

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

**April 15, 2021**

Good day members of the Council. My name is Wilbur Slockish Jr. I am a member of the Yakama Nation, a Commissioner for the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, and a treaty fisher on the Columbia River. I am here to provide testimony on behalf of the four Columbia River treaty tribes: the Yakama, Warm Springs, Umatilla, and Nez Perce Tribes.

As the Council works to finalize this year's ocean fisheries, the tribes would like to remind everyone of a few issues important to the tribes.

The Columbia Basin ecosystem is out of balance. We reminded the Council of predation issues in March, but there are also issues with the general river environment that benefit predators and harm salmon.

High summer water temperatures and excessive nutrients in the Columbia River have caused increases in the abundance of aquatic vegetation, much of which are non-native. This vegetation not only interferes with tribal fisheries but also undoubtedly impacts the food chain for our salmon and steelhead. Siltation has also become a concern. Many tributary mouths are filling in because silt is not transported downstream due to the hydro system. The shallow river mouths leave juvenile fish subject to high levels of predation and make it difficult for adults to enter tributaries at lower flows. Funding will need to be found for dredging and other restoration efforts around river mouths. In this modified environment, introduced fish species such as walleye and bass can thrive and threaten another first food, juvenile lamprey. There are also increasing numbers of introduced organisms that we know little about such as Siberian prawns and there continue to be threats from invasive mussels that are found regularly with inspections on boats coming from other parts of the country. If we care about salmon, steelhead, and lamprey, we must do more to restore a properly functioning environment for these fish.

In the 1850s, Isaac Stevens and Joel Palmer made explicit promises to the tribes as representatives of the United States. They promised that the tribes would always have access to their food. These promises were not kept as "development" occurred and fish runs were depleted. Dam building in the Columbia Basin began with dams and diversions in the tributaries in the late 1800s. These early dams along with mines, logging, and grazing destroyed and blocked fish habitat. With the construction of large mainstem dams beginning in the early 1900s, people turned to hatcheries to mitigate lost production. Even though promises continued to be made to the tribes that they would always have fish, the large majority of early hatcheries were constructed downstream of Bonneville Dam. Tribal fisheries are place-based fisheries within the tribes' Usual and Accustomed Fishing areas. Village sites and spawning grounds have been lost which displaced tribal people and the fish. Tribal fishers don't have the opportunity to move around like sport fishers who can fish anywhere from the ocean to Idaho. We depend on fish returning to our areas to provide for our needs. Ocean fisheries need to be managed conservatively to ensure enough fish return to tribal fishing areas and also to meet escapement needs.

Many of our hatchery programs are underfunded and many hatcheries have been poorly maintained. There is a good deal of current discussion about fixing the nation's infrastructure. If we are going to

work on infrastructure, we should include the infrastructure needs of salmon. This means not only dealing with the needs of hatcheries which serve as recovery tools and produce fish for harvest but improving habitat can also be considered infrastructure. Even though we have made important strides in addressing various habitat concerns, habitat restoration is complex, expensive, and time-consuming. It is critical work, and more funding and support are needed.

We bring you these statements because of the need to address the needs of salmon throughout their lifecycle or there won't be fish for anyone to harvest.

We also appreciate the efforts made by the STT to report on expected escapements for the Spring Creek and PUB stocks.

This concludes the tribal statement.