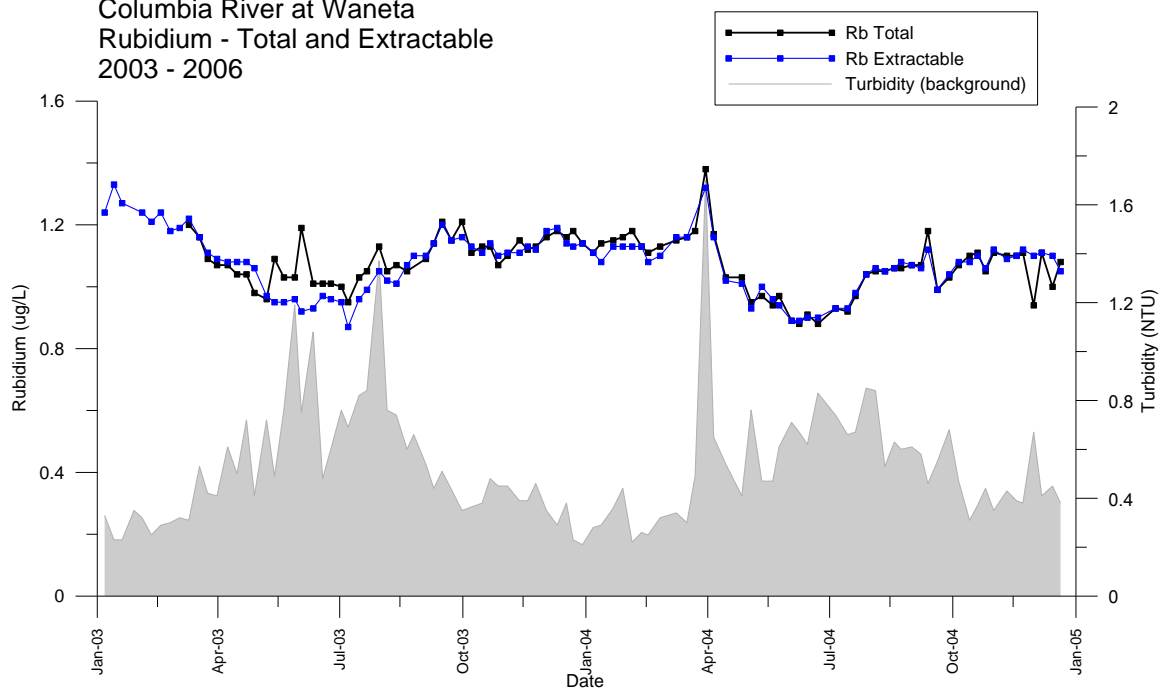


Figure 50  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Residue - Filterable

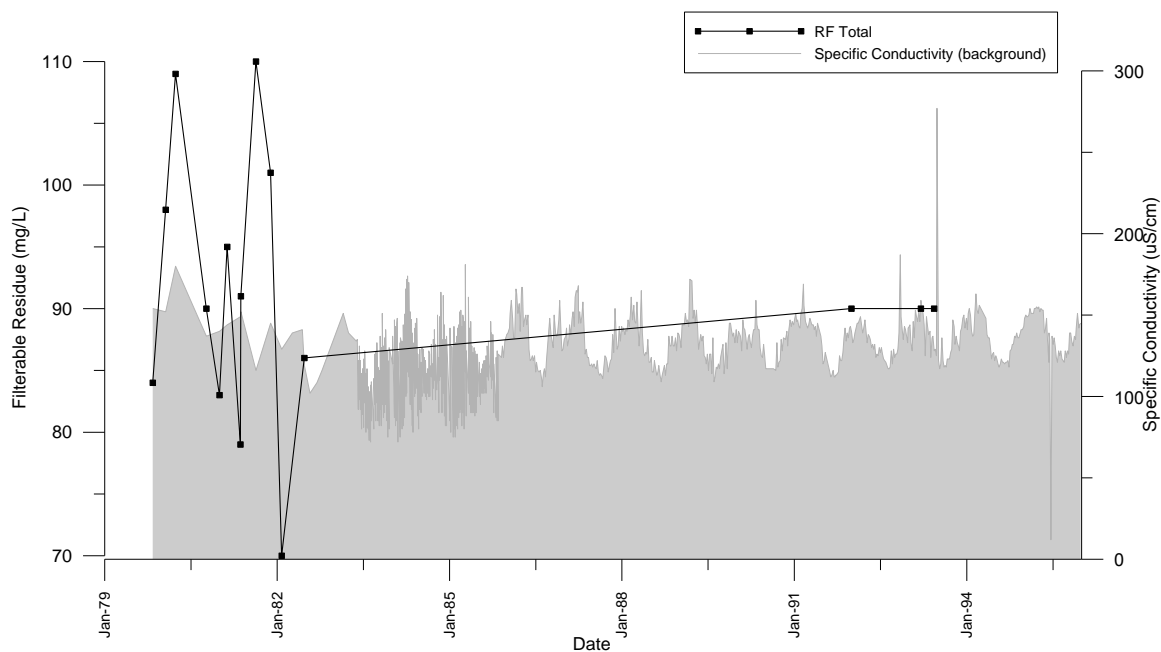


Figure 51  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Selenium - Total and Extractable  
1979 - 2005

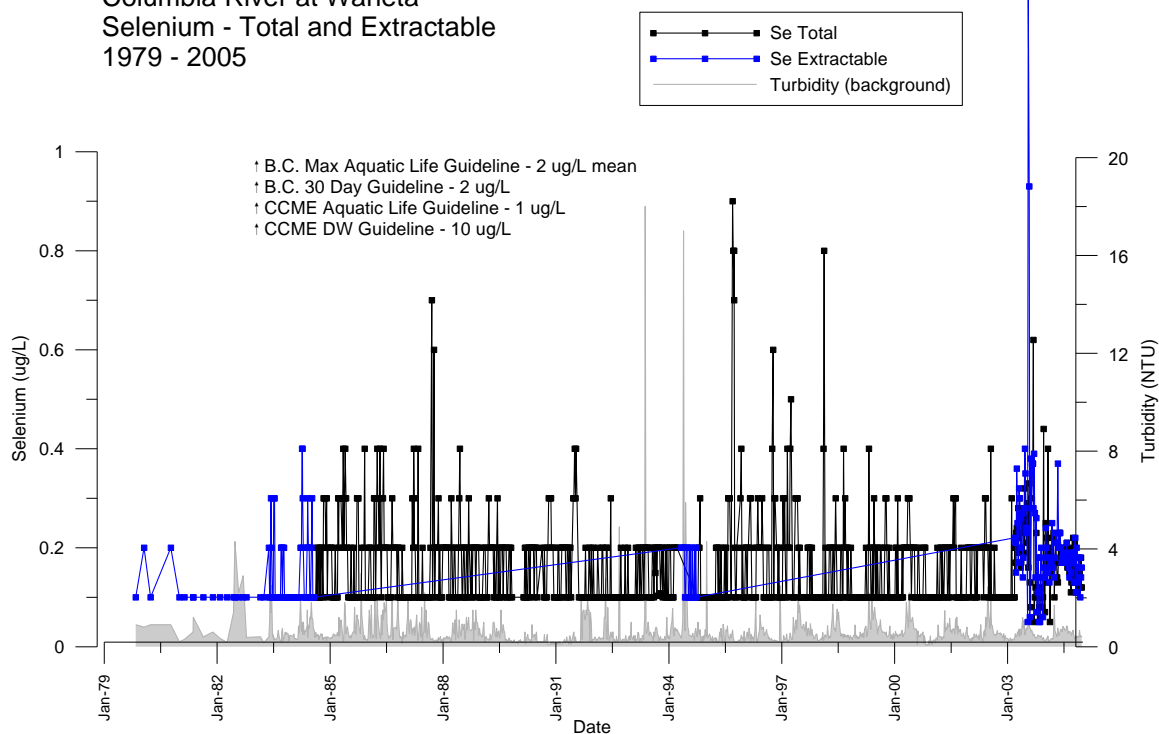


Figure 52  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Selenium - Total and Extractable  
2003 - 2005

