

The Dipnetter

News of the River from the
Columbia River Inter-Tribal
Fish Commission



January 2011

2010 Columbia River Fishery Year in Review

BY STUART ELLIS

The 2010 Columbia River fishery turned out to be a great year for tribal fishers. Despite some early closures and on-again-off-again seasons due to imperfect modeling and reporting problems, tribal fishers harvested over 191,000 chinook salmon in Zone 6.

WINTER FISHERY

The year began with a setline fishery for sturgeon in January. This fishery harvested 137 sturgeon in the Bonneville pool, which was the largest catch in many years. In February, the gillnet fishery began. The winter gillnet fishery caught 3,026 sturgeon and 12 steelhead were sold commercially. The Bonneville Pool fishery caught over 1,500 sturgeon in just 10 days. This was a record catch rate for this fishery. The fisheries in all three pools finished before the March 21 target end date.

SPRING FISHERY

Spring chinook fisheries began in March with ceremonial permit fisheries conducted by all four tribes. 9,400 spring chinook were harvested. After the conclusion of the permit fisheries, the tribes allowed commercial sales

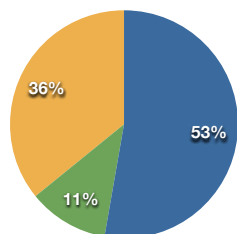
of platform and hook-and-line-caught fish and authorized three commercial gillnet openings. The Yakama, Warm Springs, and Umatilla tribes opened platform and hook-and-line fisheries downstream of Bonneville Dam. These fisheries caught over 5,000 spring chinook. The commercial gillnet fisheries caught over 27,000 more fish than expected and while the run was the third largest, the 315,000 run size was smaller than the expected run size of 470,000. This combination of catch and a smaller-than-expected run size resulted in the fishery exceeding its harvest rate limit and the spring fisheries had to be closed before the end of the season. A total of 42,954 spring chinook were harvested.

SUMMER FISHERY

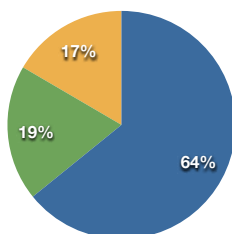
The tribes set seven commercial gillnet openings and allowed sales of platform and hook-and-line-caught fish throughout the season. The strong summer chinook run size was 72,300 fish. We saw a record return of sockeye with over 386,000 fish. Summer season tribal fisheries caught 15,800 chinook; 10,900 steelhead; and almost 22,000 sockeye.

2010 MAINSTEM HARVEST

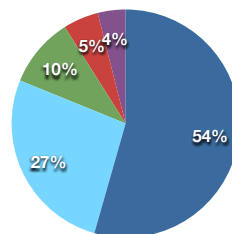
Upriver Spring
Snake River Summer
Chinook



Upper Columbia
Summer Chinook



Fall Chinook
(all stocks)

