

**TESTIMONY OF
THE COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY TRIBES
BEFORE PACIFIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
April 7, 2005
Tacoma, WA**

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Council. My name is Rapheal Bill I am a member of the Fish and Wildlife Committee of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation of Oregon. 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 2005 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.

Salmon returning to the Columbia River run a gauntlet of fisheries from Alaska through Canada and west coast as well as in-river fisheries. If we do not continue to protect Columbia River salmon, all these fisheries will suffer.

Record returns of Snake River fall Chinook have occurred in recent years. 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. However, this situation does not eliminate the need for ocean fisheries to be managed conservatively to ensure continued progress towards recovery. Even with this success, the supplementation program is not without critics. The tribes are largely responsible for the initiation of fall Chinook supplementation programs above Lower Granite dam and continue to work cooperatively with our state and federal co-managers to manage this program in ways that benefit both fisheries and recovery of the natural fall Chinook run. The tribes have long supported the appropriate use of hatcheries to support recovery of all salmon stocks throughout the Columbia Basin.

The tribes thank the Council for agreeing to send a letter to the federal hydrosystem managers regarding the Columbia River flows in 2005. It would be a shame if poor river management adversely affects the gains we have made toward recovering Snake River fall Chinook. If spill is eliminated for even one year, there probably will be adverse effects on future fisheries.

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?"

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. USFWS has announced that they have already begun mass marking approximately one half of the 2005 release of the Spring Creek tules. Although not unexpected, this was done without notifying the U.S. v. Oregon parties. They have also announced the intention to dramatically increase the number of mass marked Columbia River fall Chinook. This will now necessitate electronic sampling of all Council area ocean Chinook fisheries as well as in-river fall Chinook fisheries. None of the agencies advocating mass marking have indicated where the money for the increased sampling costs will come from. If Canada can not be convinced to electronically sample their Chinook fisheries, enormous uncertainties will be introduced into estimated Chinook impacts in Canadian fisheries. The Columbia River tribes strongly disagree with increased mass marking of Columbia River fall Chinook. Mass marking and selective fisheries goes against the tribes traditional cultural values towards salmon. We do not see this as appropriate co-management either.

We also learned this morning that WDFW is planning on implementing a new selective sport fishery for Chinook in Puget Sound. The Columbia River tribes do not support the implementation of this new fishery at the last minute. As more Columbia River fall Chinook, there will be more and more pressure to implement other new and larger selective Chinook fisheries. The tribes do not support playing with our food. This will in turn put the entire Coded Wire Tag program at risk and make it very difficult to estimate impacts on natural stocks of concern. We will in effect be managing fisheries nearly blind. Increasing selective fisheries will not benefit wild fish in part because of the release mortality rates from handling wild fish in too many fisheries. There will be significant costs from new mass marking and selective fisheries. No one has explained to us how these costs will be paid for. Money being spent on mass marking and selective fisheries would be better spent on salmon recovery.

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. This has led to renewed tribal and sport harvest that is shared in the 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 pro-active programs that need to be implemented in order to recover fish populations to healthy sustainable harvestable levels. The barging program claims to be successful simply because fish are still alive when they let them out of the barge, but the program is not successful because many of these fish do not return as adults. The tribes would like to work cooperatively with the other co-managers to address the sea lion problem on the Columbia.

We also want to mention that tribal representatives to the CTC will be helping coordinate CTC communication with the STT regarding modeling recent changes in Canadian fisheries that effect U.S. stocks.

This concludes my statement. Thank You.