

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation



PRESS RELEASE

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April 23, 2024

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CTUIR Honors First Salmon of 2024 with Ceremony

MISSION – The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) held a First Fish Ceremony on Tuesday, April 23, at the Nixyáawii Community School to celebrate the return of the first spring Chinook salmon of 2024.

The CTUIR annually celebrates the fish's return to the reservation with songs and prayers as part of the tribes' covenant to protect and enhance their First Foods.

"We know we've got to give thanks. It's important to keep the songs and honor the ones that bring these songs and who remember what we are supposed to do every year," CTUIR Chairman Gary I. Burke said. "I'm proud of our reservation, proud of our leadership, proud of our next generation. These are our gifts that the Creator gave us."

The CTUIR's Fish & Wildlife Commission (FWC), along with Department of Natural Resources' Fisheries and General Council Interpreter Thomas Morning Owl, hosted the ceremony after being advised Monday by fishers on the Columbia River at Cascade Locks to anticipate the first fish on Tuesday.

After being caught, the fish had a green rope tied to its mouth, and it was set aside so that Fisheries staff members could bring it back to the reservation for the ceremony. Planners for the ceremony usually only have 24-48 hours' notice.

Following the ceremony, the fish was to be cleaned, packaged and frozen. Because the 2024 spring Chinook run is estimated at only 122,000 – with the CTUIR's share being approximately 1,500 – tribal officials must ensure that there is enough fish for ceremonial purposes.

Corinne Sams, CTUIR Board of Trustees Member at Large and FWC chair, said having the ceremony at the school allowed students as well as tribal and community members to attend.

"It's important for us to continue to live the way of life that we've lived since time immemorial. It's important for all our tribal membership and community to celebrate in the return of our foods," she said. "We've made a lifelong covenant to speak on behalf of our foods. We pray yearly for the health of our fish and the health

of our waterways. It truly is the lifeblood of who we are as a people. We are the Wykanish-Pum, the Salmon People.”

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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Caption1: Jerimiah Bonifer, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) Fisheries Program manager, carries the first spring Chinook salmon of 2024 for CTUIR members to observe during a First Fish Ceremony on Tuesday, April 23, at the Nixyáawii Community School. The ceremony honors the CTUIR’s covenant to protect and enhance its First Foods. CTUIR

Caption2: Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) Chairman Gary I. Burke smiles as he watches CTUIR Fisheries staff members bring in the first spring Chinook for the First Fish Ceremony on Tuesday, April 23, at the Nixyáawii Community School. Lee Gavin/CTUIR

Caption3: Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) Chairman Gary I. Burke, Board of Trustees Member at Large Corinne Sams, General Council Interpreter Thomas Morning Owl, Language Instructor Damien Totus, Umatilla Master Speaker Fred Hill, Executive Director Donald Sampson, TERO Program Manager John Barkley, tribal member Whyatona Burns and Board of Trustees Member at Large Toby Patrick as Sampson speaks during the CTUIR’s First Fish Ceremony on Tuesday, April 23, at the Nixyáawii Community School. CTUIR