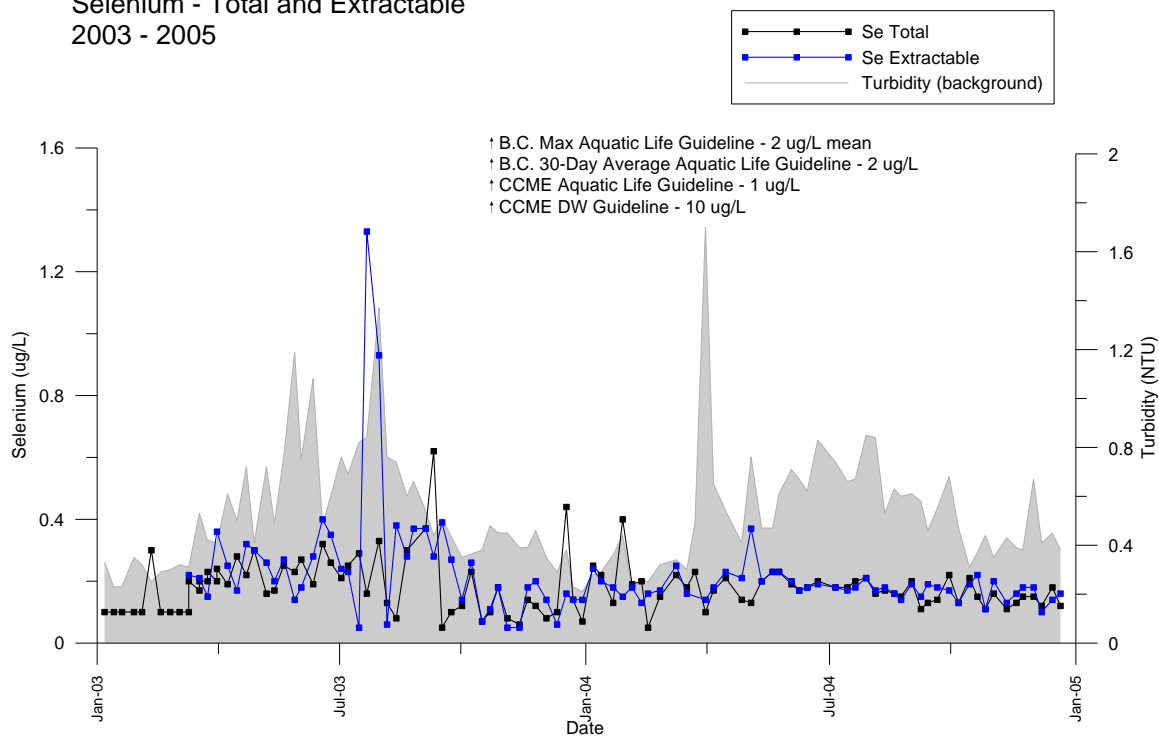


Figure 53  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Silicon - Extractable

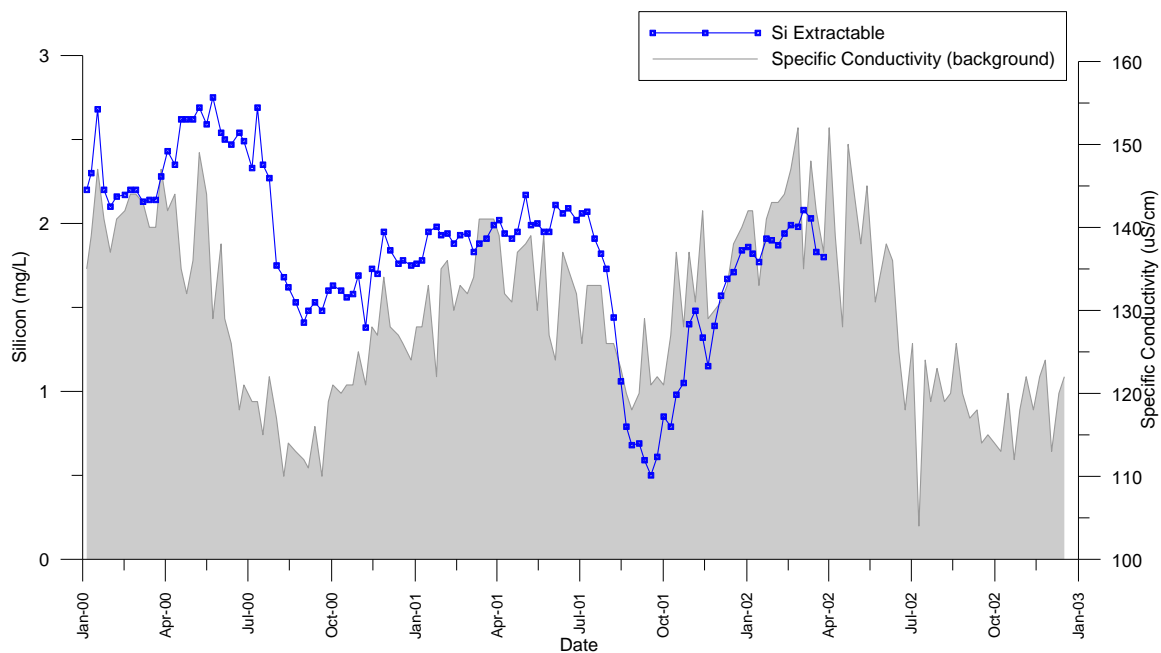


Figure 54  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Silica - Reactive and Dissolved

