

Testimony of Chair Ron Suppah
Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Day
March 3, 2023

Summary of Budget Requests

- I. Increase Funding for Rights Protection Implementation
 - a. Columbia River Fisheries Management - \$6.241 million
 - b. Columbia River-In Lieu Sites Law Enforcement - \$1.575 million
 - c. Columbia River-Fishing Access Site Operations - \$1.7 million
 - d. U.S. Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty - \$6.792 million
 - e. Implementation of P.L. 116-99 - \$5 million
 - f. Youth Program Initiatives - \$500,000
 - g. Columbia River Treaty Modernization
- II. Provide Funding for Tribal Climate Resilience - \$5 million

Good afternoon, Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Ron Suppah and I have the privilege of serving as Chair of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC). I also serve as Vice Chair of the Off-Reservation Fish and Wildlife Committee of the Warm Springs Tribes.

CRITFC was founded in 1977 by the four Columbia River treaty tribes: Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, and the Nez Perce Tribe. CRITFC provides coordination and technical assistance to these tribes in regional, national, and international efforts to protect and restore our shared salmon, steelhead, Pacific lamprey, and white sturgeon resources and the habitat upon which these species depend.

Our collective ancestral homelands are an area the size of the State of Georgia and cover nearly one-third of the U.S. portion of the Columbia River basin. In 1855, the U.S. entered into treaties with the four tribes whereupon we ceded millions of acres of our homelands. In return, the U.S. pledged to honor our ancestral rights, including the right to fish in all Usual and Accustomed stations. Unfortunately, a perilous history has brought the salmon, steelhead, and Pacific lamprey populations to the edge of extinction. Twelve Columbia Basin salmon and steelhead populations in the are listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), Pacific lamprey have declined 95% from historic numbers, and the white sturgeon population is struggling to maintain itself.

The CRITFC member tribes are internationally recognized leaders in fisheries restoration and management. We are principals in the region's efforts to halt the decline of salmon, lamprey, and sturgeon populations and rebuild them to levels that support ceremonial, subsistence, and economic needs. Columbia River fish stocks form the core of high value fisheries from the interior West to Southeast Alaska valued in the hundreds of millions of dollars. To restore these fish population, our actions emphasize 'gravel-to-gravel' management, including

supplementation of natural stocks, healthy watersheds, and collaboration with state, federal, and private entities.

For CRITFC to continue to do this critical work, we need adequate funding from Congress. Therefore, I thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding CRITFC's funding priorities. My testimony will focus on the appropriations necessary to continue the exercise of our treaty-reserved rights to harvest fish on the Columbia River.

I. Increase Funding for Rights Protection Implementation

a. Columbia River Fisheries Management

The tribes are leaders in one of the nation's largest fishery restoration efforts in response to the negative impacts of the Federal Columbia River Power System. Management is increasing in complexity and sophistication requiring greater data collection, collaboration, and enforcement. Funding shortfalls prohibit the achievement of tribal self-determination goals for fisheries management, ESA recovery efforts, protecting non-listed species, conservation enforcement, and harvest monitoring. The BIA's Columbia River Fisheries Management budget supports the core fishery program efforts of CRITFC and our member tribes and allows us to work across the bulk of current anadromous fish habitat in the Columbia Basin. We request an increase of \$624,000 over FY 2023 levels for a new program base of \$6.865 million.

CRITFC and our member tribes are principal implementers of actions laid out in three landmark agreements: 1) the Columbia Basin Fish Accords with federal action agencies overseeing the federal hydro system in the Columbia Basin¹, 2) continuing engagement in a 10-year Fisheries Management Plan with federal, tribal, and state parties under *U.S. v Oregon*, and 3) a new Chinook Chapter of the Pacific Salmon Treaty. These agreements establish regional and international commitments to harvest and fish production efforts, commitments to critical investments in habitat restoration, and resolving contentious issues by seeking balance of the many demands within the Columbia River basin. While the tribes have committed to substantial on-the-ground projects through these agreements with additional resources from the Bonneville Power Administration, the overall management responsibilities of the tribal programs have grown exponentially without commensurate increases in BIA base funding capacity. For example, Congress recently enacted the Endangered Salmon Predation Control Act, P.L. 115-329, which recognizes that CRITFC and its member tribes are a part of the regional effort to manage sea lion predation in the Columbia River. The tribes are also addressing unmet mitigation obligations such as fish losses associated with the John Day and The Dalles dams and increasing avian and piscivorous fish predation. Rights Protection Implementation funding takes on even greater importance as funding for State co-management agencies has become inconsistent or decreased.

b. Columbia River-In Lieu Sites Law Enforcement

Public safety is a high priority for CRITFC and our member tribes. Our conservation and criminal enforcement officers are the cornerstone of public safety in the heavily used Columbia River Gorge area, patrolling 150 miles of the river and its shorelines in Oregon and Washington.

