

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

April 12, 2022

Good day members of the Council. My name is Erik Holt. I am a member of the Nez Perce Tribe, and a Commissioner for the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. I am here to provide testimony on behalf of the four Columbia River Treaty Tribes; the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, and the Nez Perce Tribe.

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.

Hatcheries are a useful tool in many salmon recovery efforts as demonstrated by many upriver programs. Everyone is aware of the challenges in dealing with the ESA listed LRH tule stock impacts and we don't seem to be using the hatchery tool effectively in efforts to recover this stock. Lower river hatcheries remain primarily just for mitigation. It is important to work on salmon recovery through a wide range of actions and it appears to the tribes that little is being done for lower river tules. As a result, fisheries bear the brunt of conservation. The tribes have always advocated for dynamic recovery actions including the appropriate use of hatcheries. As mentioned, our efforts with Snake River fall chinook demonstrate this.

However, the Columbia Basin ecosystem remains 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 is non-native. This vegetation interferes with tribal fisheries and 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. 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 be needed 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 other 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.

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 majority of early mitigation 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 Pacific 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 to meet escapement needs.

Although we remain committed to the idea that hatcheries can be used as a critical part of the recovery strategy, many of our hatchery programs are underfunded and many hatcheries have been poorly maintained. Promises made to the tribes by Federal officials that we would always have hatchery fish include the need to maintain hatcheries. As we work on the nation's infrastructure, we should remember 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 also remembering that improving habitat can also be considered infrastructure. As we make important strides in addressing various habitat concerns, we must remember that habitat restoration is complex, expensive, and time-consuming. It is critical work, and more funding and support are needed.

We remind you to address the needs of salmon throughout their lifecycle or there won't be fish for anyone to harvest.

This concludes the tribal statement.