

**Statement by the Columbia River Treaty Tribes
to the Pacific Fishery Management Council
Vancouver, WA
March 7, 2025**

Good day members of the Council:

My name is Bruce Jim Sr. I am the chair of the Warm Springs Fish and Wildlife Committee and a Commissioner for the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. I am here with Wilbur Slockish Jr from the Yakama Nation. 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.

In the 1850's, our tribes signed a series of treaties with the United States. We did this as sovereigns. We are the only tribes in the Columbia Basin with federally recognized treaty fishing rights. We have always lived with and managed the salmon which is a cornerstone of our culture and spirituality. In our treaties, we specifically retained the rights to hunt and fish and gather food in all of our usual and accustomed fishing areas. Our ceded lands which encompass just part of our usual and accustomed fishing areas contain more than 25% of the entire Columbia Basin and approximately 55% of the rivers and streams that are still accessible to salmon.

We come to you today to provide some information as the Council develops its recommendations regarding the 2025 ocean salmon fisheries. Many of the stocks that return to our homelands are caught in PFMC fisheries. Upper Columbia summer chinook, all of the various upriver fall chinook, and upriver coho stocks are fish that are caught in Council waters. These stocks also migrate through our waters and are what we fish for. As was the case last year, the forecasts are mixed. Some stocks have better forecasts than last year, and some stocks have lower forecasts than last year. None of the forecasts are for very large returns.

The forecast for Upper Columbia Summer chinook is a specific concern. The river mouth return of summer chinook is forecasted to be the lowest run since 2007. We understand these are just forecasts - paper fish - and there is uncertainty around the forecasts. In-river fisheries adjust to the actual returns, but ocean fisheries cannot be adjusted if the run sizes are different than the forecasts. This makes it especially important to set ocean fisheries cautiously. We will review the output of the ocean models and will likely have additional comments throughout the March and April Meetings. The tribes do not want to continue to bear the conservation burden alone.

The goals stated in the *U.S. v. Oregon* Management Agreement are to rebuild weak runs to full productivity and fairly share the harvest of upriver runs between treaty Indian and non-treaty fisheries both in the ocean and in the Columbia River Basin. As the Council develops the 2025 ocean fishing plans, we will be reviewing the proposed fisheries to ensure they meet the goals of fairly sharing harvest and meet the requirements of the *U.S. v. Oregon* Management Agreement.

Fishing is not the cause of the decline of Columbia basin stocks. It was the destruction of habitat, logging, mining, irrigation and especially the construction of the hydroelectric system. Even though the promises made by the federal government to ensure the tribes always have fish has not been met, the tribes have worked hard with our co-managers in all aspects of the recovery efforts to address these impacts and re-build our salmon populations. In these uncertain times, we need to continue to work together on salmon recovery but also manage fisheries affecting Columbia River stocks cautiously and responsibly. If we work together, we can continue to make progress towards restoring salmon runs to healthy and harvestable levels.

We would like to specifically point out that we all need to think about how we all can best respond to decreases in funding and decreases in staffing at our federal partners. It is not simply the needed resources to continue managing fisheries responsibly and the resources to produce hatchery fish, but also the resources and staffing to monitor and protect our environment. Our fish will suffer if we do not protect our environment and address the causes and impacts of climate change.

It has taken decades for the tribes to build up relationships with our co-managers that can work together effectively to rebuild salmon runs and we do not want to see this diminished by the current situation with our government.

Thank You.