¹ The Nez Perce Tribe is not a Columbia Basin Fish Accord signatory

We are the primary provider of enforcement services at 31 fishing access sites developed pursuant to P.L. 87-14 and P.L. 100-581 for use by treaty fisheries. CRITFC's officers possess BIA Special Law Enforcement Commissions to enhance protection and service to tribal members and federal trust properties along the river. CRITFC entered a P.L. 93-638 contract with BIA in 2011 for enforcement services along the Columbia River. That contract provides funding for two positions. Additional appropriations were provided in FY2021 (\$1.5m), FY2022 (\$1.5m), and FY 2023 (\$1.575m) to enhance public safety and law enforcement services. Funding has become reoccurring, and this leads to the long-term stability of this public safety effort.

c. Columbia River-Fishing Access Site Operations

A federal commitment to provide O&M funding was established under a 1997 MOU between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and BIA and assigned to CRITFC in 2003. This O&M need was funded in FY 2022 and FY 2023 at \$1.7 million. This base O+M funding is very important to the health and safety of our treaty fishers as they access the Columbia River in exercise of their treaty reserved fishing rights.

d. U.S. Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty

In response to declining salmon populations and pending treaty fishing rights litigation, the U.S. and Canada forged the Pacific Salmon Treaty in 1985 to conserve and rebuild salmon stocks, provide for optimum production, and control salmon interceptions.

The Pacific Salmon Treaty established the Pacific Salmon Commission (PSC) as a forum to collaborate on intermingled salmon stocks. The U.S. Section of the PSC annually develops a coordinated budget for tribal, state, and federal programs to ensure cost and program efficiencies. The 2008 agreement, which expired at the end of 2018, represented a step forward in ensuring the conservation and rebuilding of the shared salmon resource. The Parties recently completed revisions to the 2008 agreement. The revised agreement calls for the implementation of additional data requirements.

For tribal participation in the Pacific Salmon Treaty, the U.S. Section has identified a continuing program need of \$6.792 million for the 25 participating tribes to implement the revised agreement. These funds provide for direct tribal participation with the Commission, panels, and technical committees. This funding maintains tribal resource assessment and research programs structured to fulfill required treaty implementation activities which protect trust resources and ensures that our tribal fishers receive an equitable portion of the harvestable fish numbers. Our FY 2023 recommended level for this program is consistent with the FY 2022 level and correlates with the U.S. Section's recommendation.

e. Implementation of P.L. 116-99

Public Law 116-99 recognized the deteriorating condition of the sites due to age and significant use and Congress authorized \$11 million to refurbish the sites in order to meet human health and safety standards. We are requesting \$5 million in FY 2024, to continue implementation of the Act. The assessment of the sites was completed in 2022 and we are conducting architecture and design and beginning construction based on the assessment findings.

f. Youth Program Initiatives

CRITFC strives to build a tribal workforce pool of respected and skilled Native American scientists, policy analysts, technicians, and managers that serve the tribes' fisheries and natural resource management program needs. CRITFC's Workforce Development Program helps prepare tribal members of all ages for jobs and careers in natural resources management by providing hands-on, culturally relevant experiences that expand their exposure to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Except for a pandemic-related pause in 2020 and 2021, CRITFC has held a week-long Salmon Camp for middle school students in collaboration with our member tribes since 2010 using limited funding resources. Adequate funding would enable the tribes to continue this program. From 2014-2017, CRITFC was able to offer paid internships and research experiences for college students interested in fisheries and natural resources, but due to a lack of funding, those opportunities are not currently available. In 2020, CRITFC acquired an estuary and near coastal observation program which we hope can provide tribal workforce opportunities in the estuary and marine environments.

g. Columbia River Treaty Modernization

Rights Protection Implementation supports CRITFC's participation in the Columbia River Treaty re-negotiation. The treaty-reserved rights of CRITFC's member tribes, as well as management authorities and responsibilities, are substantially affected by the Columbia River Treaty. While the Columbia River Treaty is evergreen and continues to provide benefits to both the U.S. and Canada through coordinated flood risk management and hydropower production, the Regional Recommendation urges modernizations by incorporating ecosystem function as a third primary purpose of the treaty. This necessary amendment would enhance the Columbia River Treaty to provide built-in principles in a pro-active, comprehensive manner rather than reacting in a piecemeal approach to individual salmon listings under the Endangered Species Act. Increased RPI funds will allow the Columbia Basin tribes to continue collaborating with the states, federal agencies, and regional stakeholders to provide technical analyses in support of the negotiations with Canada being led by the State Department.

II. Provide Funding for Tribal Climate Resilience

The Columbia River treaty fishing tribes are a place-based people. We have lived thousands of years on our homelands. We walk in the footsteps of our ancestors. Our place is on the specific landscape of the Columbia River. Climate-related stress was evident in 2020 in the form of historic forest fires and in 2015 with the loss of up to 400,000 adult sockeye salmon, including 99% of the sockeye returning to Idaho, due to elevated water temperatures. There must be continued funding to help the tribes collaborate with public, private, and non-profit sectors to develop and implement adaptation strategies to protect species at risk. CRITFC requests \$5 million for our four constituent tribes and CRITFC for planning and coordination development needed to continue the work of addressing the myriad of issues climate change is creating for our natural resources.

On behalf of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Subcommittee with our funding priorities for Fiscal Year 2024.