

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

April 8, 2026, Portland, OR

Good day members of the Council. My name is Chris Williams. I am a member of the Fish and Wildlife Committee for the Umatilla Tribes and a Commissioner with the Columbia River Inter Tribal Fish Commission and am here with Bruce Jim from the Warm Springs Tribes, Judy Oatman from the Nez Perce Tribe and Wilbur Slockish from the Yakama Nation. I am here to provide testimony on behalf of the four Columbia River treaty tribes: the Yakama, Warm Springs, Umatilla and Nez Perce Tribes.

Our four tribal nations signed treaties with the United States in the 1850's as sovereign nations. In these treaties, we specifically retained the right to hunt, fish, and gather food throughout our usual and accustomed lands which encompass wide swaths of the Columbia Basin. These treaties were ratified by the United States Senate and our rights have been upheld through the courts.

As the Council begins to finalize the package of 2026 ocean salmon fishing regulations, we have a few additional comments.

During our last statement at the March meeting, we received a question regarding tribal concerns with mark selective fisheries that we did not adequately answer at the time. The tribal concerns with mark selective fisheries are comprised of several things. First, there is uncertainty about the true release mortality rate on fish released during salmon fishing. It is very difficult to design studies to determine the appropriate release mortality rates to use. The actual mortality rates will be dependent on the level of injury to the fish, the time the fish spends on the hook, and the size, age, and health of the fish. Mortality rates likely are higher as the fish make their transition to fresh water especially in estuarine areas. Second, we are concerned about the possibility of multiple encounters especially with the increasing number of mark selective fisheries in the ocean, mainstem and tributary fisheries. If fish are handled and released multiple times, their mortality rate could also increase. Third, mark selective fisheries can cause allocation shifts. As the magnitude of mark selective fisheries increase, more terminal full retention fisheries including our tribal fisheries will have higher harvest rates on the remaining natural origin fish because so many hatchery fish were removed prior to our fishery. This has in several cases proved to be a complicating factor in managing our tribal fisheries to stay within ESA impact limits. Fourth, mark selective fisheries have been in place in many cases for decades and have done nothing to help reduce overall fishery impacts on natural origin fish. They have only been implemented in ways to access more hatchery fish. These fisheries do nothing to restore natural fish runs. And finally, the tribes see fishing as the way to harvest fish for food and to meet our ceremonial and cultural needs. The idea of catching fish and then just throwing them back because you don't want to or are not allowed to keep them, just does not sit well with us. We don't understand why people want to manage fisheries this way. We think it would be better just to go out and catch and keep the fish you need for food and then go home.

We also want to reinforce to the Council how much the tribes have done to support and increase hatchery production upstream of Bonneville. Hatcheries are necessary to mitigate for impacts from the hydro system and other development. When the Columbia Basin salmon hatchery system was first developed, most of the production was downstream of Bonneville Dam and did not support

tribal fisheries and could not be used to supplement and rebuild natural runs. This was blatantly discriminatory to the tribes because it just supported non-treaty fisheries. The tribes have long advocated for improvements to the hatchery system, for production to occur in the basins where impacts have occurred and for hatcheries to support re-introduction and rebuilding of natural runs. Producing fish upstream allows the fish to fulfill their creator driven mandate to support the entire ecosystem. Through our work with the other *U.S. v. Oregon* Parties, we have over time reached agreements for annual release targets of over 4.2 million Upper Columbia Summer chinook, over 43.5 million fall chinook, and 10 million coho upstream of Bonneville Dam. The tribes manage and co-manage a number of the hatcheries producing these fish. These fish support ocean, in-river, and tributary fisheries as well as support a number of re-introduction and rebuilding efforts. One of the most successful rebuilding efforts has been with Snake River fall chinook. The run has been built up from just 78 natural origin fish at Lower Granite Dam in 1990 to natural origin returns averaging almost 8,000 per year in the last five years. Around 25 years ago the Council sometimes had difficulty concluding business at the end of the April meeting because the ocean fisheries struggled to meet the conservation limit for Snake River fall chinook. These fish have not been a driver of ocean fisheries in many years. Our tribes continually work with our co-managers to modernize and improve hatchery programs to produce more fish and fish better adapted to support our ongoing efforts to rebuild fish runs to full harvestable levels that support all of our needs.

This concludes the tribal statement.