

## YAKAMA NATION'S WILLY DICK CREEK BARRIER REMOVAL & FLOODPLAIN ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

LAURA GEPHART, CRITFC WATERSHED PROJECT COORDINATOR

Willy Dick Creek, a tributary of Toppenish Creek, has four miles of available steelhead spawning habitat. The creek only produced an average of four ESA Middle Columbia River steelhead redds per year between 2006 and 2011, with a maximum of fourteen redds in 2010. Through implementation of a barrier removal and floodplain enhancement project, Yakama Nation staff have realigned Willy Dick Creek's channel with its historical pathway and enhanced numerous habitat features that will allow for further development and sustainability over time. This has been done by altering the existing dike, removing a culvert that blocked fish passage, and planting native vegetation along the creek.



Jerald Reed (r) and Frank Flett planting a native ponderosa pine to help rebuild the natural riparian area along the restored creek.



Now fish will be able to take advantage of backwater areas for rearing habitat. The restored channel meanders, which encourages nutrient exchange and cycling, and allows woody debris to build up, creating habitat complexity which provides adult and juvenile refuge from predators and spawning, foraging, and rearing habitat. The former channel was converted to backwater channel habitat

and graded to prevent fish stranding. The site is located in an area forecasted to experience less snowpack and more precipitation in the form of rain. Therefore, climate change is making water storage at this site increasingly essential to overall stream and ultimately fish health.

"The cool part of this project is that it required very little engineering. We simply helped the creek return to its former alignment and are letting the stream reach equilibrium and build on itself. I anticipate seeing steelhead redds within the project reach as early as this year. Over time, more pools and riffles will form which will add needed habitat for rearing and foraging juvenile fish, and spawning habitat for adult fish," said project manager Ryan DeKnikker, Yakama Nation Fisheries. The project was funded under the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund through NOAA Fisheries, the Bonneville Power Administration, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Removing barriers to fish passage are the highest priority identified in the 2009 Yakima Steelhead Recovery Plan. The project site is entirely located on Yakama Nation tribal trust land. The use and management of the land is governed and managed by the Yakama Nation. 🐟



## FIRST SALMON



Paul Lumley  
YAKAMA

This year, the spring chinook have already started arriving, just as they have for thousands of years. Up and down the river, their arrival will be greeted by the tribal people. The songs that are part of the ancient First Salmon feasts honoring the salmon's return will soon be heard in longhouses throughout the region. To me, the feasts are a reminder of how truly blessed tribal people are to have salmon return each year to feed and provide for our physical and spiritual needs. They are also a reminder of the spirit and richness of tribal culture, a culture that it is still strong and connected to the land that we call home.

In my meetings with state and federal agency representatives and officials, I often encourage them to take part in one of these ceremonies. Too often, in the day-to-day fights over the salmon as a resource, they can lose sight of the fact that the salmon are a gift from the Creator. When non-Indians witness and take part in a First Salmon ceremony, they not only see how important these sacred fish are to the tribes, they also see salmon and tribal people in a whole new light. The tribes do not have a monopoly on caring for and honoring the salmon. However, we've been doing it for a long time and have a lot of wisdom to share with the region on what we've learned. Now in this era of growing returns, the region is seeing the results of the tribes' leadership and expertise to restore and rebuild the Columbia River basin's salmon runs. 🐟

*A salmon feast at Celilo Village.*



## Fishery Update

BY STUART ELLIS, CRITFC HARVEST BIOLOGIST

The winter gillnet fishery ends March 21. Based on catches available at press time, it looks like there will be a good number of sturgeon available on both the Bonneville and The Dalles harvest guidelines and a few available on the John Day pool guideline. No determinations have been made by the tribes yet on how to use these fish. Additional sturgeon fisheries may be a possibility.

The spring chinook is forecast to be 232,500 fish and are already starting to pass Bonneville Dam. It is still a pretty small number of fish, but we have the largest total to date since 2003. Please note this may not mean the run will be bigger than predicted, it is just starting out early.

We won't know how big the run will be until sometime in May. The actual run size will determine what the allowed harvest rate and the allowed catch is for the tribal fishery. Both treaty and non-treaty fisheries are managed on the same actual river mouth run size.

The tribes will begin ceremonial permit fishing any time, which will last for several weeks. After the ceremonial fishery is done, then the tribes will make determinations about how to manage the latter part of the spring season.

