



UPPER SKAGIT INDIAN TRIBE

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TESTIMONY AND STATEMENT OF THE UPPER SKAGIT INDIAN TRIBE

Delivered by
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Dear Members of The Pacific Fisheries Management Council, concerning the planning process for 2024 fisheries The Upper Skagit Indian Tribe has significant concern about planned fishery impacts on Skagit River origin summer and fall Chinook salmon. The three populations of Skagit summer and fall Chinook, managed as a single unit, are being impacted by both climate-induced and anthropogenic factors; This year's return is much lower than needed to safeguard the viability of the individual populations. We recognize that there is nothing that can be done in the short-term to influence the climate-induced factors and some of the anthropogenic factors, but the planned fishery impacts under the purview of the PFMC can be adjusted to better protect these populations of Chinook salmon. Additionally, the PFMC must consider support for reduction of Canadian fishery impacts on these populations – currently modeled at an exploitation rate of 17%, which is greater than the exploitation rate ceiling for all southern-US fisheries.

The Upper Skagit Indian Tribe reminds the PFMC that the minimum escapement of natural Sauk summer Chinook spawners to the spawning grounds is 400 adults and that current models suggest that escapement will be well below 350 adult spawners. Based on the established best management practices, biological considerations, and the forecast of return well below the Low Abundance Threshold and minimum escapement needs for Sauk Summer Chinook, The Upper Skagit Tribe requests that the PFMC ensure that all pre-terminal fisheries be managed to achieve the maximum possible escapement to spawning and ensure population viability.

It is obvious that there is no way for the 2024-2025 Southern US salmon fisheries to be shaped such that the Sauk Summer Chinook escapement will reach the designated Low Abundance Threshold escapement of 400 fish and that the only option will be to focus on achieving the Southern US ER ceiling of 15%. While achieving the SUS ER may be acceptable for protection of the US/Canada agreement, it does not protect the recovery and maintenance needs for the Sauk Summer Chinook population.

The Upper Skagit Tribe submits that the projected return of wild Sauk Summer Chinook salmon to the Skagit River is far below that necessary to ensure protection of the resource in 2024. Just as the Upper Skagit Tribe must constrain their impacts, including Ceremonial and Subsistence needs, the PFMC must consider weak-stock management measures that reduce impacts and protect the Sauk summer Chinook, and other wild spawning populations of Chinook salmon, this year - both for the health of the resource and the associated treaty rights of the Indian Tribes of Washington.

In closing, The Upper Skagit Indian Tribe reminds the Council that the projections for 2025 returns of Skagit Chinook salmon is even more concerning than this year and that the expectation of the Tribe is that the PFMC will consider the needs of the resource above all else in fishery planning beyond this year and into the foreseeable future.