

Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Testimony in Support of House Bill 5018

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RESERVATION OF OREGON

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Good morning, Co-Chairs Devlin and Rayfield and members of the Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources. My name is Louis Pitt, Jr., of the Wal/tala people. I am the Director of Government Affairs of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon. This is to support House Bill 5018, the base Department of Environmental Quality Budget with certain policy option packages. My tribe is primarily concerned with the Water Quality Budget, which is needed at a higher level than that of the Governor's Budget to ensure protection of our sacred rivers and the salmon brothers who swim upstream to feed us.

In the tradition given us by the Creator millennia ago, the salmon people are our first food. The health of salmon, sturgeon, lamprey, and other fish people are important to our people beyond what words can express. After water alone, these are the most precious gifts of the Creator. They are the basis of our culture and survival for many thousands of years. If they are poisoned, we are poisoned, for our people eat 10 times as much fish as the average Oregonian.

We lost two fishing chiefs to cancer in 2000. Both were in their early 60's. Both ate a diet rich in salmon as our ancestors did, yet they died early. They told me that it was the fish being poisoned that in turn poisoned them.

In 2002, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission completed a survey of fish tissue contaminants in the Columbia River Basin (Columbia River Basin Fish Contaminant Survey 1996-1998, PA 910/R-02-006).

The following brief summary of the study was prepared by then-CRITFC Water Quality Coordinator Dr. Patti Howard:

In the EPA/CRITFC study, the fish tissue samples were analyzed for 132 chemicals including 26 pesticides, 18 metals, 7 forms of PCB, 13 dioxin-like PCBs, 7 dioxin compounds, and 51 miscellaneous organic chemicals. Of the 132 chemicals analyzed, 92 were detected in fish. Chemical residues were detected in all samples with concentrations varying between type, species and location. Resident fish had higher chemical residue levels compared to anadromous fish. The study results raise important health and cultural concerns for the Commission member tribes whose fish consumption rate is significantly higher compared to the general public. This increased risk is due to their high consumption of Columbia River Basin fish estimated at 10 times the national average (A Fish

Consumption Survey of the Umatilla, Nez Perce, Yakama, and Warm Springs Tribes of the Columbia River Basins, Technical Report 94-3, 1994). These study findings are similar to studies of comparable aquatic ecosystems in North America, and confirm the need for strategies that reduce exposure through environmental cleanup and reduced use of toxins.

Salmon returns to the Columbia River Basin are a small fraction of historic levels. Fish tissue contamination of Columbia River fish reflects an ecosystem of impaired water quality and degraded salmon habitat. Although chemical contamination of surface water and sediments presents difficult challenges to water resource managers in the Pacific Northwest, you can help correct it with an adequate Water Quality Budget. These challenges include sublethal and lethal impacts to salmon, lamprey, and sturgeon populations from exposure to legacy, emerging, and current-use toxins in addition to environmental chemical mixtures.

This summary confirmed what you already know: we need to do more to protect the health of all Oregonians, particularly the most susceptible populations, children, pregnant women, and our People.

Please pass HB 5018 with the addition of Packages ##121—Water quality assessment, 123—Restoring wastewater permitting, and 124—Portland Harbor Coordinator to help reduce pollution of our rivers and poisoning of the fish people.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you about this critical budget.