



**Testimony of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Capitol Construction
SB 5534
May 7, 2021**

Co-Chairs Girod and Holvey, and members of the Subcommittee, my name is Jeremy Wolf. I am the Vice-Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. I am here to urge your support of Senate Bill 5534 and funding for the Wallowa Lake Dam project.

Today, I come before you, along with our partners from the irrigation community, to ask for your help in achieving something truly special. We have the opportunity to realize something that prior generations, failing to work together, were unable to accomplish.

The Columbia Basin and its fisheries have been sacred to the culture and traditions of the Tribes since time immemorial. These fisheries are central to exercising the rights reserved to us in our Treaty of 1855, and are sustained by the cold, clean water from high mountain lakes and streams, such as those of the Wallowa Mountains in northeastern Oregon.

In our Sahaptian language, the word *Waláwa* refers to the fish traps or weirs the Tribes once used for salmon fishing, which were common along the Wallowa River. Wallowa Lake, the source of the Wallowa River, is where the Tribes historically gathered to fish for sockeye, the brilliant red salmon that once returned to the Wallowas each summer.

For more than a century, a dam has been present at this location, providing flood control to downstream communities and allowing agriculture to thrive in the Wallowa Valley. And, for more than a century, sockeye have been absent from their natal waters, blocked by this dam from reaching Wallowa Lake.

For species like sockeye, which require access to a lake to spawn, the lack of passage at Wallowa Lake Dam disrupted a journey that had occurred for millennia. In only a few years, the brilliant red fish that had once returned from the ocean each summer quietly disappeared from the Wallowas.

But, for the first time in generations, we have an opportunity to help them return home.

The aging Wallowa Lake Dam is in urgent need of repair. Allowing this infrastructure to crumble not only increases the threat of catastrophic flooding for downstream communities, but also reduces the amount of water that can safely be stored for the community and the river in times of drought. And we would lose the ability to restore fish passage at Wallowa Lake Dam.

We must seize this opportunity. From protecting downstream communities, to restoring fish passage and stream flows, to supporting the agriculture, recreation, and tourism that drive the local economy, the public benefits of repairing the dam are many.

Together, we have worked closely with the Wallowa Lake Irrigation District and Nez Perce Tribe to seek funding to repair the Wallowa Lake Dam and restore fish passage to Wallowa Lake. Though we represent diverse interests, we have come together to forge a Memorandum of Agreement that formally commits us to achieving the great public benefits promised by this project. We greatly appreciate the Governor's recognition of our hard work, and her inclusion of the Wallowa Lake Dam Project in the Governor's budget.

Now we need your support to make this historic undertaking a reality. Together, we come before you to ask your support for the funding of the Wallowa Dam project in Senate Bill 5534. After so long, we look forward to welcoming back the brilliant red fish that once made their way to the Wallowas. We ask for your help in finally bringing them home.

Thank you for your time today.