

## Risks of Columbia River Fossil Fuel Transport

by Jeremy FiveCrows, CRITFC Public Affairs



*In a 2014 train derailment in British Columbia, coal spilled directly into Burnaby Creek. This situation is what the Columbia River tribes fear could happen on the Columbia, with devastating consequences.  
Photo: Kevin Washbrook, Voters Taking Action on Climate Change.*

For thousands of years, people have lived, worked and prayed along the Columbia River. The great river of the Northwest shapes the cultures of those who rely on its bounty. The river has experienced many changes in the past 200 years: overfishing, hydropower development, population pressures, and pollutants. Today, the river is threatened by a wave of proposals to turn the railroads lining the river, as well as the river itself, into a major transportation corridor for fossil fuels. These proposals, should they be put into practice, would risk the health, safety, and economic security of those living along the river. Tribal members fishing in the Columbia face even larger risks and potential impacts since they spend significant time outside exposed to the air and water in and along the river and eating a diet heavy in fish caught there.

The tribe's opposition stems not only to the climate effects of continued fossil fuel use, but also the present danger of transportation risks. Continued reliance on fossil fuels would have long-lasting, harmful impacts to the environment and the natural resources upon which tribal cultures are based.

This alone is reason enough for opposition to expanding fossil fuel transport through the region, but adding in the risk of catastrophic environmental damage from spills and derailments and the correct course of action is even more obvious.

### CONCERNS WITH RAIL TRANSPORT

On both sides of the Columbia River Gorge, rail lines follow the river, with some stretches running on causeways mere feet from the river on both sides of the track. Traffic this close to the river almost guarantees that accidents and spillage issues will either enter the water or affect it.

For the rail transport of coal, the major risk is the amount of dust and debris that comes off the cargo during transit. Coal is transported in open rail cars that are exposed to the elements. The loaded cars are sprayed with a substance in an attempt to control dust, but settling and jostling of the coal during transit reduces its effectiveness. Coal dust and debris pollutes the air, water, and land all along the Columbia River. Some trains can have more than one hundred coal cars, each adding coal dust and debris to the environment the train travels through. Under windy conditions, black clouds of coal dust have been witnessed coming off these cars, blowing into the environment or the river. Airborne coal dust can be especially harmful to humans when inhaled. Tribal fishers and others who work along the river are at particular risk to breathing in unsafe amounts of coal dust particulates. This scattering of coal into the environment happens in the course of normal transport, not just during a derailment or other accident.

For the rail transport of oil, the primary risk is from derailment and oil spillage into or along the Columbia River.

Derailments or oil spills



*Chip Smith (right), Asst. for Environment, Tribal and Regulatory Affairs, Office of Asst. Sec. for Army Civil Works; and JR Inglis, Corps of Engineers Tribal Liaison, Portland District, dig down to find the depth of the coal debris along the tracks near Dallesport, WA. In some places, they found debris 4 to 6 inches deep.*



in this sensitive corridor would devastate the Columbia River ecosystem and the treaty fishery. Even with a multi-million dollar, full-scale emergency response using the



An oil train derailment into the James River in Lynchburg, Virginia.

Photo: Waterkeeper Alliance.

latest containment methods, a major spill could potentially pollute the area for many years.

Sightline Daily, a Northwest news source, documented 276 train derailments over one 31-month

period they reviewed. Trains transporting Bakken oil out of Montana, North Dakota, and Saskatchewan have derailed across North America with alarming frequency, each causing spectacular—and deadly—results. Tribal and local communities are further vulnerable with evidence that companies shipping coal and oil are vastly under-insured leaving local populations with the responsibility of cleaning up spills.

The impacts of increased fossil fuel transport aren't limited to risks from a possible accident. This transport will impact the sensitive Columbia River ecosystem even if every train runs without any problems. The increases in rail transport will require expansion of rail lines, which means more fill in the river, shorelines, wetlands, and streams, along with further displacement of tribal fishers and impact to the ecosystem and natural resources.



