Report of Jim Harp
On the 2000 North of Cape Falcon Process

Mr. Chairman, I’d like to give a brief report on this year’s North of Cape Falcon (NCF) meetings. As you know, each year the managers representing the states of Oregon and Washington and the treaty tribes of the Washington Coast, Puget Sound, and the Columbia River meet with the affected constituents to consider the condition of the resource and determine allowable fisheries that are possible under the circumstances. This year, we met on March 15 and 16 in Portland and again on March 28, 29 and 30 in Tukwila.

This year the tribal and state co-managers also held a meeting with Canadian fisheries managers on March 14 to exchange information on our respective forecasts of abundance and expected fisheries plans. This exchange provided the co-managers much more certainty than in past years upon which to base assumptions concerning Canadian fisheries in our modeling of impacts during our NCF process. This improved pre-season planning relationship with Canada is a direct result of the 1999 PST agreement, and the commitment of the parties to more closely mesh their respective fisheries planning processes.

Under the best of conditions, this is a difficult process to shape the Treaty Indian and Non-Treaty fisheries for areas from the ocean to in-river for the various stocks of concern. This year’s process has been particularly difficult because of the very low forecasted abundance for most coho and some chinook stocks, and because of the additional species that have been listed under the ESA this past year.

For 2000, the forecast for most wild coho and some hatchery coho stocks is for run sizes below desired optimum escapement levels. Of particular concern on the Washington coast is the Queets River and in Puget Sound the Skagit, Stillaguamish and Snohomish Rivers. In addition, the hatchery run to South Puget Sound, a normally strong contributor to our fisheries, is forecasted to be weak. This situation has necessitated the need to develop very restrictive fishery plans in both the ocean and inside areas to achieve acceptable escapement levels.

As part of this pre-season planning process, the tribes and WDFW have developed a Puget Sound chinook fishing strategy to meet the requirements of the ESA. The implementation of this plan through the NCF process is expected to result in a Section 7 “no jeopardy” determination by NMFS. Similarly, ocean fishery plans are expected to meet the ESA standards that have been established by NMFS for listed Columbia River stocks.

Our NCF work is not yet completed. The tribes and WDFW will be working throughout this week to complete a package of agreed fisheries plans. We are confident that an agreement will be reached that meets the needs of the resource and provides some level of fishing opportunity for all fishing interest.