

**TESTIMONY OF  
THE COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY TRIBES  
BEFORE PACIFIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COUNCIL  
April 8, 2003  
Sacramento, CA**

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Council. My name is Harold Blackwolf Sr. I am a member of the Fish and Wildlife Committee of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon and a treaty fisherman on the Columbia River. I am here today to provide Testimony on behalf of the four Columbia River treaty tribes: the Yakama, Warm Springs, Umatilla and Nez Perce tribes.

As we near the completion of the planning for 2004 ocean fisheries, we would like to remind the Council of some of the issues bringing us where we are now and some of the events outside the Council process that will influence where we will end up in the future.

Regarding Snake River fall Chinook, in the 1990, a record low number of fall Chinook reached Lower Granite Dam – 335 adult fish. Of these, less than 100 may have been natural origin fish. In the mid 1990's, the tribes won a legal dispute with the states and a supplementation program was begun acclimating fish above Lower Granite Dam in an effort to use locally derived hatchery fish to supplement the natural run. This program has been a remarkable success. In 2003, a mere 13 years after the record low run, around 12,000 adult fish reached Lower Granite Dam. Of these, 3,856 were estimated to be natural origin fish. A record 2,247 redds were counted above Lower Granite Dam. NMFS has identified a preliminary de-listing target of a natural origin run size of 2,500 over an eight year geometric mean. With this increasing abundance of natural origin Snake River fall Chinook, it is entirely possible to reach this de-listing goal within this decade. While better ocean survival can not be discounted as a contributing factor, the supplementation program can not be denied as the primary reason for this strong increase in run sizes. Even with this success, the supplementation program is not without critics. There are many who argue

that the trap at Lower Granite Dam be managed to reduce the number of fish that can pass the dam and contribute to rebuilding. These are people who never want to use well designed hatchery programs to contribute to recovery. The tribes have long supported the appropriate use of hatcheries to support recovery of all salmon stocks throughout the Columbia Basin.

In part because of the increase in run sizes, both the states and tribes had expressed the desire to explore some flexibility in the ESA standards for both ocean and in-river fisheries in years such as 2004 that have relatively high abundance. Such flexibility seems quite reasonable, as long as we continue to make progress towards recovery. Even some NOAA Fisheries staff were inclined to support such flexibility. However, this idea was quashed by the Federal Government and as a result planning ocean fisheries has been quite challenging this year. The tribes are convinced that the reason for this is that the Federal Government has a predetermined intent to allocate more salmon mortality to the hydro-system and so there is just nothing extra left for fisheries.

The proposal to eliminate August spill in the Columbia River will have very negative effects on many salmon stocks including Snake River fall Chinook. In 2001, spill was curtailed because of the drought and so called "power emergency". There are plenty of data showing that outmigrants in 2001 had much lower than average survival. The only reason we are not seeing dramatic effects in total adult returns currently is that we got lucky with strong survival of 2000 outmigrants and expected strong survival of 2002 outmigrants. If spill is eliminated for even one year, there probably will be effects on fisheries. If spill is eliminated for more than one year as is proposed, the negative effects on fish runs and fisheries is certain.

This year's ocean fishery planning has involved lots of hard work and very difficult decision making that will hopefully help insure a lot of Snake River fall Chinook are going to reach the spawning grounds. However, because of Federal Government policy, the offspring of these fish we are working to protect face a very uncertain future. While we commend those who have made decisions to reduce their fisheries to protect fish that are so important to the tribes, it is a perfectly natural question for you to ask, "Why are we

going through this very difficult exercise when the end result will be that the fish we save will produce offspring that will be simply ground up in the eight Federal dams?”

Unfortunately, if the Federal Government gets its way, fish recovery may become much more unlikely and fishery planning may become much more difficult.

Another issue that relates both to conservation of fish as well as fishery planning is mass marking of fish with adipose fin clips without coded wire tags. Congressman Norm Dicks is demanding that the number of mass marked fish be dramatically increased including almost all Columbia River fall Chinook. These fish are important components of ocean fisheries. If more of these fish are mass marked it will further degrade the Coded Wire Tag program. We are dependant on this program to measure impacts to various stocks. One effect of this as far as fishery planning is that, in a year like this, where fishers are required to make round after round of cuts to their proposed fisheries is that we really will not know the true effect of these cuts on key managed stocks. We will in effect be managing fisheries nearly blind.

While clearly many parts of the Federal Government are acting as a drag on fish recovery, there are things that can and are being done to benefit the fish as well as treaty and non-treaty fishermen.

Because of the Tribes' cultural and spiritual connection with salmon, the tribes are extremely focused on the health of the salmon and the water they live in. This is what produces our desire to recover fish populations. The Umatilla Tribe has successfully shown that it is possible to work with private landowners and irrigators and the State of Oregon to re-introduce coho into the Umatilla River. By working cooperatively the tribes have shown that it is possible to make improvements to habitat and water conditions to support salmon. The Nez Perce Tribe has worked successfully with the State of Idaho and the USFWS to reintroduce coho into the Clearwater. The Yakama Nation and the State of Washington have coho programs in the Yakama and Wenatchee. While these programs are all still works in progress, it shows that by working cooperatively with the tribes it is possible

to do things that both support salmon recovery and provide fishery benefits for ocean and in-river fisheries. The reason that the Ocean fishery and lower Columbia River fisheries are required to ensure that 50% of the upriver coho reach Bonneville Dam is not just to meet treaty fishery needs but to ensure enough fish return so that these recovery programs can continue to produce larger runs of fish in the future.

The tribes have many other programs and proposals that will assist with recovering all salmon runs to healthy harvestable levels. These include numerous habitat improvement projects in tributaries throughout the basin and an annual water management plan for the Columbia River that proposes flows, temperatures, and spills that will provide benefits to fish while including appropriate allowances for irrigation and power generation. Unlike programs like the flawed barging program, it is these types of positive proactive programs that need to be implemented in order to recover fish populations to healthy sustainable harvestable levels.

This concludes my statement. Thank You.