

**The Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe and Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribes’ Concerns with the State of Washington’s Proposal to Increase the Critical Exploitation Rate for the ESA Protected Mid-Hood Canal Chinook Stock**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Council, my name is Aaron Brooks and I am the Finfish Management Biologist for the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe. I am with Abby Welch, the Finfish Management Biologist for the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe, and together we wish to address some concerns our Tribes have regarding potential fisheries impacts to the conservation of the Mid-Hood Canal Chinook stock. I am speaking today because part of your decision-making process has implications for Puget Sound Chinook conservation. Our tribes have not fished Chinook in Hood Canal for over 17 years because of the need to recover Mid-Hood Canal Chinook. Our Tribes are very concerned about the recovery of this stock in our Tribes’ traditional fishing area, and ask that our tribal communities’ concerns be heard.

As you may be aware, Western Washington’s Mid-Hood Canal Chinook stock is listed under the federal Endangered Species Act as an essential component to the recovery of the Puget Sound Chinook Evolutionary Significant Unit (ESU) and is considered one of the most at-risk populations in the Puget Sound ESU. The forecasted return of this stock for 2020 is at a historical low, only 39 fish, which is far below its court-ordered Puget Sound and Hood Canal Salmon Management Plans’ escapement goal of 750 Chinook, and well below its low abundance threshold of 400 Chinook. Yet the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is now proposing a harvest rate increase on this stock over this stock’s critical harvest exploitation rate ceiling, which has been in the critical limit for the past 16 years, from 2004 through 2019.

We urgently request that the PFMC examine the current suite of Ocean fishing options with an eye toward preserving our long-standing co-manager negotiated, and NOAA ESA sanctioned, critical exploitation rate ceiling for Mid-Hood Canal Chinook. We ask that the Council not make a decision that encourages more exploitation of Mid-Hood Canal Chinook this year.

The State is insisting on increasing the 12% critical exploitation rate ceiling beyond our long standing co-manager Agreement of 2003 and the stock’s Management Unit Profile (MUP) of the Puget Sound Chinook Resource Management Plan (RMP) that has been in place since 2004. In the face of this stock’s declining trend, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is aggressively pushing to move the harvest rate ceiling up to 12.4%, using the Fishery Regulatory Assessment Model (FRAM). However, the FRAM has nothing to do with our critical exploitation ceiling agreement, because the rate was not derived using FRAM.

The issue of WDFW proposing to increase the critical ER ceiling is not simply a debate about 12% versus 12.4%. The critical rate was set by agreement at 12% through a political compromise among the Tribes and WDFW, up from the Tribes proposed exploitation rate of less than 10%. This was set by our Tribes as necessary for recovery in 2003. In other words, a critical exploitation rate of less than 10% represents what may actually be needed for recovery, and is

the true starting point if any kind of new FRAM adjustments are to be considered in setting rate ceilings.

The tribal agreement on 12% was a large concession by the Tribes based on mitigating factors such as a supplementation program and habitat restoration – both of which ultimately failed to improve the stocks status. Nonetheless, since 2003, the WDFW and the Tribes have continued to manage to 12%. For these and conservation reasons, we object to any increase in the ER ceiling from the agreed-upon 12% rate. We also object to the WDFW presumption that a change in the FRAM automatically should result in a change in an agreed ER for this stock.

Many Puget Sound Tribes and their critical chinook situations will be affected as well if there is an increase in the Mid-Hood Canal Chinook exploitation rate. Many have supported us in our objection to the WDFW proposal. We would ask that the Council also take this into consideration as Ocean harvest levels North of Cape Falcon are examined.

We ask the PFMC to honor our Mid-Hood Canal Chinook recovery and critical exploitation rate ceiling when considering Ocean option levels. Current co-manager North of Cape Falcon chinook model runs, utilizing last year's fisheries in combination with this year's forecasted abundance, have only three Ocean options as contained in the low to middle levels that would be considered under the Mid-Hood Canal Chinook ceiling of 12%. Middle level model run number 1720a demonstrates that a 11.9% rate could be achieved; while low model runs 1820a and 1820b also demonstrate that less than 10% could be achieved at 9.29% and 9.72 % respectively.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Council members, for this opportunity to testify today on this critically important issue to our Tribes and to the preservation of this precious resource.