

**TESTIMONY OF THE COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY TRIBES
BEFORE PACIFIC FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
MARCH 7, 2012
Sacramento, CA**

Good day Mr. Chairman and members of the Council. My name is Chris Williams. I am a member of the Fish and Wildlife Committee of the Umatilla Tribes. I am here with Bruce Jim, Herb Jackson, and Wilbur Slockish Jr. 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 2012 ocean salmon fisheries, the tribes would like to remind the Council about 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 continues to show measurable success. The tribes are rebuilding salmon populations to levels where everyone benefits and the proof is in the numbers.

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 at the forefront of work to ensure hatchery practices are appropriate to avoid risks to natural populations. Groups like the HSRG have recommended rigid and sometimes arbitrary standards for hatchery management. Instead each hatchery program should be operated according to the specific needs in that area. It should be remembered that hatchery fish came from wild populations and salmon are adaptable and adapt as habitat and passage are restored.

An area that the tribes have seen significant positive results is with Snake River fall chinook. Although the current supplementation program is a cooperative program of all the Snake Basin managers, the tribes believe the program would have never begun without the tribes pushing for it. The supplementation program allows 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 1991 only 78 natural origin Snake River fall chinook returned to the Lower Granite Dam. In 2011, we had a the second highest return of both hatchery and natural origin fall chinook. The natural origin adult return was almost 8,000 fish which was well above all other years except the record 2010 return. The total adult return was over 27,000 adults to Lower Granite in spite of these same fish being harvested everywhere from Alaska and Canada to throughout the PFMC area fisheries and in in-river fisheries. In the past three years, sport fishermen have been able to keep fall chinook caught upstream of Lower Granite and the Nez Perce Tribe has begun to harvest some of these fish. It has been 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.

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 65,000 fall chinook spawned on the Hanford Reach in 2011. Over 30,000 additional fish went on upstream over Priest Rapids dam. The Hanford bright fall chinook remain stable and strong even with the presence of large hatchery programs in the area.

The Umatilla Tribes have worked for years on better water and habitat management in the Umatilla basin. In 2011, over 2,400 hatchery and natural fall chinook returned to the Umatilla River – a river that for years had such poor water management, it supported almost no anadromous fish. The Yakama Nation has recently begun a process of re-introducing summer chinook into the Yakima River. The Warm Springs Tribes have worked for years to help ensure a very stable population of natural origin fall chinook in the Deschutes River. Last year over 18,000 fall chinook returned to the Deschutes compared to an average return of around 11,000. The tribes are actively involved in planning efforts in the White Salmon and Hood Rivers which should lead to increased numbers of natural origin tules now that Powerdale and Condit Dams have been removed. Over 20,000 coho passed Priest Rapids Dam last year and a strong run of over 5,000 coho reached Lower Granite. These coho are direct results of tribal recovery efforts. All of these fish are part of the ocean fisheries that PFMC is dealing with.

More often than not, the press around Columbia Basin salmon issues focuses on failures. 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 mainstem and tributary harvest. Spring chinook have been successfully re-introduced into the Walla Walla River. Spring chinook, steelhead and sockeye are being restored upstream of Round Butte Dam on the Deschutes. Sockeye returning to their lakes in Canada and Idaho have been setting records since dam construction began. 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.

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. We curtail our harvest to provide for escapement. Tribal fisheries have intensive in-season management. The need to meet our escapement and recovery objectives is why we often voice concerns about the management of fisheries. 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 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 on 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 just a distant memory. The region must work together for the sake of our collective future. We all benefit from healthy populations of salmon.

This concludes our statement. Thank You.