

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

**April 15, 2025, San Jose, CA**

Good day members of the Council. My name is Wilbur Slockish Jr. I am a member of the Yakama Nation and Commissioner with the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. I am here with Jasmine Higheagle and Bruce Jim Sr. 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 finalizes the ocean fisheries for this year, we would like to share some of our perspectives. The rights retained by our Tribes over 150 years ago are critically important. These rights allow us to maintain our cultural and spiritual connection to the fish and all of our natural resources. We have had these connections with the fish since time immemorial. These rights have also resulted in our system of co-management of the fisheries and a system where we must all work together carefully to protect and rebuild salmon runs while fairly sharing the harvest. Non-treaty fisheries do not have superior rights to tribal fishing. By established case law, Tribal fisheries are to be the last ones constrained. When these rights are respected, we work well together. And the treaty and non-treaty fisheries as well as the fish do better. As we work on salmon recovery together, all of our fisheries will improve.

We also remind people of the need to continually focus on improving fish habitat. Fish habitat in fresh water has been degraded and destroyed for well over 100 years. Climate change is already affecting both freshwater areas and the ocean. Addressing climate change related ocean conditions will be exceptionally difficult. But we can address many of the freshwater and estuarine conditions. The health of our salmon depends on the health of the tributaries. And the health our people depends on the health of the salmon. The tribes have been leaders in both advocating for restoring habitat as well as actually doing the work to restore fish habitat. We work closely with our co-managers in these efforts. The benefits to restoring habitat can often only be measured over many years. It can take a very long time for ecosystems to heal. This is why we need to maintain continued focus on these efforts. We are concerned about the possibility of reduction in funding in many federal programs may adversely affect our efforts to continue habitat restoration work. We are also concerned about possible changes to regulations protecting habitat from pollution and timber harvest and other activities which adversely impact fish. One specific area of concern are recent reports that the administration is planning on eliminating the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund. This program was appropriated 1.8 billion dollars since 2000 including IRA funds. This money leveraged an additional 2.2 billion dollars in other contributions and has resulted in the protection and restoration of almost 1.2 million acres of salmon habitat. This money has provided important benefits and needs to be continued. We need to all work together to ensure that not only protections for habitat are maintained but funding to continue the work of restoring habitat is also maintained.

An area of fish habitat that has not had enough focus is the sedimentation around river mouths. Many of our river mouths have become filled with sediment that only allows narrow shallow passages for juvenile fish to get through which leaves them open to predation by birds and non-native fish. The conditions in the river mouths need to be addressed.

Our rivers and streams are the lifeblood of our people and the nurseries of our salmon. For generations, these waters have sustained not only the fish but the spirit, culture, and survival of our people. The salmon are more than food — they are our relative, but now, the balance is broken.

Clean, healthy water is not a luxury — it is a sacred responsibility. Every element of the salmon ecosystem plays a role in our traditions, our ceremonies, and our future. The fish have always taken care of us. The salmon need us more than ever to take care of them & their environment. Their survival is our survival.

This concludes our statement.

Thank you.