



COLUMBIA RIVER INTER-TRIBAL FISH COMMISSION

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Testimony of Chair Jeremy Takala
Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Day
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Summary of Budget Requests for FY2026:

Increase Funding for Rights Protection Implementation

- a. Columbia River Fisheries Management - \$6.4 million
- b. Columbia River-In Lieu Sites Law Enforcement - \$1.75 million
- c. Columbia River-Fishing Access Site Operations - \$2.29 million
- d. U.S. Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty - \$7.42 million
- e. Implementation of P.L. 116-99 - \$2.5 million
- f. Youth Program Initiatives - \$555,000

Good afternoon, Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Jeremy Takala and I have the privilege of serving as Chair of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC). I am also Chair of both the Fish and Wildlife Committee and Law and Order Committee of the Yakama Nation Tribal Council.

CRITFC was founded in 1977 by the four Columbia River treaty tribes: the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, and the Nez Perce Tribe. CRITFC provides coordination and technical assistance to these tribes in regional, national, and international efforts to protect and restore our shared salmon, steelhead, Pacific lamprey, and white sturgeon resources and the habitat upon which these species depend.

Our collective ancestral homelands are 66,591 square miles of the Columbia River basin in Idaho, Washington, and Oregon, which is slightly larger than State of Florida. These lands cover nearly one-third of the U.S. portion of the Columbia basin and make up 88 percent of the rivers and streams above Bonneville Dam that are still accessible to salmon.

In 1855, the U.S. entered into treaties with our four tribes whereupon we ceded tens of millions of acres of our homelands. In return, the U.S. pledged to honor our ancestral rights, including the right to fish in all Usual and Accustomed stations. Unfortunately, a perilous history has brought the salmon, steelhead, and Pacific lamprey populations to the

edge of extinction. Innumerable fish stocks have been extirpated in our homelands, twelve Columbia Basin salmon and steelhead populations are listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), Pacific lamprey have declined 95% from historic numbers, and the white sturgeon population is struggling to maintain itself.

The CRITFC member tribes are internationally recognized leaders in fisheries restoration and management. We are principals in the region's efforts to halt the decline of salmon, lamprey, and sturgeon populations and rebuild them to levels that support ceremonial, subsistence, and economic needs. Columbia River fish stocks form the core of high value fisheries from the interior West to Southeast Alaska valued in the hundreds of millions of dollars. To restore these fish populations, our actions emphasize 'gravel-to-gravel' management, including supplementation of natural stocks, healthy watersheds, and collaboration with state, federal, and private entities.

For CRITFC to continue to do this critical work, we need adequate Congressional funding. Therefore, I thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding CRITFC's funding priorities. My testimony will focus on the appropriations necessary to continue the exercise of our treaty-reserved rights to harvest fish on the Columbia River.

Increase Funding for Rights Protection Implementation

a. Columbia River Fisheries Management

The tribes are leaders in one of the nation's largest fishery restoration efforts in response to the negative impacts of the Federal Columbia River Power System. Management is increasing in complexity and sophistication requiring greater data collection, collaboration, and enforcement. The BIA's Columbia River Fisheries Management budget supports the core fishery program efforts of CRITFC and our member tribes and allows us to work across the bulk of current anadromous fish habitat in the Columbia Basin.

CRITFC and our member tribes are principal implementers of actions laid out in four landmark agreements: 1) the Columbia Basin Fish Accords with federal action agencies overseeing the federal hydro system in the Columbia Basin¹, 2) continuing engagement in a 10-year Fisheries Management Plan with federal, tribal, and state parties under *U.S. v Oregon*, 3) a new Chinook Chapter of the Pacific Salmon Treaty and 4) the Columbia Basin Restoration Initiative. These agreements establish regional and international commitments to harvest and fish production efforts, commitments to critical investments in habitat restoration, and resolving contentious issues by seeking balance of the many demands within the Columbia River basin. While the tribes have committed to substantial on-the-ground projects through these agreements with additional resources from the Bonneville Power Administration, the overall management responsibilities of the tribal

¹ The Nez Perce Tribe is not a Columbia Basin Fish Accord signatory

programs have grown exponentially and need commensurate increases in BIA base funding capacity. For example, Congress enacted the Endangered Salmon Predation Control Act, P.L. 115-329, which recognizes that CRITFC and its member tribes are a part of the regional effort to manage sea lion predation in the Columbia River. However no funding was included to undertake these management activities. Rights Protection Implementation funding takes on even greater importance as funding for State co-management agencies has become inconsistent or decreased. We request Columbia River Fisheries Management funding at a new program base of **\$6.4 million**.

