

# Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

## PRESS RELEASE



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### **CTUIR Lauds Report on U.S. Dams Negatively Impacting PNW Tribes**

MISSION – A Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) elected leader is lauding a federal report released Tuesday, June 18 in which the U.S. government, for the first time, admits dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers have negatively impacted Columbia Basin tribes.

“It is the first time the federal government tells the truth about how the construction of the dams on the Columbia River devastated salmon runs, inundated tribal villages, important regional gathering and trading centers, sacred sites, burial grounds and fishing areas that tribes depended upon for subsistence and trade,” CTUIR Board of Trustees Member at Large Corinne Sams said. Sams also chairs the CTUIR’s Fish & Wildlife Commission and the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. “These government-built structures not only caused the salmon runs to precipitously decline, and contributed to the extinction of some runs, but have made it exceedingly difficult to rebuild runs, as well as exercise the treaty reserved fishing right that our ancestors fought for in the treaty negotiations with the United States.”

Sams called the [Tribal Circumstances Analysis](#) (TCA) “an honest acknowledgment” regarding “devastating impacts of development of the Columbia Basin on tribes,” including the region’s wealth going from the tribes to non-Indians. She added it serves as a foundation for future analyses of proposed federal actions or funding involving the hydrosystem, salmon or tribal resources in the basin.

Along with the CTUIR, the TCA lists the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, Nez Perce Tribe, Yakama Nation, Coeur D’Alene Tribe, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation, Spokane Tribe and Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation as the tribes most immediately impacted by Columbia River dams and reservoirs.

Since time immemorial, basin tribes have relied on the river’s resources, especially salmon, which are integral to their cultures, identities and sustenance. According to the TCA, historically, up to 16 million salmon and steelhead returned to Pacific Northwest tributaries annually. However, dam construction beginning near the early 20th century blocked fish from migrating into certain basin reaches and flooded sacred sites, burial grounds and thousands of acres.

According to the TCA, tribal communities lost access to fish, which altered diets, deprived them traditional lifeways and changed how they teach and raise children in their respective cultural and spiritual beliefs.

The TCA also provides recommendations for upholding the U.S. government's treaty and trust responsibilities, including fully considering and integrating the inequities tribes have suffered via dam construction into future National Environmental Policy Act reviews, as well as pursuing co-stewardship and co-management agreements, continuing efforts to consolidate tribal homelands and incorporating Indigenous knowledge into decision making.

Sams said she is pleased with the TCA as it fulfills a commitment made in the Resilient Columbia Basin Agreement (RCBA) between the U.S. government and the Six Sovereigns (CTUIR, Yakama Nation, Nez Perce Tribe, Warm Springs Tribes and the states of Washington and Oregon). The RCBA stays litigation over the federal dams on the lower Snake and mainstem Columbia Rivers. It also aims to restore salmon populations in the Lower Basin, expand tribally sponsored clean energy production and provide stability for communities that depend on the Columbia River for agriculture, energy, recreation and transportation.

"It (TCA) is a remarkable document, and a demonstration of the (Biden) administration's commitment to restore the salmon runs and the ecosystems they depend upon in the Columbia Basin," she said. "We are confident that our partnership with the U.S. government will succeed in restoring our salmon runs, while at the same time meeting our needs for decarbonization and clean energy that does not kill fish and providing for the transportation, irrigation and recreation needs of our region."

*The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation is comprised of the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla Tribes, and formed under the Treaty of 1855 at the Walla Walla Valley, 12 Stat. 945. In 1949, the Tribes adopted a constitutional form of government to protect, preserve and enhance the reserved treaty rights guaranteed under federal law.*

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Caption: Corinne Sams, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) Member at Large and chair of Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, signs an agreement between the Biden administration and the Six Sovereigns (CTUIR, Nez Perce Tribe, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, Yakama Nation and states of Oregon and Washington) on Feb. 23 in Washington, D.C. The agreement lays the groundwork for the federal government and the Six Sovereigns to protect and restore salmon, steelhead and native fish to the Columbia River Basin. As part of that agreement, the federal government on Tuesday, June 18 released a report in which it admits that dams built on the Columbia and Snake rivers have negatively impacted Columbia Basin tribes. CTUIR