The tribes are continuing discussions about fisheries downstream of Bonneville. Announcements will be made as decisions are finalized. 🐟

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## RIVER FORECAST

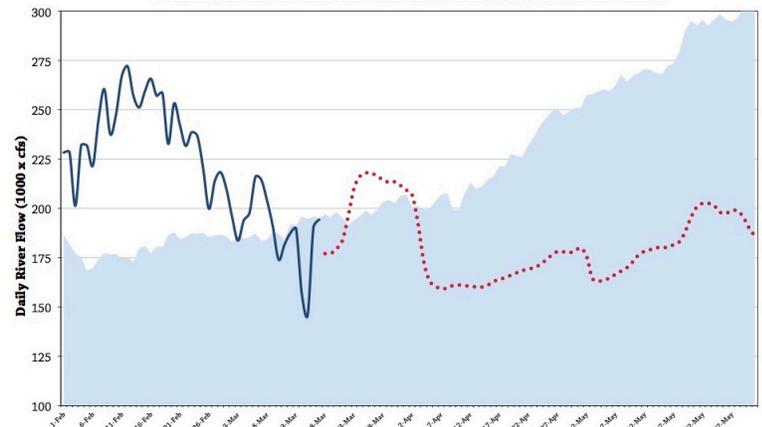
BY KYLE DITTMER, CRITFC METEOROLOGIST/HYDROLOGIST

Rising rivers due to snowmelt is one of many cues that the Creator tells us that spring is here. The normal pattern of rising spring river levels is a cue to salmon smolts to move downriver as fast as possible, which helps ensure a safer passage route out to the ocean. For this spring, though, many watersheds are lacking snowpack in a big way.

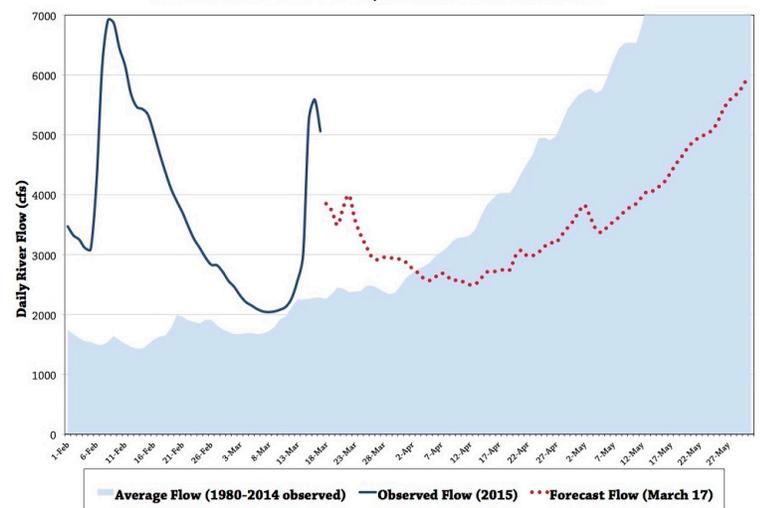
This winter has been short-changed due to El Niño in the tropical Pacific Ocean, which tends to deliver warm, dry winters to the Pacific Northwest. The Pacific Ocean usually has a predictable 20- to 30-year warm-cold ocean cycle. We should be in a cooler part of the cycle, but conditions have departed from the norm and the ocean is warmer this year. This warmer ocean, in turn, has increased the effects of the El Niño.

The snowpacks in the Oregon-Washington Cascades have been very low. Snow water equivalent values were 25 to 75 percent below normal this winter. A major storm hit in early February, which is normally a time when it would have fallen as snow. Instead, the warm temperatures resulted in the precipitation falling as rain, which caused many flashy rises in tributary streams (see graph). These peak flow events came two to three months early, which means less water will be available for the summer season and the mainstem river peaks of late May. The latest CRITFC water supply forecast for the Columbia at The Dalles is 95 percent of normal (NOAA forecast is 80 percent), which doesn't sound so bad. Unfortunately the warm temperatures have resulted in all this water coming downstream soon after it falls rather than being stored in snowpack to be released during the warm summer months. This means that streams this summer will be

**Columbia River at Bonneville: Observed & Forecast Flow**



**Wenatchee R. near Peshastin, WA: Observed/Forecast Flow**



hotter than normal, the low water levels will create fish passage and habitat problems, and there will be a greater chance of wildfires. 🐟



