



COLUMBIA RIVER INTER-TRIBAL FISH COMMISSION

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Testimony for DEQ Hearing on Oregon's Revised Standards for Toxic Water Pollutants

Good afternoon. My name is Aja DeCoteau, and I am a member of the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation. I come from a family of Columbia River fisherman, and I am proud to continue that tradition today as I also fish from the river whenever I get the chance. I am also the Watershed Department Manager for the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC), and want to thank you for the opportunity to present our views on the proposal to revise water quality standards to protect human health.

CRITFC was created in 1977 by the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Nez Perce Tribe to ensure a unified voice in the overall management of the fishery resources, and as managers, to protect reserved treaty rights by exercising the inherent sovereign powers of the tribes.

In the Watershed Department, our tasks involve identifying key areas that must be addressed to conserve and restore the habitat and natural production and productivity of fisheries' stocks for the benefit of not only tribes, but all people in the Pacific Northwest. One of these key areas is the quality of surface waters in the Columbia River Basin. We believe the adoption of the proposed fish consumption rate of 175 grams per day is a critical first step in improving water quality in the Basin, as well as protecting the health of our fish and tribal members who eat the fish.

Salmon and other fish provide tribal members not only with a subsistence resource for food, but are also fundamental to our cultural, spiritual, and economic well-being—our natural resources are our cultural resources. The tribes signed treaties in 1855 that ceded millions of acres of land in order to retain our rights to take fish, hunt, and gather at all the usual and accustomed areas, thereby protecting our way of life in perpetuity. These treaty-protected rights are being threatened if our fish and the waterways are contaminated.

In 1996, CRITFC in cooperation with the Center for Disease Control sponsored a survey of the fish consumption rates and patterns of Tribal members who reside in, and consume fish from, the Columbia River Basin. The survey reports that 97 percent of the tribal members interviewed eat fish, and 88 percent of these fish originated in the Columbia River Basin. This survey is an accurate measure of the fish consumption habits of an average tribal member, noting that many tribal members consume much more than this.

A subsequent study was completed by the EPA in 2002, which collected fish tissue samples from the same areas noted in the CRITFC survey where tribal members regularly take fish. This study showed the presence of 92 priority pollutants in fish that are consumed by CRITFC tribal members and other people in the Columbia River Basin. Chemicals measured include PCBs, dioxins, furans, arsenic, mercury and DDE.

This is significant because these fish are affected by the quality of Oregon waters for all or part of their life cycle. The Fish Consumption survey conducted by our organization reveals that 95 percent of tribal members' health will be protected using a fish consumption rate of 175 grams per day, and so it is a reasonable and protective value to use as the basis for Oregon's human health criteria. Other surveys reviewed by DEQ's Human Health Focus Group corroborate our findings and demonstrate that Asian and Pacific Islanders and Eastern European communities also consume fish at levels similar to Oregon Tribes.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the Tribes have economic interests in the sustainable development of our own natural resources, as well as a culture of natural resource stewardship. We recognize the difficulties that meeting some of the new standards will create, and we are willing to support interim measures and to seek, cost-effective long-term solutions to eliminate toxic chemicals from the Oregon waters that we all share.

Thank you and once again, I appreciate this opportunity to speak on behalf of CRITFC and the many tribal members and state citizens who will be protected by these proposed rule-makings.