

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

March 11, 2021,

Good day members of the Council. My name is Bruce Jim, Sr. I am the Chair of the Warm Springs Fish and Wildlife Committee, a Commissioner with the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission and a treaty fisher on the Columbia River. I have been asked to present this statement on behalf of the four Columbia River Treaty Tribes, the Warm Springs, Umatilla, Yakama, and Nez Perce Tribes. Our four tribes specifically reserved rights to hunt and fish and gather foods in all of our Usual and Accustomed places in treaties our tribes signed with the United States in the 1850's.

Yesterday, March 10, was the 64th anniversary of the flooding of Celilo Falls. This event marks an enormous loss for our tribes. The full mitigation for this and other losses our tribes have faced has still not occurred. While Celilo Falls is the fishing site most well known by non-Indians, there are a host of other fishing sites and village sites in both the mainstem and tributaries that have been lost under the reservoirs or destroyed through other development. We were promised that even with the development of the hydrosystem, that we would always have fish to catch. Each of the dams caused damage from Bonneville Dam on upstream. Dams have covered spawning grounds, changed flows and run-off timing, and increased river temperatures as well as created fish passage problems. The government promised that hatcheries would make up for all the lost fish. The government promised they would rebuild these runs. With challenges regarding hatchery funding along with maintenance and water supply issues, we are concerned about moving the wrong direction in fulfilling promises made to our tribes.

Our four tribes have had to reduce our fisheries as runs have declined and we have been displaced from many fishing areas. Our tribes bear an unfair portion of the conservation burden associated with managing weak runs of fish.

In addition to these issues, we remain very concerned about predation problems in the Columbia Basin. We have made some progress in our ability to address pinniped predation because of new federal legislation that is giving states and tribes more latitude in addressing problem animals. Seal and sea lion predation remains a problem and we will need to continue to work together to address it. We also have a huge problem of predation by birds and introduced fish species in the Columbia Basin. Birds and introduced fish continue to eat millions of smolts per year throughout the basin. Our efforts to remove cormorants from East Sand Island in the Columbia estuary has only moved them to the Astoria Megler Bridge where their diet is made up of even more salmonids that it was before. These birds are also damaging the bridge. Solving the problem of excessive bird predation will require that we all continue to work together to find solutions. We have had problems with predation by introduced fish species for decades, but a new potential risk has developed with northern Pike becoming established upstream of Grand Coulee Dam. Northern pike are voracious predators and if they make it downstream of Grand Coulee, they will likely devastate salmonids in the mainstem. Finding better ways to control these fish is an urgent concern. The development of the hydro-system has changed the Columbia river in ways that adversely impact salmon, but have helped these predators. When the ecosystem is so far out of balance, we must step in to manage these predators.

This concludes the tribal statement.