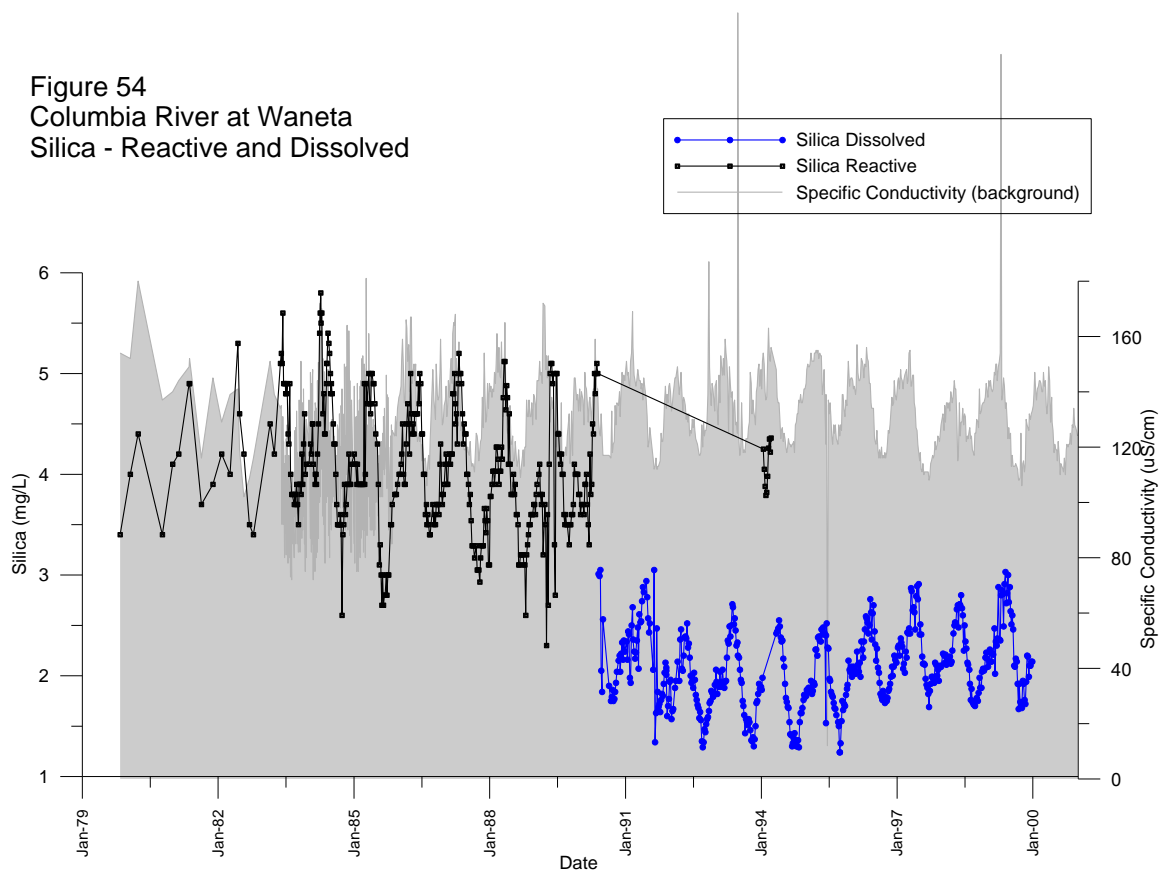


Figure 55  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Silver - Total and Extractable

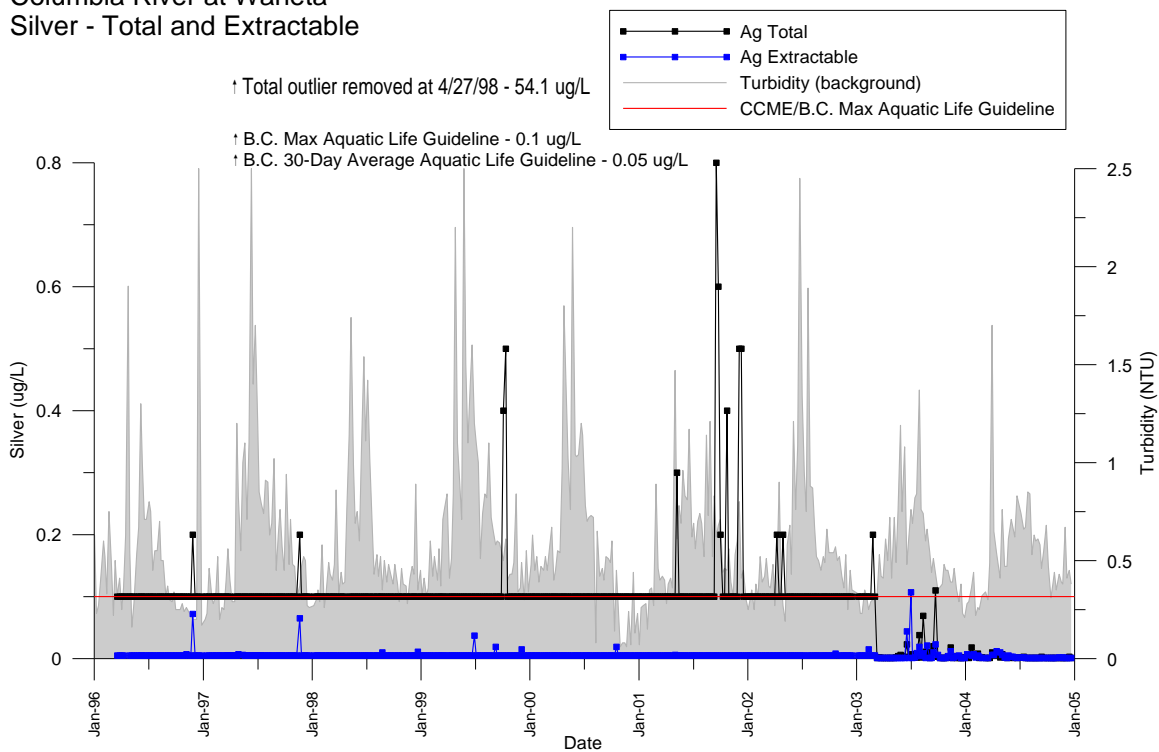


Figure 56  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Silver - Total and Extractable  
2003 - 2005

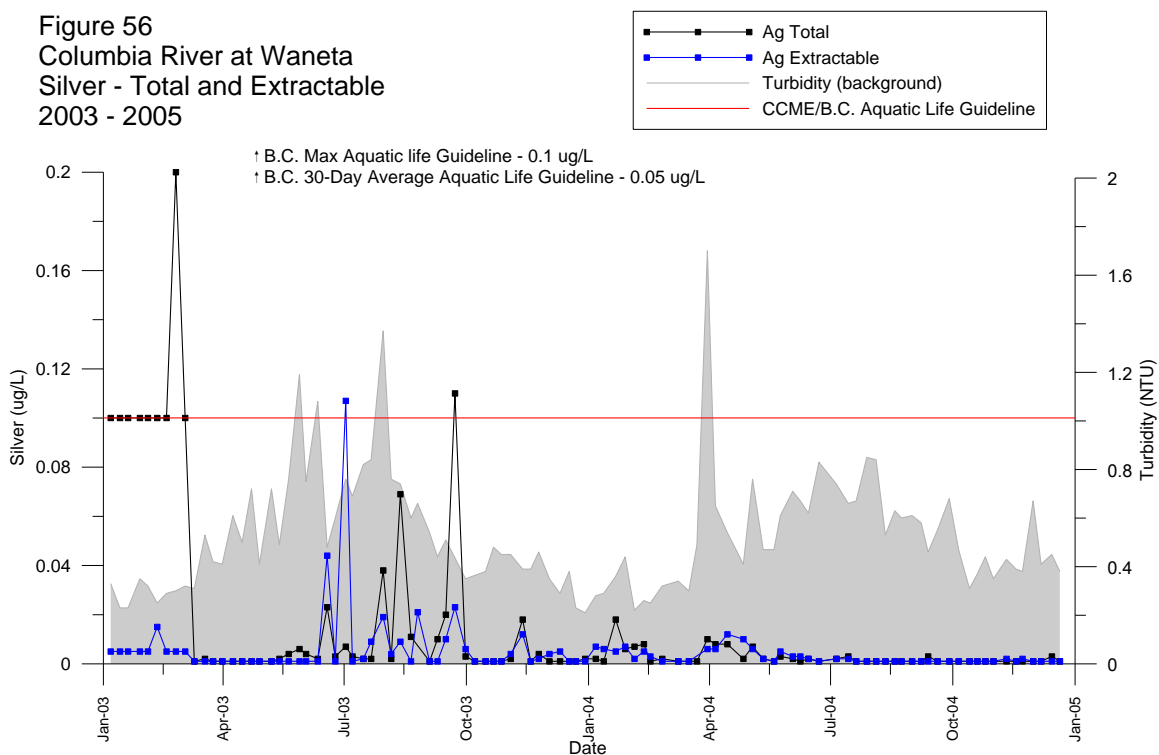


Figure 57  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Sodium - Dissolved and Extractable

