

The Dipnetter

News of the River from the
Columbia River Inter-Tribal
Fish Commission

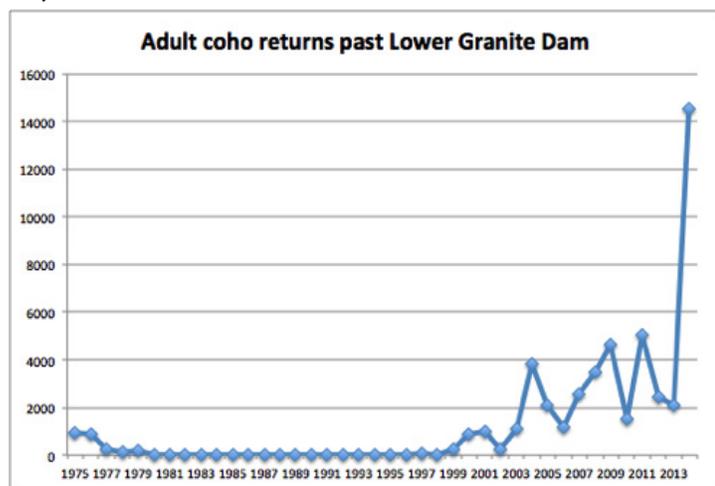


November 2014

NEZ PERCE PROGRAM RESURRECTS SNAKE RIVER COHO

SARA THOMPSON, PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER

Coho salmon are returning from a 20-year absence in the Snake River Basin, surging up the Columbia and Snake Rivers by the thousands and supporting fisheries along the way.



Coho salmon once returned to the Clearwater River Basin (tributary to the Snake River) in abundance and supported an important fall tribal fishery.

Earlier efforts to restore coho during the 1960s failed. Snake River coho were never listed under the Endangered Species Act. The Nez Perce Tribe's reintroduction program began in 1995 with hatchery coho releases into the Clearwater River. For the first time, coho returns are approaching the tribal goal of 14,000 adults returning annually to the Clearwater Basin.

"Reintroduction of coho is succeeding in the Clearwater Basin. The only reason the Nez Perce Tribe has been able to bring them back, and keep them here, is because of this essential Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Funding," said Silas Whitman, Chairman of the Nez Perce Tribe. "The returning coho are being harvested and spawning and part of our cultural connection to these fish has been reestablished."

The Nez Perce Tribe's coho program is the result of an agreement through *U.S. v. Oregon* where the Nez Perce Tribe

used surplus coho eggs from the lower Columbia River to reintroduce the species. NOAA Fisheries' Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund and Mitchell Act Program have provided the Nez Perce Tribe's coho program with more than \$5 million in funding since 2000.

Many of the returning Snake River coho are caught in tribal and other fisheries in the Columbia River and a Nez Perce tribal fishery in the mainstem Clearwater, North Fork of the Clearwater, Lapwai Creek, and Clear Creek.

"In a year of great salmon returns this one stands out because it started from zero," said Barry Thom, deputy regional administrator of NOAA Fisheries. "Few places in the world can say they have brought back a lost salmon run, but the determined work of the Nez Perce Tribe has done exactly that. That work is benefiting many others." 🐟



Nez Perce Fisheries technician Brett Bisbee releasing coho smolts into Meadow Creek at McComas Meadows in the Nez Perce National Forest.

The Far-Reaching Effects of the Treaties

Since time immemorial, the health, spirit, and cultures of the Columbia River tribes have been sustained by the water, salmon, game, roots, and berries of our homeland—our sacred “First Foods.” When the Yakama, Umatilla, Warm Springs and Nez Perce tribes entered into treaties with the United States in 1855, they specifically reserved their rights to fish, hunt, and gather at all usual and accustomed areas. The treaties have not only protected these rights, they have provided crucial legal leverage helping drive current salmon recovery efforts.

Since the signing of the treaties, the Columbia Basin

has been dramatically altered. Increased human population, dam construction, unregulated harvest, and substantial habitat modifications drastically reduced salmon populations. The significant decline drove the four tribes to form the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission in 1977. Since then, these tribes have become leaders in “putting fish back in the rivers and protecting the watersheds where fish live.” They participate in interstate agreements and international treaties controlling salmon harvest and



Paul Lumley
YAKAMA

water management; they are successfully rebuilding naturally spawning salmon populations, and they are restoring habitat and protecting the water flowing in the rivers.

