TESTIMONY OF
THE COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY TRIBES
BEFORE PACIFIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
MARCH 7, 2000
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Council. My name is Justin Gould. I am a member of the Nez Perce Fish and Wildlife Commission. I am here today to present comments on behalf of the four Columbia River treaty tribes: the Yakama, Warm Springs, Umatilla and Nez Perce tribes.

The 2000 Spring Creek Hatchery tule chinook forecast of almost 21,000 is less than half of last year's return of 49,000 fish. Tule chinook make up the majority of the catch in ocean fisheries between Cape Falcon and the U.S.-Canada border. The Spring Creek Hatchery tule returns in the mid 1970s were in the 180,000 range, almost nine times this year's forecast. For Columbia River Upriver Bright fall chinook return, the forecast of about 170,000 fish is similar to last year's return.

The imbalance between Spring Creek and Upriver Bright fall chinook, together with constraints on impacts for listed Snake River fall chinook, creates allocation problems for Columbia River fisheries. The federal government will propose restrictions that will prevent the tribes from harvesting a 50% share of the fall chinook, as required under U.S. v. Oregon.
The forecast for Columbia River coho suggests a much larger return than last year. According to management agreements for upper Columbia River coho, the tribes are entitled to a 50% share of the harvestable surplus. We expect the states to monitor and include all sources of non-Indian fishery mortalities in the lower river to ensure the adequate passage of coho past Bonneville Dam in order for the tribes to have the opportunity to harvest their share of the coho.

The Columbia River tribes continue to question the utility of mass marking and selective fisheries. Our understanding was that the mass marking of coho was to be an experiment. It seems like it has advanced to the full scale implementation phase. There also appears to be a movement for the mass marking of chinook. There are still unresolved technical issues concerning the mass marking and selective fishing for chinook that are far more complicated than for coho. The idea of selective fishing as a way to address wild stock concerns is seductive because it diverts attention from the real problem: low wild fish survival. Managers are so interested in figuring out how to mass mark salmon that they haven’t stopped to consider the longer term implications. Our experience with steelhead in the Columbia River indicates that mass marking and selective fishing by itself will not restore wild runs. It is not prudent to move ahead with mass marking and selective fishing for chinook.
Although the forecast for the Snake River wild fall chinook is not ready, last year's Lower Granite Dam counts were the highest on record. Some of last years increase in the wild Snake River counts were the results of supplementation that the tribes successfully advocated for. The tribes believe that this provides a good foundation for recovery. However, the federal government discounts the value of successful supplementation programs. Other examples of successful supplementation include restoring fall chinook returns to the Umatilla, Yakima, and Klickitat Rivers, spring chinook in the Clearwater and Umatilla Rivers, and coho in the Yakima River.

Upper Columbia River spring chinook are forecasted to return in the largest numbers since 1978. This should be good news. The tribes proposed a modest increase in harvest rates. However, the federal government is attempting to constrain tribal fisheries because of concerns for listed stocks in the Snake River basin, stocks for which they have made no effort to restore, expect for constraining fisheries. This must stop. As outlined in United States versus Oregon, the tribes’ ceremonial and subsistence fisheries have the highest priority for spring and summer season fisheries. Ceremonial fisheries are vital to the continuation of traditional tribal religious practices, such as First Salmon Ceremonies, Memorials, and Death-Wakes.
The Columbia River tribes are working hard to contribute to the rebuilding of upriver salmon and steelhead using the limited tools available to us like voluntary restrictions on harvest and working to increase the production of upriver stocks through supplementation. However, it is difficult to expand supplementation when hatchery funding puts a priority on status quo programs. It is difficult to find justice in restricting only fisheries while hydropower, ranching, logging, urban development, and agricultural activities continue their unregulated impacts on salmon habitat and survival. The science shows that some Columbia River stocks will recover only if major changes in the hydropower system, such as breaching or drawdown take place. The dams continue to indiscriminately harvest salmon, while the fishermen are left to fight over the crumbs.

The Federal government has the legal obligation under federal law to restrict other activities that impact listed species before restricting the Columbia River treaty Indian fishery any further. This must be done to comply with the conservation principles established in United States versus Oregon. Until everyone, Indian and non-Indian, can resume fishing at its full potential, we can not forget the work that we have to do together to recover all salmon and steelhead runs for our future generations.
The recovery of the Columbia River salmon is also dependent on international negotiations. Columbia River tribes **support** the movement of the Pacific Salmon Commission toward a system based on **stock abundance**. We have given our representatives the following guiding principles in the negotiations, which also have application to our lower river and coastal fisheries:

- Harvest rates must account for **all** sources of mortalities and be sustainable and support rebuilding of weak and depressed stocks.

- Non-tribal river and ocean fisheries **must** allow sufficient escapement so the tribes can harvest their fair share of the harvestable surplus. The allocation between tribal and non-tribal fisheries must include mortalities from all sources, not just fishery mortalities.

- **Habitat** protection and restoration and stock supplementation must be a part of the long term solution.
It is difficult to recommend specific options at this time. However, due to the low numbers of Spring Creek Hatchery fall chinook, the Columbia River tribes ask that the Council to instruct the Salmon Technical Team to include an option with zero non-Indian fishing north of Cape Falcon. This would return the maximum number of Spring Creek fish to the Columbia River and give the greatest flexibility for in-river allocation. The tribes are also interested in reviewing the Team’s analysis of last year’s fisheries North of Cape Falcon with this year’s projected returns and All ocean fishery models must be analyzed for cumulative impacts relative to listed Snake River stocks and the projected escapement of Spring Creek Hatchery fall chinook. This concludes my statement. Thank You.