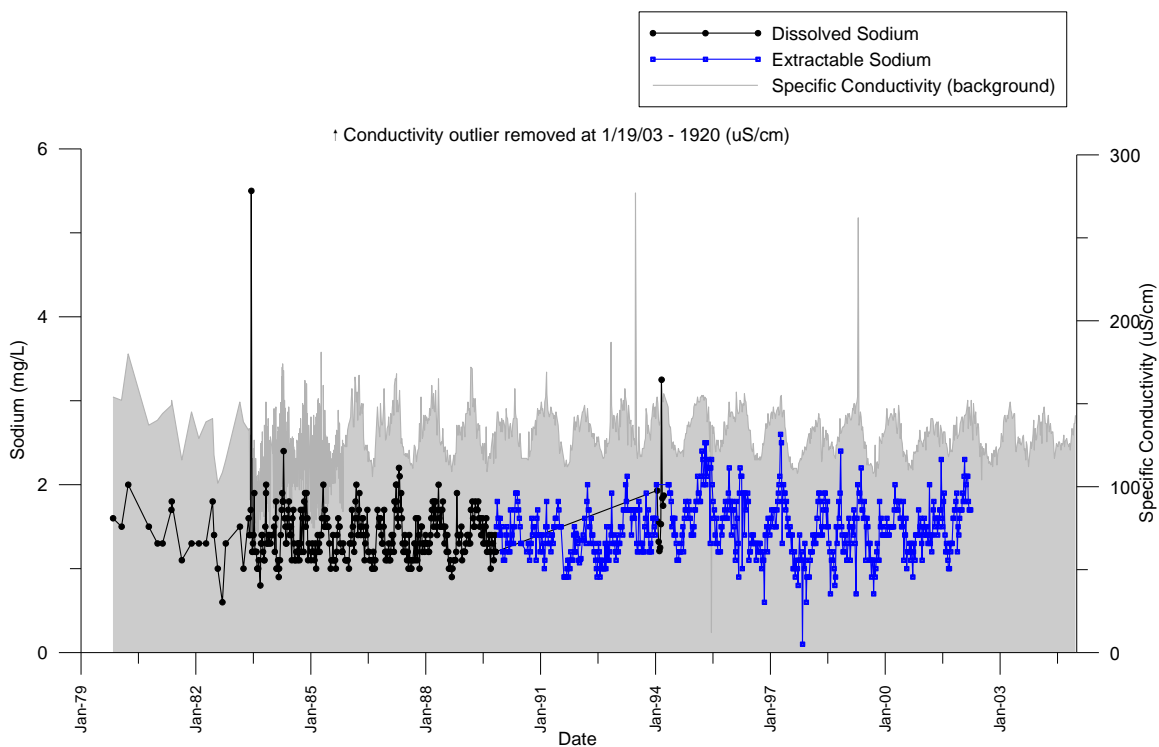
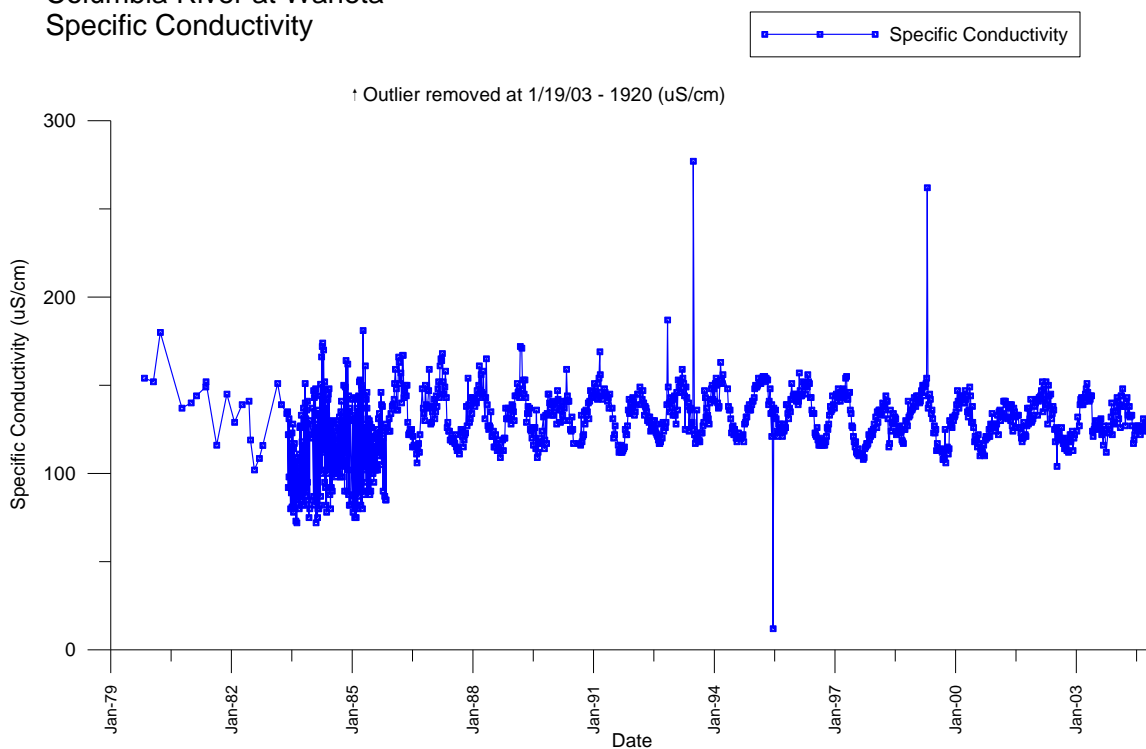


Figure 58  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Specific Conductivity