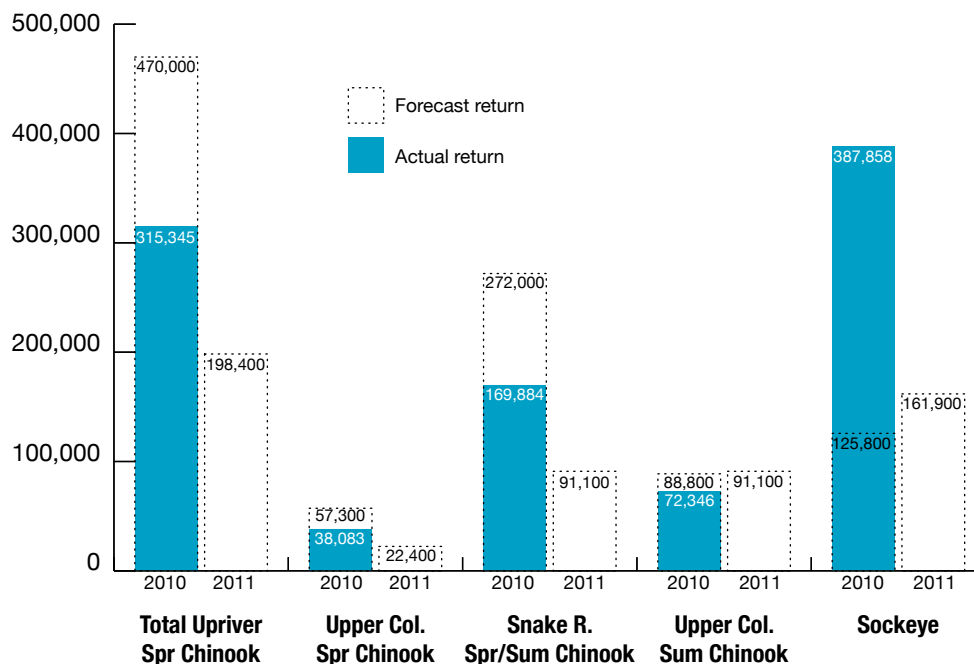


- Treaty Harvest
- Non-treaty Commercial
- Non-treaty Sport
- Ocean Sport and Commercial
- Buoy 10 and Zones 1-5 Sport
- Zone 6-Hanford Sport

FALL FISHERY

Fall season fisheries were good. Over 525,000 adult upriver fall chinook entered

2010-11 SALMON FORECASTS AND RETURNS



the Columbia River this fall. Of these about 127,000 were Spring Creek Hatchery tules, and the rest were various bright stocks of fish.

Over 436,000 Group A and Group B steelhead passed Bonneville Dam this summer and fall. The coho count at Bonneville was over 118,000. The upriver bright chinook run was a bit larger than forecast, while the Spring Creek tule and Group B steelhead runs were both smaller than forecast. This caused some complications with setting dates throughout the fall season fishery. Overall catches were good. Tribal fishers caught over 132,000 chinook (including almost 60,000 tules), over 27,000 steelhead, and nearly 12,000 coho.

2010 run sizes and catches of fall chinook and steelhead are preliminary until the *U.S. v. Oregon* Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) finalizes the harvest numbers in February. 🐟

in memoriam



Jay Minthorn
UMATILLA
1936-2010

Umatilla tribal elder and CRITFC commissioner Jay Minthorn passed away on November 22, 2010. He served on the Commission for nearly a quarter of a century from 1986 through 2010, serving as chairman in 2004-05. During this time, Jay provided leadership in the effort to secure a co-management role for the tribes that recognized tribal authority over Columbia River fishery resources. He had a keen understanding of the linkages among the many governmental processes that affected salmon and other fish resources, especially lamprey and sturgeon. Jay's advocacy helped secure full co-management authority for the tribes through agreements negotiated within the frameworks of the Pacific Salmon Treaty, *U.S. v. Oregon*, and the Northwest Power Act.

Jay was a constant teacher whose lessons ranged from the meaning of a hand-

shake to the meaning of treaties and the events surrounding their negotiation. He never missed the opportunity to share Indian culture with those working for or with tribes. His stories of fishing at Celilo provided a profound glimpse at what was lost when the falls were inundated.

Jay also understood the history of relations among the sovereigns and the importance of tribal unity in addressing issues between states and tribes. As chairman of the Oregon Commission on Indian Affairs and a member of CRITFC, Jay used the past to gain a practical view of the future. His friendship and sense of humor were the tracks on which his ideas were conveyed and his ideas about sovereignty currently inform the substantial progress that tribes have made recovering their birthright: the salmon of the Columbia River. His presence at the Commission table will be missed. 🐟



Bonneville Pool Sturgeon Fisheries

BY BLAINE PARKER AND STUART ELLIS



The Bonneville Pool supports a sizable sturgeon population, likely due to the favorable spawning conditions just downstream of The Dalles Dam. The sturgeon there are young and for reasons that are still not completely clear, they have not been growing as fast as we would like into the legal size slot for harvest. This presents a challenge to managing the sturgeon fishery throughout Zone 6 and particularly in the Bonneville Pool.