b. Columbia River-In Lieu Sites Law Enforcement

Public safety is a high priority for CRITFC and our member tribes. Our conservation and criminal enforcement officers are the cornerstone of public safety in the heavily used Columbia River Gorge area, patrolling 150 miles of the river and its shorelines in Oregon and Washington. We are the primary provider of enforcement services at 31 fishing access sites developed on federal lands and under federal jurisdiction pursuant to P.L. 87-14 and P.L. 100-581 for use by treaty fisheries. CRITFC's officers possess BIA Special Law Enforcement Commissions to enhance protection and service to tribal members and federal trust properties along the river.

CRITFC entered a P.L. 93-638 contract with BIA in 2011 for enforcement services along the Columbia River. That contract provides funding for two positions. Additional appropriations were provided in FY2022 (\$1.5m), FY2023 (\$1.575m), and FY 2024 (\$1.575m) to enhance public safety and law enforcement services. Funding has become reoccurring and leads to increased long-term stability of this public safety effort. We request Columbia River-In Lieu Sites Law Enforcement funding at **\$1.75 million**.

c. Columbia River-Fishing Access Site Operations

A federal commitment to provide operation and maintenance (O&M) funding was established under a 1997 MOU between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and BIA and assigned to CRITFC in 2003. This O&M need was funded in FY 2022 and FY 2023 at \$1.7 million. This base O&M funding is very important to the health and safety of our treaty fishers as they access the Columbia River in exercise of their treaty reserved fishing rights. We request Columbia River-Fishing Access Site Operations funding at **\$2.29 million**.

d. U.S. Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty

In response to declining salmon populations and pending treaty fishing rights litigation, the U.S. and Canada forged the Pacific Salmon Treaty in 1985 to conserve and rebuild salmon stocks, provide for optimum production, and control salmon interceptions.

The Pacific Salmon Treaty established the Pacific Salmon Commission (PSC) as a forum to collaborate on intermingled salmon stocks. The U.S. Section of the PSC annually develops a coordinated budget for tribal, state, and federal programs to ensure cost and program efficiencies. The 2008 agreement, which expired at the end of 2018, represented a step

forward in ensuring the conservation and rebuilding of the shared salmon resource. The Parties recently completed revisions to the 2008 agreement. The revised agreement calls for the implementation of additional data requirements.

For tribal participation in the Pacific Salmon Treaty, the U.S. Section has identified a continuing program need of \$7.42 million for the 25 participating tribes to implement the revised agreement. These funds provide for direct tribal participation with the Commission, panels, and technical committees. This funding maintains tribal resource assessment and research programs structured to fulfill required treaty implementation activities which protect trust resources and ensures that our tribal fishers receive an equitable portion of the harvestable fish numbers. We request U.S. Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty funding at **\$7.42 million**.

e. Implementation of P.L. 116-99

Public Law 116-99, signed into law by President Trump in 2019, recognized the deteriorating condition of the sites due to age and significant use and Congress authorized \$11 million to refurbish the sites in order to meet human health and safety standards. We are requesting \$2.5 million in FY 2026, to continue implementation of the 2022 assessment. We have started construction on the four highest priority sites utilizing programmatic appropriations and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding. We are working to address Clean Water Act standards at the oldest, most heavily used sites including Lone Pine, Cooks and Cascade Locks In lieu sites and the Lyle Treaty Fishing Access Site. We request P.L. 116-99 Implementation funding at **\$2.5 million**.

f. Youth Program Initiatives

CRITFC strives to build a tribal workforce pool of respected and skilled Native American scientists, policy analysts, technicians, and managers that serve the tribes' fisheries and natural resource management program needs. CRITFC's Workforce Development Program helps prepare tribal members of all ages for jobs and careers in natural resources management by providing hands-on, culturally relevant experiences that expand their exposure to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Except for a pandemic-related pause in 2020 and 2021, CRITFC has held a week-long Salmon Camp for middle school students in collaboration with our member tribes since 2010. From 2014-2017, CRITFC was able to offer paid internships and research experiences for college students interested in fisheries and natural resources, but due to a lack of funding, those opportunities are not currently available. In 2020, CRITFC acquired an estuary and near coastal observation program which we hope can provide tribal workforce opportunities in the estuary and marine environments. We request Youth Program Initiatives funding at **\$555,000**.

On behalf of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Subcommittee with our funding priorities for Fiscal Year 2026.