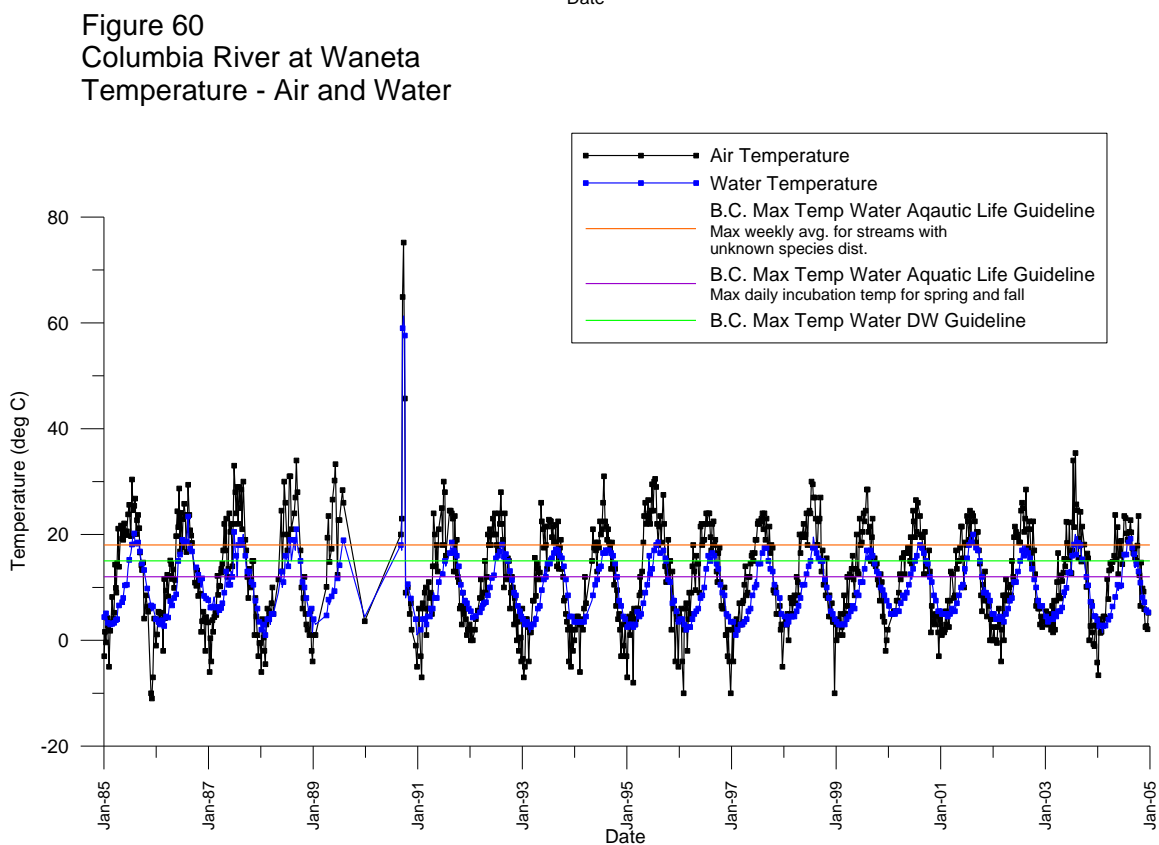
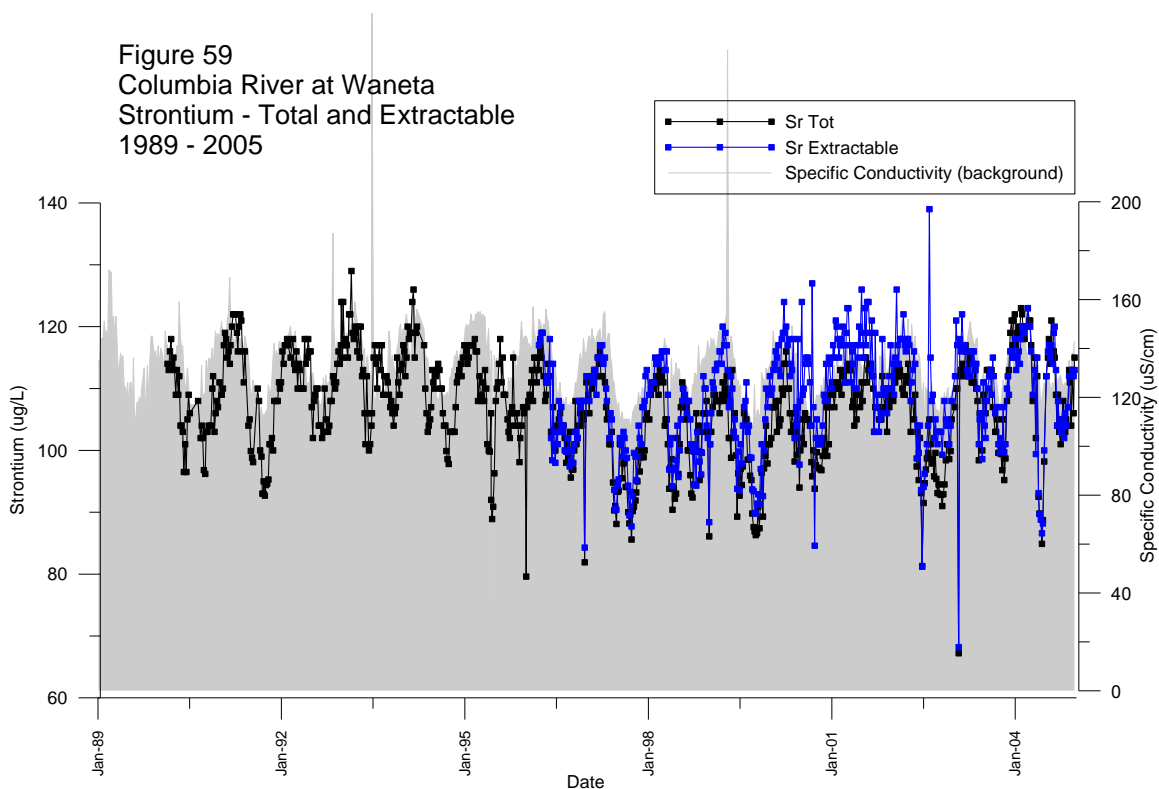


Figure 61  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Tin - Total and Extractable