A 2014 derailment near Wallula in Oregon. With tracks built this close to the river, any problem will likely impact the water. Fortunately this train consisted of empty cattle cars. Photo: Julie Carter, CRITFC.

Increased rail traffic also equates to more risk of train-strike. Tribal fishers are particularly at risk, as they regularly cross railroad tracks when accessing their fishing sites. Most of the access roads to the Columbia River are rural crossings without lights or crossing bars. This combination of tribal members regularly using uncontrolled crossings and a sharp increase in railroad traffic greatly increases the likelihood of deadly train-strikes.

### CONCERNS WITH BARGE TRANSPORT

Fossil fuels transported by barge carries its own risks and impacts, not only to the environment, but to tribal treaty fishing activities as well. Increased barge

traffic impedes tribal fishing efforts and the construction of more boat docks and loading terminals could impact or even eliminate treaty fishing sites. In the lower river, the large ships that are proposed to carry the fossil fuels will further damage valuable habitat and cause problems such as wake stranding for adults and out-migrating salmonid smolts. Increasing the already large amount of barge traffic through the Columbia River estuary will only make this situation worse.



A river barge transporting coal.

### TRIBAL ENERGY VISION

The tribes' opposition to fossil fuel transport through the region doesn't mean they are opposed to or ignorant of the region's energy needs. In 2003, the tribes authored their Tribal Energy Vision, a plan that proposes sustainable energy development goals that would not burden natural resources. A fundamental goal of the Tribal Energy Vision is to reduce the pressure of energy demand on Columbia Basin fish and wildlife resources. In other words, the tribal goal is to take energy policy off the backs of salmon and the environment that supports them.

Our entire region is defined by the Columbia River, and its protection should be on the forefront of our thoughts and actions. Opposing threats such as fossil fuel transport is a significant and important piece of that goal. ✨



Umatilla tribal members digging roots beneath windmills in their ceded territory.

## Adult Fall Chinook Record Broken



Paul Lumley  
YAKAMA

On the morning of November 10, Columbia River fall chinook set a new passage record at Bonneville Dam. The 25 adult fall chinook that had passed Bonneville Dam as of 9:05 am that morning pushed the total number of fall chinook to 953,240 fish for 2015. This broke the previous record for the 77-year-old dam, set in 2013, of 953,222.

The fall chinook success is the result of a variety of environmental factors and human efforts to improve survival. This year's run enjoyed excellent ocean conditions and, unlike the fish migrating during the summer, they enjoyed good migrating conditions. They also benefitted from tribal reintroduction efforts throughout the Columbia River Basin, harvest management actions on the Pacific Ocean and mainstem Columbia, and strong collaborative efforts to improve habitat.

Breaking this record is truly something to celebrate. The success of this fall chinook run reflects the region's commitment to healthy salmon runs and the collaborative spirit that has made it possible. The tribes celebrate this year's return and pledge to continue our protection and restoration work that helped make it possible. The lessons the region has learned in achieving the success we've seen so far will help us address upcoming impacts such as the predicted El Niño this winter and the long-term effects of climate change. 🍀



CRITFC fisheries technician Agnes Strong (Yakama) holding a Columbia River fall chinook that was trapped at Priest Rapids Hatchery. Photo courtesy Agnes Strong.

## Fish Canning Class

by Buck Jones, Salmon Marketing Coordinator

The CRITFC Salmon Marketing program will be hosting a Fundamentals of Canning and Drying class next month. The class cover the basic concepts required to safely can and dry products at home. The class will also provide additional information for those who are interested in commercial sales of canned or dried fish.

Class attendees get to participate in the process with instructors Mark Whitham and Yakama Nation tribal member Sharon Dick.

