

**Statement by the Columbia River Treaty Tribes  
to the Pacific Fishery Management Council  
Seattle, Washington  
April 6, 2024**

Good day members of the Council:

My name is Wilbur Slockish, Jr. I am a member of the Yakama Nation and a CRITFC commissioner. I am here with Bruce Jim Sr. from Warm Springs and Erik Holt from the Nez Perce Tribe. I am here today to provide a statement on behalf of the four Columbia River Treaty Tribes; the Umatilla, Warm Springs, Yakama, and Nez Perce Tribes. Our tribes are composed of numerous bands that were joined together when the treaties were signed and all have federally recognized treaty rights in the Columbia River and its tributaries. From time immemorial, the Columbia River treaty tribes have relied on the river and the tributaries for our culture, food, and economy.

As the Council considers options for the ocean salmon fisheries this year, we would like to point out that our objective in salmon restoration is to build up salmon runs to healthy self sustaining levels not simply to build up fisheries. We don't need to catch every last fish. The challenges facing us as we plan our fisheries is because the status of our fish runs has been impacted by a wide range of non-fishing activities, not simply fishing. The habitat in the Columbia Basin has been radically altered.

But habitat problems are not the only ones. One major issue that is affecting our salmon and steelhead run is avian predation. Bird populations in the Columbia basin have grown to levels that are severely impacting our fish. Birds eat tens of thousands of smolts every year including fish that contribute to Council fisheries. This has happened because of human activities especially the construction of the hydro system. There are thousands of gulls nesting right now in areas such as Miller Rocks near the mouth of the Deschutes River. These gulls feed at both dams and in shallow silted areas around river mouths when smolts are available and are supported by large nearby landfills during other times of year. There is no reason to allow gulls to nest in the interior basin anywhere near the numbers they currently do. We need to take actions to limit these bird's ability to reproduce. White pelicans have also become problematic. Their populations in the interior Columbia have increased dramatically in recent years and their impacts on fish has grown with their population increases. Pelicans not only eat smolts but can eat fish at least as large as adult sockeye. We also need to take action to limit breeding pelican populations. Birds are a natural part of the ecosystem, but human activities have put the system way out of balance. We need to be able to manage these salmon predators. There are several other bird species that impact salmon. Besides birds, non-native fish are significant predators of salmon smolts. We have even seen increases in stellar sea lions that prey on fall chinook stocks in the Columbia.

These are just some examples of the work that we all need to continue to do if we are going to fully recover our salmon populations and be able to support reasonable fisheries. Until we can address all of the impacts that are adversely affecting our salmon, we will never reach recovery.

We will continue to review the impacts on Columbia River stocks from the ocean fishery options and will have additional comments later.

Thank You.