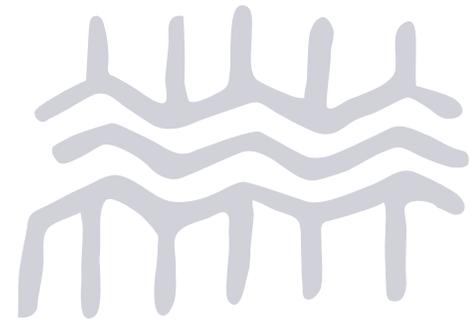


# The Dipnetter

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## SEAL AND SEA LION PROBLEM

A recent CRITFC survey of pinnipeds (sea lions and seals) in the lower Columbia River found this colony of about 6,400 harbor seals at the mouth of the river. The seals and sea lions are taking advantage of a high smelt run this year. It is unclear what the effects of this explosion in pinniped numbers will have on the salmon run. 🐟

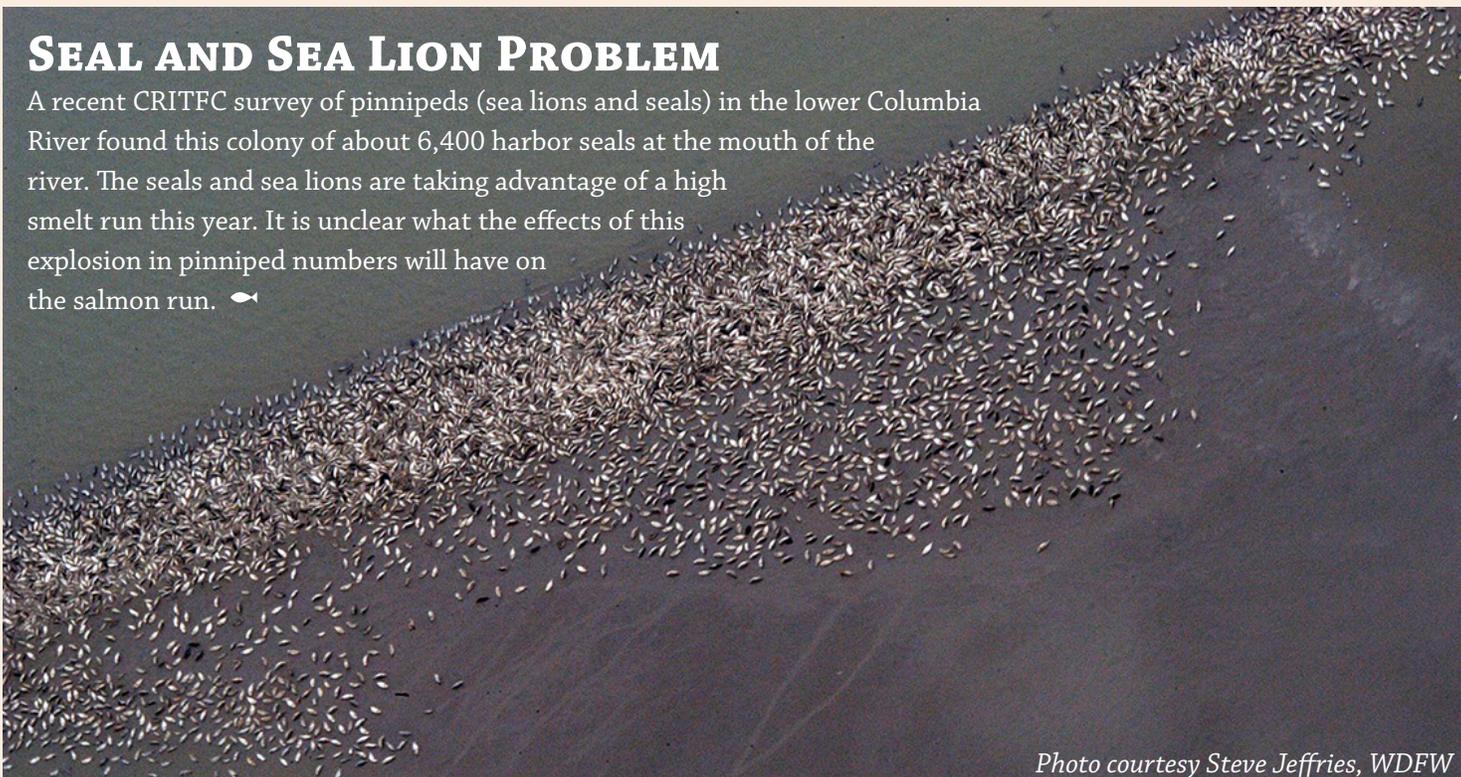


Photo courtesy Steve Jeffries, WDFW