The class is on December 2 at the Lyle Community Center from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. Seating is limited. Register by contacting Buck Jones at (971) 221-2546. 🍀

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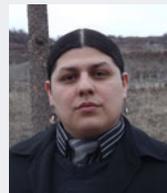
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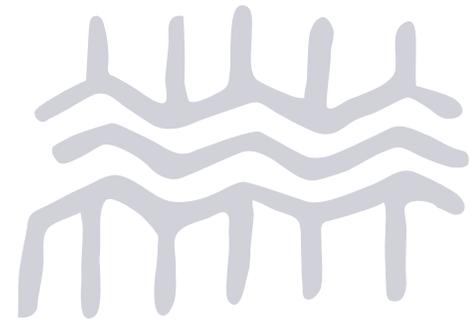


# The Dipnetter

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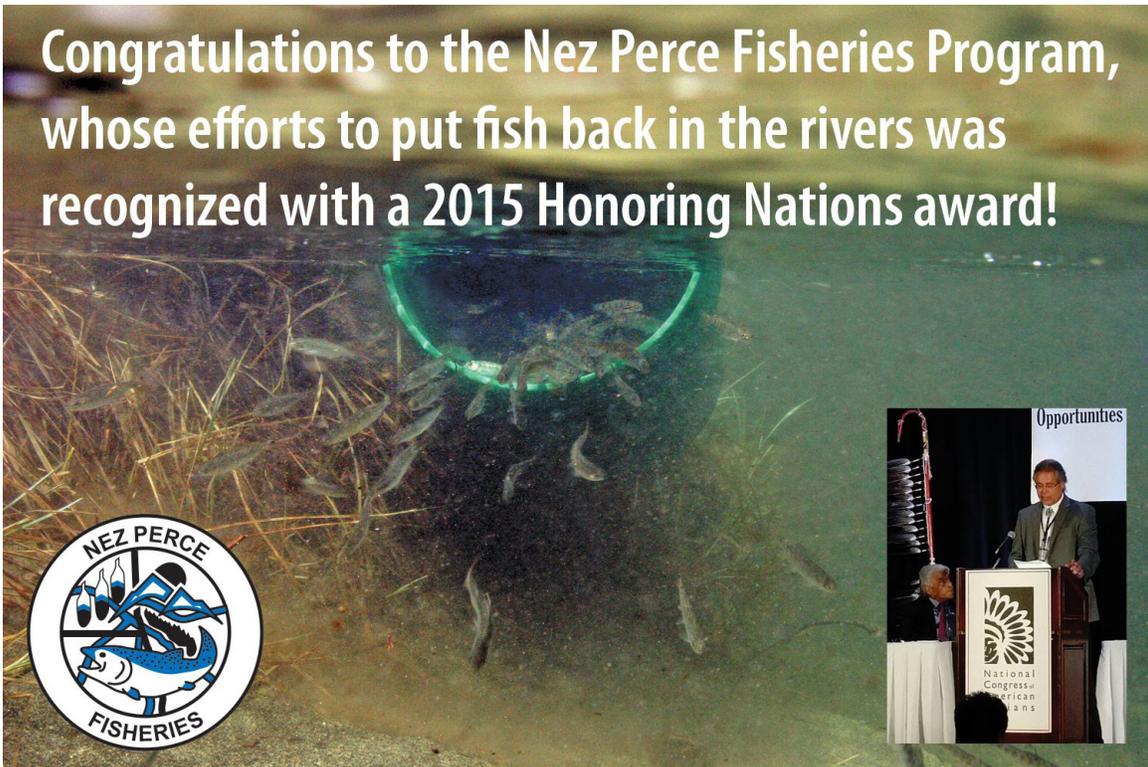


Text "critfc" to the number 555-888 to start getting fishery announcements on your cell phone. It's free!



# The Dipnetter

Yakama • Warm Springs  
Umatilla • Nez Perce 



**Congratulations to the Nez Perce Fisheries Program, whose efforts to put fish back in the rivers was recognized with a 2015 Honoring Nations award!**



Congratulations to the Nez Perce Tribe Department of Fisheries Resources Management, recipient of one of the 2015 Honoring Nations awards from the Harvard University Project on American Indian Economic Development program. The prestigious Honoring Nations award identifies, celebrates, and shares exemplary programs in tribal governance. Program director Dave Johnson accepted the award at a ceremony at the NCAI Congress in San Diego this morning. *Inset photo courtesy James Holt, Nez Perce Water Resources director.* 🏆