

**TESTIMONY OF THE COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY TRIBES
BEFORE THE PACIFIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

March 9, 2020, Rohnert Park, CA

Good day members of the Council. My name is Bud Herrera. I am a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, a CRITFC and a treaty fisher on the Columbia River. I am here with Erik Holt, Wilbur Slockish, and Bruce Jim. We are here to provide testimony on behalf of the four Columbia River treaty tribes. Salmon are central to our livelihood. Salmon was the first food to offer himself up to feed the people when we were placed on these lands. The deer offered his hide to clothe the people from birth to the time they leave this Earth. The roots, the berries and water complete our circle of life. All of these foods with their medicinal properties must be available for our wellbeing. The salmon are essential and must always be available into the future for our children, grandchildren and all future generations.

We appreciate that we regularly receive detailed model output data. This enables us to review more detailed information about impacts to Columbia River stocks than is shown in the STT reports. Currently, on paper, the impacts with the options meet minimal needs for Columbia River returns. However, these are only paper fish and we remain very hesitant to rely on paper fish. We won't have enough information to reliably begin to update Columbia River fall chinook run sizes until around September 10 which is too late to make any adjustments to all of the various fisheries which will occur before then. We have had many bad experiences in the past with paper fish not becoming real fish. Legal principles require that non-treaty fisheries be restricted before the treaty fishery.

We have expressed our concerns about the forecasts for the Spring Creek tule stock. If the actual returns of the Spring Creek stock are lower than forecast and approaches a 30,000 run size or less it becomes difficult to manage the tribal fishery to meet the escapement needs at spring creek hatchery while trying to harvest the more abundant upriver bright fish. We have also seen issues in recent years with lower run sizes of the Mid-Columbia Bright stock where we have not met the broodstock needs for Little White Salmon National Fish Hatchery. While our fishery occurs on the aggregate of the fall chinook run, we must manage the fishery so no overharvest occurs on any one stock. **This greatly complicates our fall management and demonstrates the continued importance of exercising caution setting fisheries that cannot be modified before the actual run sizes are known.**

We also wanted to provide a bit more detail on predation issues facing Columbia River salmon. Tens of millions of salmon smolts are killed each year by birds. Bird predation occurs throughout the basin not simply in the estuary. While birds are part of the natural ecosystem, the Columbia Basin has been modified in numerous ways that improved the ability of birds to prey on salmon smolts. The lack of turbidity in the spring freshet allows birds to see smolts much more easily than they historically could have. The reservoirs offer ample nesting sites free from natural predators that would control bird populations. The ecosystem is out of balance and we are being forced to take actions to restore a balance in which salmon survival can be improved.

One clear challenge in addressing bird predation is complying with the Migratory Bird Treaty. We firmly believe that if we work together we can make changes in management that both ensure long term survival of the overall populations of migratory birds and salmon that we all depend on for all of our fisheries. We need to redefine actions taken to protect listed species from

bird predation so they are not considered a prohibited “take” under the treaty. The Corps of Engineers needs to be involved in bird control activities not simply on land they control, but in all areas where birds live that are impacting fish due to the existence and operation of the hydrosystem. The USFWS needs to lower the overall west coast minimum population threshold for double crested cormorants to a more realistic number such as 25 thousand pairs. They need to adopt reduced population goals for piscivorous birds that eat listed fish species. On the east coast, there is better flexibility in actions that can be taken to control birds. We deserve this flexibility as well.

Another challenge is funding. We have faced reduced funding for monitoring bird predation. We no longer are able to make expanded PIT tag based estimates of predation. Funding for these and other efforts needs to be provided. We also need funding so that the tribes can be more involved in actions to protect fish from bird predation.

Another issue that everyone needs to be aware of is that there is a critical risk that Northern Pike that were illegally introduced into the Columbia upstream of Grand Coulee Dam. We already have numerous non-native fish in the Columbia that adversely impact salmon smolts, but if and when Northern Pike make their way downstream of Grand Coulee, they could devastate our populations of salmon and steelhead. Pike are voracious predators that can kill fish up to smaller sized adult salmon and steelhead. They could lay waste to juvenile salmon. While current control methods in Lake Roosevelt help reduce risk, they are not sufficient to control these fish. We need to do much more to eliminate the threats from these fish.