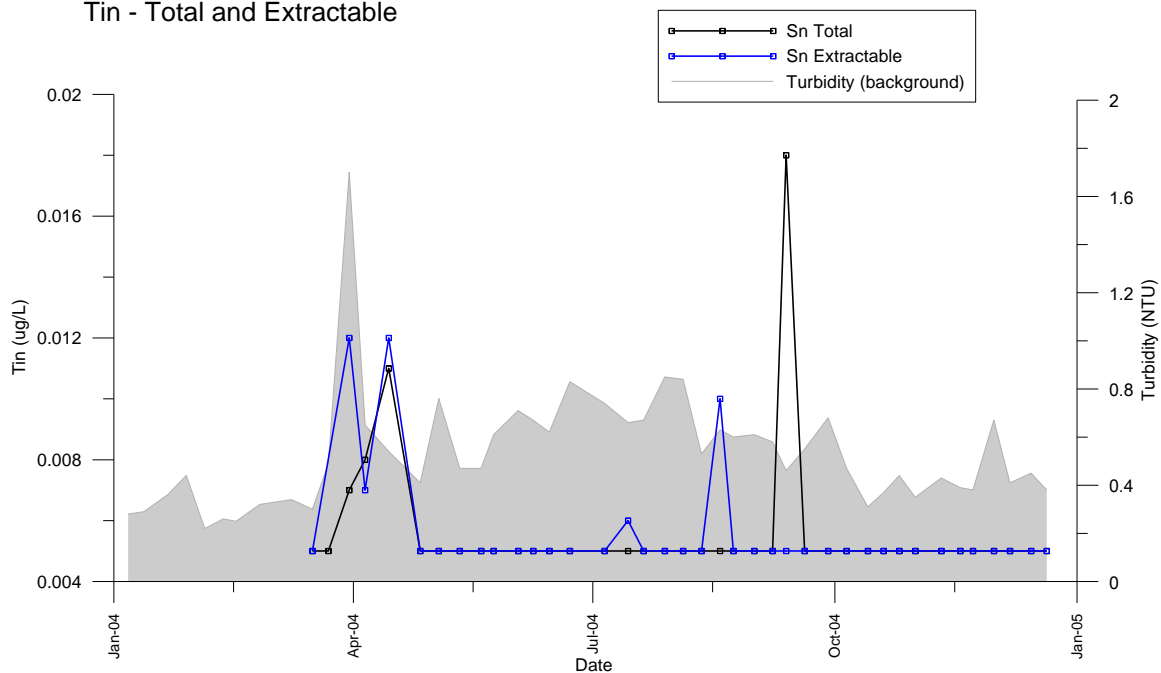
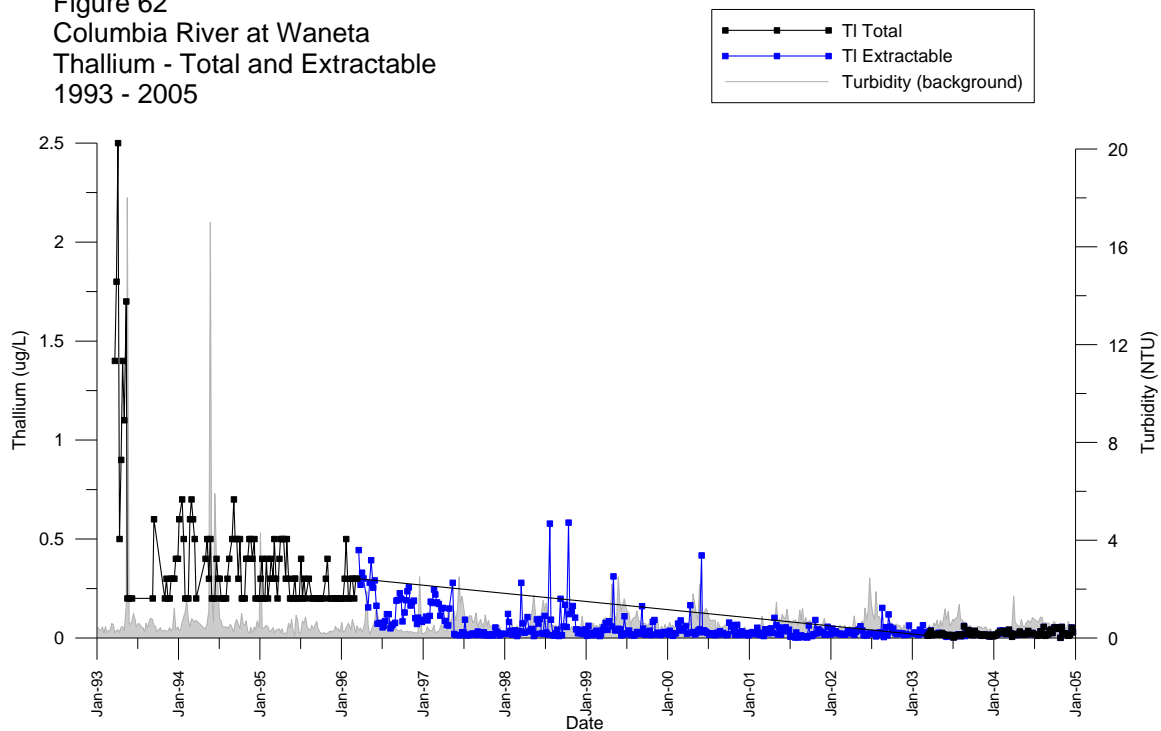


Figure 62  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Thallium - Total and Extractable  
1993 - 2005



## Water Quality Assessment of the Columbia River at Waneta 1983-2005

Figure 63  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Thallium - Total and Extractable  
2003 - 2005

