

UPPER COLUMBIA UNITED TRIBES

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Colville * Coeur d'Alene * Kalispel * Kootenai * Spokane

UCUT CHAIR'S ORAL TESTIMONY STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN WARREN SEYLER

ON BEHALF OF THE UPPER COLUMBIA UNITED TRIBES
BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
JUNE 3, 2003
REGARDING THE STATUS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE PROGRAMS

Mr. Chairman and Honorable Committee Members, thank you for this opportunity to provide a snapshot of the fish and wildlife management activities of the Upper Columbia United Tribes (UCUT). My name is Warren Seyler, Tribal Council Member of the Spokane Tribe of Indians and Chairman of this inter-Tribal organization. Also present is Gary Aitken, Chairman of the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho and Vice-Chairman of UCUT.

The combined territories of the five UCUT member Tribes are large and ecologically complex, and over the years we have been innovative and persistent in our management approaches. We are proud of what we have accomplished "on a shoestring budget," and we believe you will be favorably impressed by our achievements.

Our Geographic Range

The five members of UCUT are the Coeur d'Alene Tribe of Idaho, Colville Confederated Tribes, Kalispel Tribe of Indians, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, and the Spokane Tribe of Indians. Historically, our Tribes shared a vast area of aboriginal grounds, from present-day western Montana to the Cascades of central Washington, and from Canada to Oregon. Today, we still proudly retain management responsibilities over:

- 450 miles of waterways, which include approximately 40 interior lakes and approximately 30 dams and reservoirs, all of which falls within the 14 million acres of our combined aboriginal territories established by the Indian Land Claims Commission.
- Our current Tribal reservations are used to store the water for two of BPA's major dams, Chief Joseph and Grand Coulee. Grand Coulee is the largest hydropower facility

in the United States. As you will see in the written testimony of the Spokane Tribe, there are unresolved and uncompensated issues concerning the impacts of Grand Coulee Dam.

Within our region, management of this wide range of resources is a daunting task. Included into any decision is the Endangered Species Act, the Bonneville Northwest Power Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Clean Water Act, Superfund sites, regional growth and development, and developing relationships with local utilities, counties, and other governments ... all within our diminishing financial resources. We definitely have our challenges.

Status of Fish and Wildlife Populations

Impacts of hydropower facilities have been devastating to upriver fish and wildlife resources; both have been in drastic decline for several decades. As ocean-going salmon were completely blocked by the construction of Grand Coulee Dam in 1940, a complete change to our historical diet has led us to the highest level of diabetes in the county.

As partial mitigation for our great losses, the UCUT Tribes have constructed 4 hatcheries, where they raise approximately 2.5 million fish per year. These fish are released into reservoirs and rivers for the benefit of the entire Northwest and its visitors.

UCUT member Tribes also have acquired and restored approximately 31,000 acres of wildlife habitat, but our concerns are rising due to the fact that mitigation funding has been stopped.

Community Partnerships

Our Tribes have not remained isolated in our management activities. To the contrary, the Tribes have invested personal dollars in travel and management costs to interact with our neighbors, which include 13 Tribes, 12 counties, multiple federal agencies, and State departments. We intend to expand our discussions with local public and private utilities, as we at UCUT believe the only way to long-term solutions is for open, honest and frank discussions involving all concerned parties.

Our primary program funding is acquired through the Northwest Power Planning & Conservation Council, an inter-state compact of the 4 northwestern States. Recommendations for program funding are proposed by the Columbia Basin Fish & Wildlife Authority, a body of 13 Tribes, 4 States, and 2 federal fish and wildlife agencies.

The Importance of Federal Funding

Each of UCUT's five member tribes depends almost entirely on federal funding to manage fish, wildlife, and habitats. ~~In the case of r~~Ratepayer funding ~~s~~ from the Bonneville Power Administration, ~~this money~~ is an obligation to mitigate for impacts of the hydropower

system. Additional Congressional appropriations are ~~necessary~~ needed to address Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, National Historic Preservation Act, and other federal statutory responsibilities. We implore this Committee to be very assertive on our behalf, to ensure that the funds are there for us to continue with our fish and wildlife programs. The money is well-used, spent very efficiently, and is matched in many ways, with local government contributions, voluntary efforts of our neighboring communities, and countless "in-kind" contributions from within our Tribes.

As for UCUT, itself, let me take this opportunity to raise the Committee's awareness of our organization's great need. ~~To give the Committee a snapshot comparison,~~ Consider the geographic area, resources and challenges I have described for the Upper Columbia United Tribes, compared to the more limited salmon focus of ~~our two othersister~~ inter-Tribal organizations in the Pacific Northwest. Both the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC) and the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC) are supported by federal budgets well into the seven digits. Those organizations serve ~~important~~ coordinating and clearinghouse roles on fisheries issues, similar to the role of UCUT for our five member tribes.

However, at UCUT, our ~~wildlife, habitat, and cultural resources~~ ~~resident fish and wildlife~~ issues are as important as our concerns about ~~fish~~ ~~salmon~~. And, we combine our efforts to address common concerns regarding ~~cultural resources, water and air quality,~~ social services, economic development, and sovereign rights, in addition to ~~environmental issues~~ ~~fish and wildlife~~. Yet, the UCUT annual appropriation has been flat-lined for many years at only around \$300,000, ~~shared which must be sliced up~~ among the 5 member tribes and the central UCUT organization. ~~UCUT has pieced together other small grants and contracts to keep the organization alive, but~~ is in dire need of an adequate and equitable annual appropriation to continue to serve its vital inter-Tribal role.

Before I conclude, I would like to draw the Committee's attention to the written testimony of the Spokane Tribe. It focuses on what we have learned as a result of BPA's financial crisis and how it got there. It provides a remedy for avoiding these problems in the future. The history of failed governance in the Basin is demonstrated, and we include recommendations to create a workable process. The Tribes, particularly upriver Tribes, suffer the greatest impacts, but upriver issues seem to be forgotten or pushed aside as listed salmon get all the attention. We need a regional forum with full participation by Federal, State and Tribal governments and stakeholders to address these issues in a river governance process that is accountable and fair.

Fish and Wildlife are Cultural Resources

~~It would behoove the Committee to remember the strong ties of our Indian people to the land and water. UCUT's members dwelled along the rivers for thousands of years. We lived with, not just upon, the land. Our traditions revolve around a seasonal cycle of fishing, gathering, hunting, and sheltering in the natural world. Our religious and cultural gatherings are based upon our relationships with nature. With the destruction of our environment, so came the destruction of our ways of life. As we work to restore our fish and wildlife and habitats, so we also strive to restore the good health and spirits of our people.~~

Again, I appreciate your attention and interest in our programs and the challenges we face in fish and wildlife management.

~~Respectfully submitted,~~

Warren Seyler

Chairman

Upper Columbia United Tribes