Several years ago, the tribes reduced the lower end of the legal harvest size limit to give fishers access to more of the smaller fish. They hoped that the removal of more of these smaller fish would improve sturgeon population growth. This hasn't been the case. The overall population of sturgeon in Bonneville Pool has increased significantly, but the fishery still catches primarily

was exceeded by over 350 fish during the last winter season.

The primary objective of the fishery is to manage it sustainably. We need to ensure enough fish pass through the fishery into the larger older sizes (generally over five feet long) so that there will be enough spawners to keep the population healthy. But we also want to ensure we are providing the best fishing we can and that the tribal sturgeon fishery gets an appropriate share of the fish.

To accomplish this, managers have been discussing several different ideas. These options include setting a weekly opening similar to how the summer and fall commercial gillnet fisheries are managed (maybe a three-night opening per week). Possible advantages to this would be that the winter gillnet fishery would last longer and less likelihood of swamping buyers with too many fish at once and causing the price to drop. It may provide improved opportunity for fishers unable to fish all the time. It may also help with safety, as fishers may not feel pressure to fish in dangerous weather if there is an expectation of more fish to catch later. A second idea would be to return the lower end of the slot limit back to the larger size limit used in the past. This may help focus the fishery on larger fish that fetch a better price. A third idea might be to allocate some of the annual Bonneville Pool catch guideline to setline fisheries that might occur in the summer or fall. This might help spread out the catch and keep prices as high as possible.

These are just ideas, but the ultimate goal is to have a sustainable, consistent, economically beneficial commercial sturgeon fishery in the Bonneville Pool. If you have any comments on these options or have any other suggestions, please contact your tribal harvest managers or CRITFC sturgeon specialists Stuart Ellis or Blaine Parker. We look forward to hearing from you soon. 🐟



CRITFC biologist Blaine Parker conducting research to help increase our understanding of these ancient fish.

ly smaller sturgeon despite an increase in the number of sturgeon over 48 inches.

However, because the increasing abundance of smaller sturgeon and reducing the minimum size of harvestable fish, the winter gillnet fishery quota in the Bonneville Pool fishery was reached very quickly in the last two years. The 2010 winter season only lasted nine days. The short season likely precluded some fishers from having a decent opportunity to participate in the fishery before it closed. The short fishery tends to swamp the market with too many fish caught all at once and makes it difficult to keep within the harvest quota. The sturgeon harvest guideline





Paul Lumley
YAKAMA

Looking Forward to 2011

critfc executive director's message

Happy New Year! In looking forward to what 2011 will bring, I see many signs for positive outcomes for tribes and tribal fishers. Fish run projections look promising, state enforcement in Zone 6 will hopefully diminish in response to a strengthened tribal enforcement program, and we will also be looking forward to see the continued results of major tribal hatchery and habitat restoration activities that have taken place over the last decade.

This year, I also hope to see more tribal fishers and other interested tribal members at our monthly commission meetings. They are not only a great opportunity to learn what CRITFC does, but also give people a chance to interact with their own tribal representatives. Our meetings are generally open to members of the Yakama, Umatilla, Warm Springs, and Nez Perce tribes. The 2011 commission meeting schedule is listed to the right. ➔

2011 COMMISSION MEETING SCHEDULE

Meetings begin at 8 a.m. and are held at the CRITFC office in Portland unless otherwise noted.

January 20-21

February 17-18

March 17-18, **off-site @ Yakama**

April 21-22

May 19-20

June 16-17

July 20-21, **Hood River**

(Fishers Expo, July 22-23)

August 18-19, **off-site @ Nez Perce**

September 14-15

October 20-21

November 17-18

December 15-16



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Richard George, Johnny Jackson, Sam Jim
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James Marsh, Mitch Pond, Chris Williams

NEZ PERCE · (208) 843-2253

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Wilferd Scott