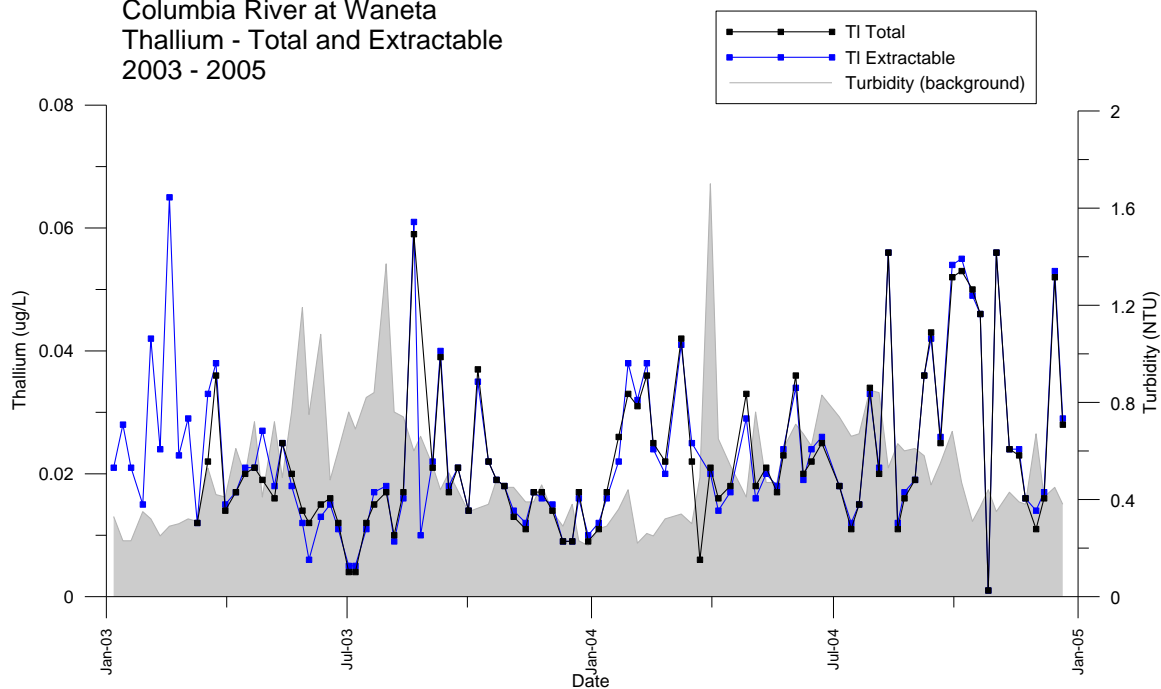


Figure 64  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Turbidity

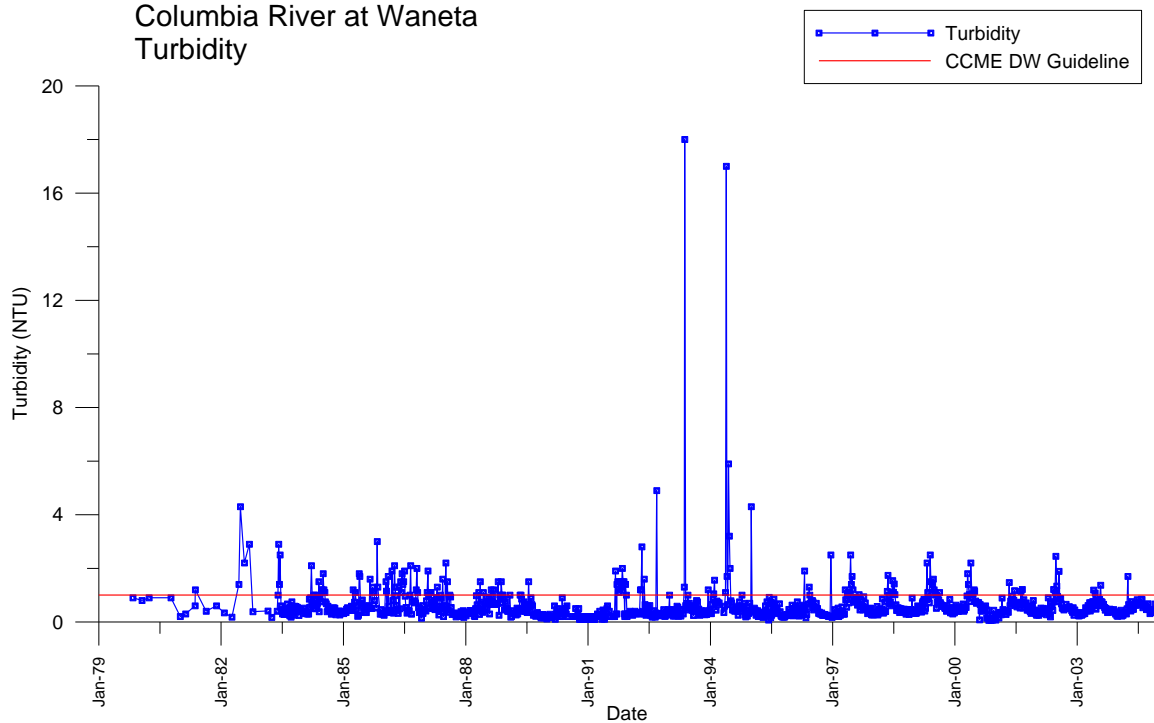




Figure 65  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Uranium - Total and Extractable  
1996 - 2005

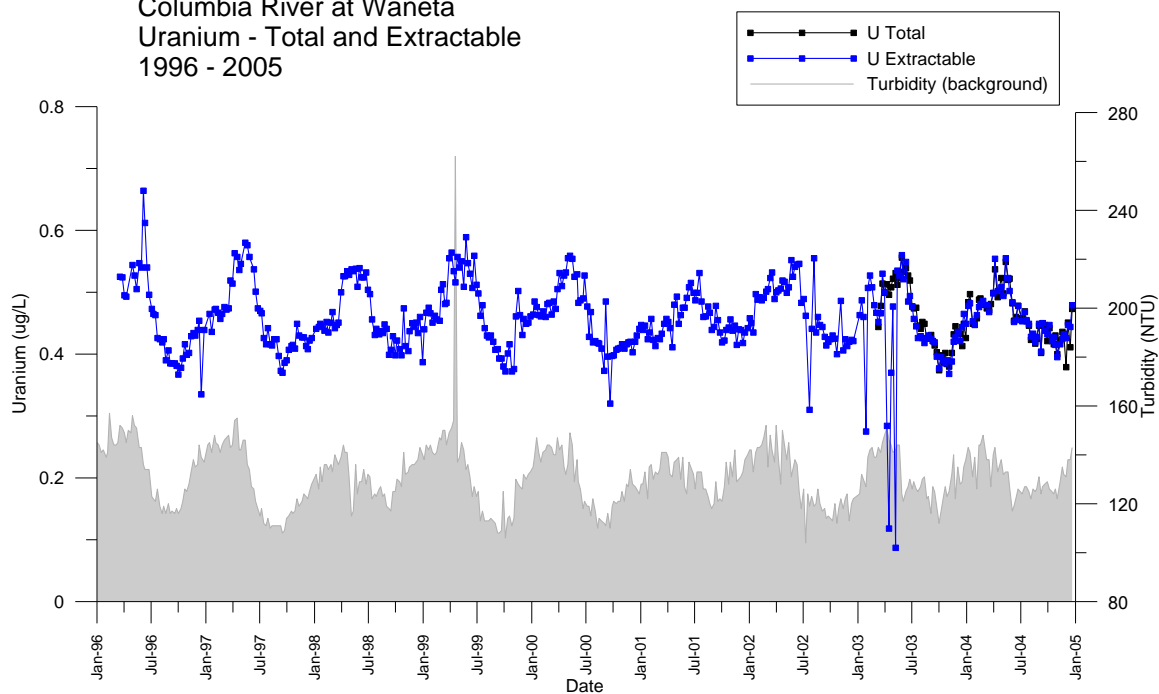


Figure 66  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Uranium - Total and Extractable  
2003 - 2005

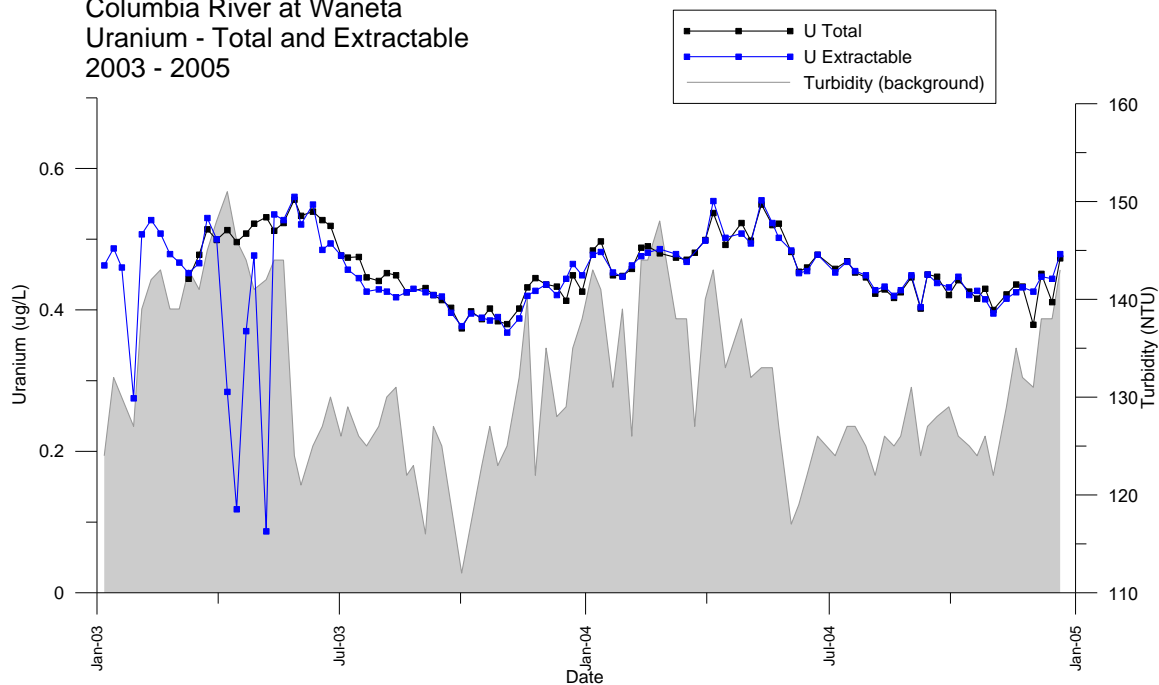


Figure 67  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Vanadium - Total and Extractable  
1990 - 2005

