

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

April 6, 2017, Portland, OR

Good day members of the Council. My name is Casey Mitchell. I am a member of the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee and the Chair of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. I am here to provide testimony on behalf of the four Columbia River treaty tribes: the Yakama, Warm Springs, Umatilla, and Nez Perce Tribes.

At the March meeting, we testified in opposition to Option 1 as it projected an ocean escapement for the URB stock of less than 200,000. The PSC CTC has finished its calibration of the PSC chinook model and has calculated the Abundance Indices for the northern fisheries. With the incorporation of this information into the PFMC chinook FRAM, the projected ocean escapement for URB's for all three options is currently over 200,000. This resolves our concern with paper fish. However, forecasts are just predictions and Columbia River fisheries are managed based the actual run sizes. The URB forecast has been as much as 144% of the actual run in the past ten years and has averaged 135% of the actual run over the same time period. Over forecasts have occurred in half of the last ten years. For this reason, we urge a high degree of caution in setting ocean fisheries this year so as not to create the potential combination of problems of ocean fisheries that are too high and the in-river fisheries having to manage for a much lower actual run.

We are all faced with challenges in providing reasonable fisheries this year in the context of lower expected run sizes and forecast uncertainty. While some of factors that have led to reduced run sizes include poor ocean conditions, another major problem affecting fish in the Columbia River is excessive predation by birds and marine mammals.

Birds kill tens of thousands of salmon and steelhead smolts every year. Bird populations have been artificially enhanced through the modification of the in-river environment and the management of the hydro-system.

There have been actions taken in the estuary to reduce successful nesting of Caspian terns in the last couple years. Breeding pairs were reduced in 2017 to less than 4,000 from a recent average of around 9,000. There were no known juveniles produced on East Sand Island in 2017 compared to a recent average of nearly 0.8 juveniles per pair. There has also been some progress made in the estuary in reducing impacts from cormorants as well. However, these species are long lived and just because they don't nest successfully, does not mean they don't still eat smolts. They also occur throughout the basin along with gulls and pelicans. There are large nesting colonies of birds upstream including in places like the Umatilla wildlife refuge. We have strived to get the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refuge managers to take the bird predation issue as seriously as it needs to be taken. It seems like the Fish and Wildlife personnel working on salmon have a completely different focus than the refuge personnel who seem only focused on birds. It is like two different agencies. There is much more that needs to be done especially in upstream areas to reduce predation on our fish that we work so hard to restore and manage for the benefit of all users.

Seals and sea lions make the news in the spring when predation on adult salmon and steelhead is so noticeable. But it is important to remember that seal and sealion predation is not just a problem for spring chinook and winter steelhead. These mammals are in the river year-round. Sea

lions can be found upstream of Bonneville all year. They prey on summer and fall chinook as well as coho. The existence and management of the hydro-system has benefited pinnipeds at the expense of salmon and steelhead. The Columbia River does not function like a natural system that would allow us to leave certain species “un-managed”. We need to do much more to reduce the number of seals and sea lions in the Columbia and reduce their predation. The Marine Mammal Protection Act is overly restrictive in its ability to properly balance the needs of salmon with the desire to conserve marine mammals. The tribes have expressed support for legislation in Congress that will improve management of pinnipeds. If we can make some real progress in addressing excessive predation by species that are out of control in the Columbia, we can make some real improvements in the abundance of Columbia River salmon.

This concludes the tribal statement.