Despite many daunting challenges, the tribes never strayed from their mission to protect salmon. Remarkably, the salmon decline has been reversed, in large part to the legal leverage of the treaty-reserved fishing right and the value of partnership. Our work has only begun, but the success of our efforts will benefit future generations, tribal and non-tribal alike. 🐟

◀ The Walla Walla Treaty Council. May 1855.



May, 1855. Walla Walla Council. Governor Stevens with Indians.

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FALL FISHERY UPDATE

STUART ELLIS, CRITFC HARVEST BIOLOGIST

This year's fall season fisheries have set records for modern times. The total 2014 fall chinook run was a bit less than the record high predicted, but was still a close second to last year's record return. Steelhead returns did a bit better than predicted. The upriver coho return at Bonneville was the second highest since dam construction. At the Dalles and further upriver, coho counts set record highs. The tribes had nine weeks of commercial gillnet fishing, catching over 260,000 adult fall chinook. There were 41.5 days of commercial gillnet fishing—the most open days since the 1980's.

During the peak week, the tribal fishery caught over 80,000 fall chinook, which was more than the entire fall season catch from some years in the past. We have not found any records of harvesting more fish than this in one week, so this may be a new record high weekly catch. Even with all this fishing, fall chinook counts at Lower Granite set new records for adult fall chinook and adult coho. This is further evidence that tribal efforts to restore and rebuild upriver runs has benefited both the fish as well as fisheries and tribal economies. 🐟

COAL AND OIL TRAINS ALONG THE COLUMBIA RIVER

JEREMY FIVECROWS, CRITFC PUBLIC AFFAIRS

On a tour of the Columbia River last month, CRITFC Executive Director Paul Lumley and Corps of Engineers representatives stopped at Columbia Hills State Park. Here they discovered a tremendous amount of coal and coal dust from trains that travel along the river there. The contamination is very serious, widespread, and much more

than would be expected from the few trains that pass daily. During the tour, Chip Smith, Assistant for Environment, Tribal and Regulatory Affairs, Office of Assistant Secretary for Army Civil Works; and JR Inglis, Corps of Engineers Tribal Liaison, Portland District, (*pictured to the left*) dug down to find the depth of the coal debris along the tracks. In some places, they found debris 4 to 6 inches deep.

The tracks these coal and oil trains run on are often just a few yards of the Columbia River as they travel the length of the Columbia Gorge. This poses a significant risk should one derail, as they are carrying extremely large loads that would have the potential to create an environmental disaster should the contents end up in the river. Many coal and oil trains traveling along the Columbia River pull more than 100 cars. The oil train passing by The Dalles Dam in the image below was pulling 110 cars. It was over a mile long and was carrying 3.3 million gallons of crude oil.

CRITFC and the tribes are continually monitoring this situation and are actively working to protect the Columbia River and its fisheries from the dangers of high capacity fossil fuel transport. 🐟



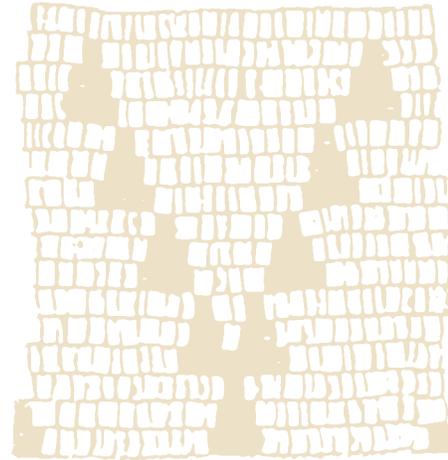


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The Dipnetter

Yakama • Warm Springs
Umatilla • Nez Perce 

A RECORD YEAR FOR CHINOOK

Several records were broken during this year's chinook salmon run and specifically the fall chinook run.

With just small numbers still passing, the current Bonneville Dam total chinook count for the year is 1,150,520 adults. The spring run at Bonneville was 224,946 fish, the summer run was 72,871, and the fall run was 852,703 (as of Oct 29)

Two days during the fall run broke the one-day record of 63,870 adult chinook that was set just last year. 67,024 fish passed on September 7, with the record to only stand one day when 67,521 passed on September 8.

The other fish counts for 2014 are:

- Adult Coho: 259,058
- Sockeye: 614,179
- Summer Steelhead: 320,460
- Lamprey: 31,950

Here's to seeing even higher numbers next year! ➤



John R. McMillan NOAA/NWFSC

Coho returned in record numbers this year to rivers and streams in Idaho where they had been declared functionally extinct 29 years ago. Photo courtesy NOAA Fisheries.