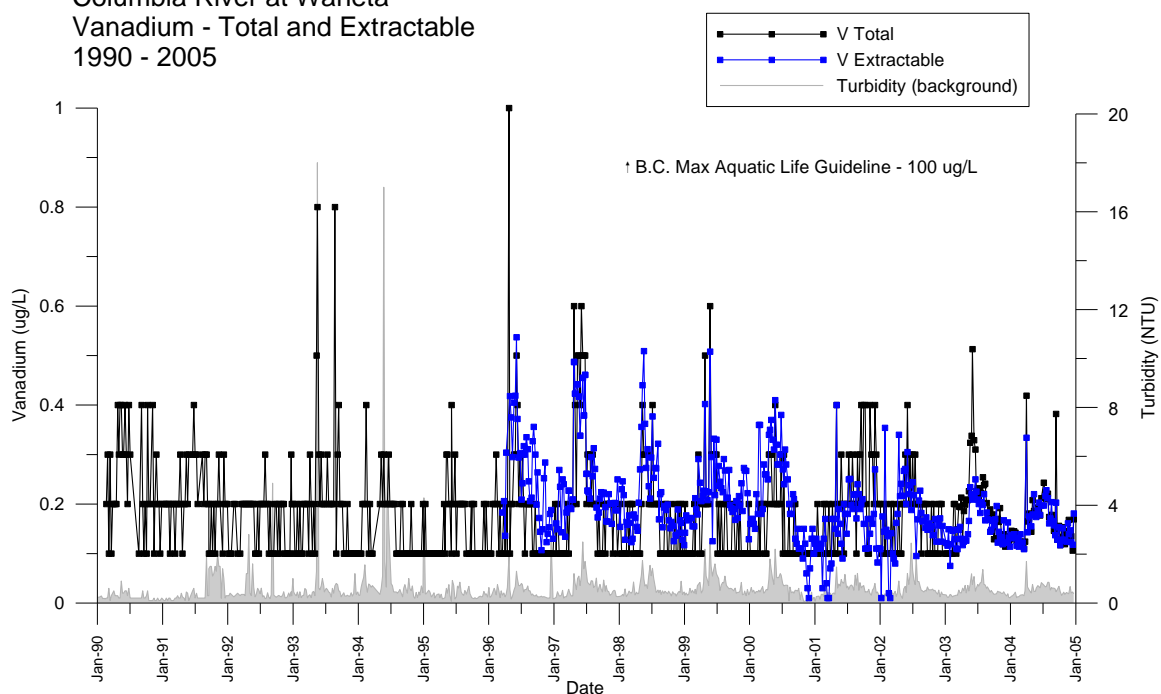


Figure 68  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Vanadium - Total and Extractable  
2003 - 2005

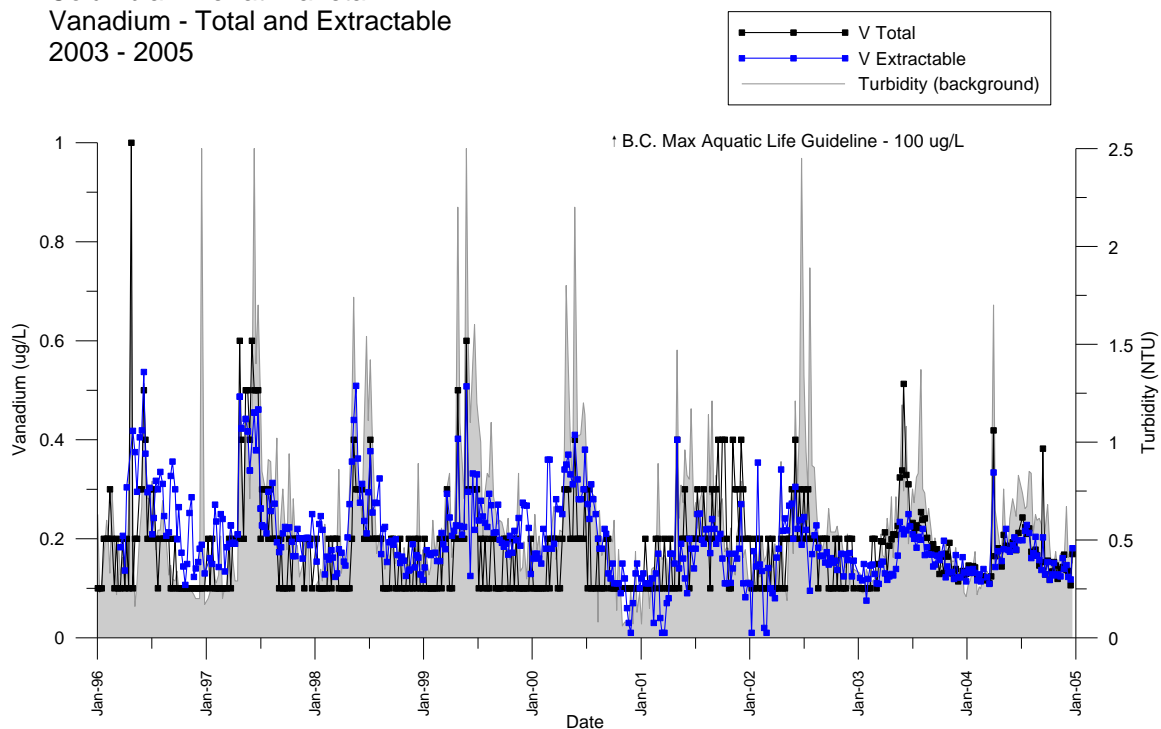


Figure 69  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Zinc - Total and Extractable  
1979 - 2003

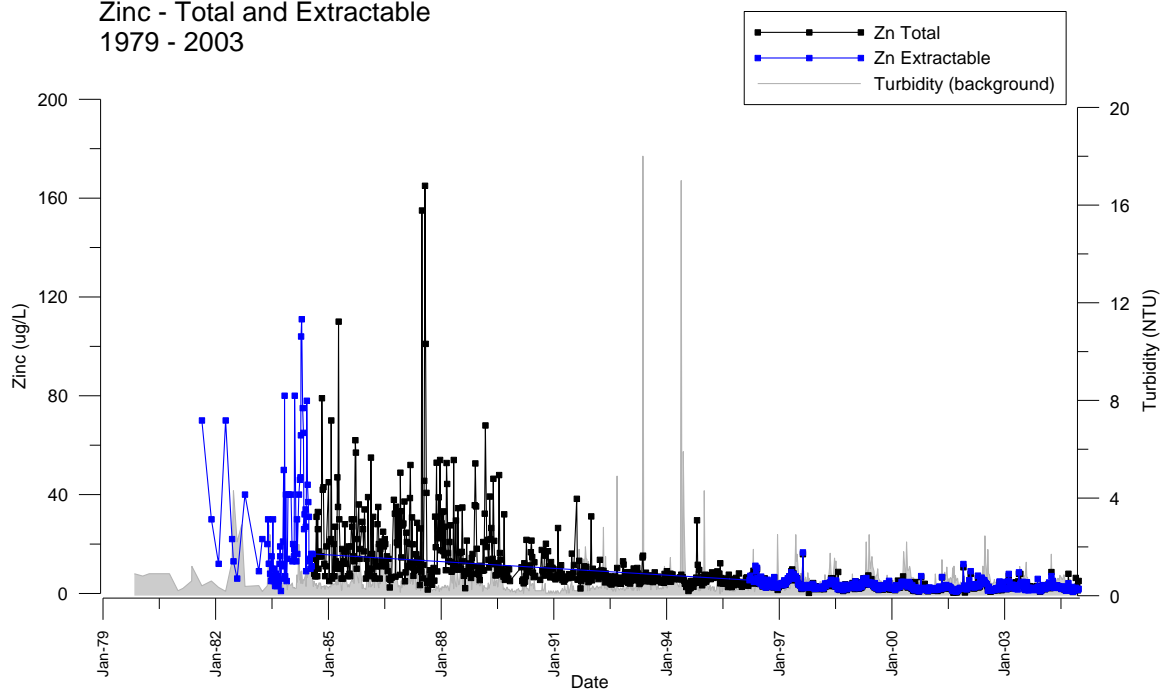


Figure 70  
Columbia River at Waneta  
Zinc - Total and Extractable  
1995 - 2005

