

**TESTIMONY OF THE COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY TRIBES
BEFORE PACIFIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
MARCH 9, 2011
Vancouver, WA**

Good day Mr. Chairman and members of the Council. My name is Emerson Squiemphen. I am a member of the Fish and Wildlife Committee of the Warm Springs Tribes. I am here with Chris Williams of the Umatilla Tribe and Wilbur Slockish Jr. of the Yakama Nation to provide Testimony on behalf of the four Columbia River treaty tribes: the Yakama, Warm Springs, Umatilla and Nez Perce tribes.

As the Council considers a set of options for 2011 ocean salmon fisheries, the tribes would like to present information on tribal efforts to recover and rebuild weak salmon runs. The tribes have been engaged in long term efforts to rebuild our salmon runs both for the sake of the wild salmon and to meet the needs of the tribes and our fisheries. The tribes view salmon management as a gravel-to-gravel exercise where efforts must be made in all aspects of the salmon lifecycle. The tribes' gravel-to-gravel management approach to salmon recovery is two fold: put fish back in to the rivers and protect the watersheds where fish live. The careful management of the tribes' sustainable fisheries and recent improvements to passage along the mainstem has seen measurable success. One key area that the tribes have focused on is the appropriate use of hatchery fish to aid in the rebuilding of wild salmon runs. The tribes are rebuilding salmon populations to levels where everyone benefits and the proof is in the numbers.

An area that the tribes have seen significant positive results is with Snake River fall Chinook. The tribes engaged in very difficult struggles with the states and federal government to get agreements on establishing a supplementation program allowing hatchery origin fish that were acclimated upstream of Lower Granite Dam to return and spawn in areas throughout accessible parts of the basin above Lower Granite. It has been many years of hard work to build up this program to its current level. The program is designed to increase the abundance of natural origin fish so that the fish may take advantage of increases in productivity that will come from better management of the hydro-system and other parts of the salmon's lifecycle. The program is showing very good success. In 1994 fewer than 2,000 Snake River Fall Chinook returned to the Columbia Basin. Listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, the estimated return on naturally-spawning Snake River Fall Chinook averaged 328 adults from 1986-1992. In 2010, we had a record return of both hatchery and natural origin fall Chinook. The natural origin adult return was almost 10,000 fish which was nearly twice the previous record return. The total adult return was over 40,000 fish.

This occurred even with these same fish being harvested everywhere from Alaska and Canada to throughout the PFMC area fisheries and in in-river fisheries. In the past two years, Idaho sport fishermen have been able to keep fall Chinook caught upstream of Lower Granite and the Nez Perce Tribe is working on harvest plans that will allow them increased access to these fish. It has been nearly 15 years since the Council had significant problems in constraining fisheries to meet Snake River fall Chinook harvest limits. Our tribes view this as significant progress and evidence of the value of tribal recovery strategies. Just think of how fishery management might be different if we were able to use these kinds of strategies to help recover lower river tules instead of relying on a strategy of endless fishery restrictions and hatchery reductions.

The Columbia River above Bonneville is seeing strong runs of salmon. Once considered for listing under the Endangered Species Act, only 20,000 Fall Chinook passed in to the Hanford Reach area of the Columbia River in the early 1980s. Today, the Hanford Reach Fall Chinook run is one of the healthiest runs in the basin. Supporting fisheries in Alaska, Canada, , the PFMC area and the mainstem Columbia over 133,000 Fall Chinook returned to the Hanford Reach in 2010.

More often than not, the press around Columbia Basin salmon issues focuses on failures. They focus on how the government can't get it right, or that hatchery fish will single handedly be responsible for the demise of wild salmon populations, or that the price tag for recovery is too high and the only certainty in salmon recovery is failure. Power producers complain about the "cost" of spilling water over dams. Reality, on the other hand, is remarkably different. Wild spring chinook salmon are returning to the Umatilla, Yakima, Klickitat and Deschutes Rivers in numbers that sustain harvestable levels. Spring chinook have been successfully re-introduced into the Walla Walla River. Coho that are harvested in all of our fisheries are returning to the Clearwater tributary of the Snake River after being declared extinct in 1994. Strong numbers of coho from tribal restoration programs are returning to the Wenatchee, Yakama, Umatilla and Klickitat Rivers as well. Record numbers of sockeye are returning to their natal lakes in Canada and Idaho. Fish are returning to the Columbia River Basin and their success is, in part, the direct result of more than thirty years of tribal restoration and rebuilding initiatives. The tribes are leading the focus on salmon recovery because the alternative is unacceptable.

The salmon are returning to a healthier habitat. The tribes have fought for in river flow agreements, such as the Vernita Bar Agreement, that protect unborn salmon and invested millions of dollars and countless of hours into protecting and restoring thousands of acres of habitat and thousands of miles of streams. Fish are returning to the spawning grounds and in the end these are the results that matter.

These tribal recovery efforts involve a delicate balance of careful, modern hatchery practices and conservative harvest management along with large efforts in habitat improvement and hydro-system management. The monitoring and evaluation of recovery programs is complex. Some fish are adipose fin clipped so we can assess harvest impacts and some are left unclipped to help them bypass mark selective fisheries and return to spawn. But increasing intensity of mark selective fishing both makes the monitoring and evaluation of our programs more difficult and increases the uncertainty around how many unclipped hatchery fish and wild fish are being harvested. Requirements to mass mark hatchery fish that in many cases serve both harvest and recovery functions has also disrupted our ability to appropriately manage our rebuilding efforts.

Our tribal scientists have published numerous scientific papers demonstrating that the popular press position that all hatchery fish have negative effects on wild populations is simply incorrect. We have an increasing body of science that shows that when carefully managed, hatchery fish can have a benign and even positive impact to wild populations.

Proposals to ban gill nets, the demonization of hatchery fish, or implementing mark selective fisheries will not save salmon. Hard work and determination will. The region must work together to realize healthy, sustainable, salmon populations.

The tribes are leading by example to make the best out of a challenging situation. Without the tribes' efforts, most upriver Columbia basin salmon would be a figment of our imagination. The region must work together for the sake of our collective future. We all benefit from healthy populations of salmon. Maybe, just maybe, we'll see full recovery in our lifetimes.

This concludes our statement. Thank You.