

The Dipnetter

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



December 2011

CONDIT DAM BREACHED: A NEW PATH FORWARD

BY PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER SARA THOMPSON



Sara Thompson

October 26 was not your typical day. Huddled with approximately 150 representatives from various entities, tribal leaders gathered on the banks of the White Salmon River to witness an important moment in history: the breaching of Condit Dam. Shortly after noon, the one-minute warning siren cut through the silence. A faint, “fire in the hole” could be heard in the distance. The earth began to tremble. Participants watched patiently, glued to the television screens streaming the live feed, for the explosion at the base of Condit Dam. Then as promised, 700 pounds of dynamite punched through the base of the dam. On-lookers

watched in silence as 99 years of sediment, logs and debris made its way down the White Salmon River.

Constructed in 1913, Condit Dam was a 125-foot concrete structure that was a complete barrier. It blocked over 30 miles of habitat for Pacific lamprey, steelhead, coho, and spring and fall chinook. The October 26 breaching opened a significant amount of habitat and allows the White Salmon River to run unimpeded.

The second largest dam to be removed in the United States for fish passage, Condit's breaching came 12 years after a 1999 settlement agreement between PacifiCorp, Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, Yakama Nation, Washington Fish and Wildlife, National Marine Fishery Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington Department of Ecology, American Rivers and other non-governmental organizations. The settlement agreement outlined a removal process for the dam that was less expensive than installing fish passage.

For some, the day of the breaching was a day of sadness; for others, a day of celebration. For the tribes, the breaching of Condit Dam is a fresh start for a river and an ecosystem that has provided for the tribes since time immemorial. October 26 represented the culmination of over 20 years of work by the tribes



The freed White Salmon River rushes out of the breached Condit Dam after seven hundred pounds of dynamite opened a hole near the dam's base. The hole was large enough that the reservoir drained in less than two hours.

to ensure that salmon and lamprey are given every opportunity to survive, and thrive in the White Salmon River. A significant first step, the rest of Condit Dam will slowly be demolished over the next year. Complete removal is anticipated to be in August 2012.

To see more photos and view a video of the breaching, visit <http://bit.ly/conditbreach>. 🐟

FISHING SITE CLOSURES

The in-depth cleaning and maintenance plan is currently underway. The upcoming site closures are listed below. Note: dates are approximate. For the latest information, check the site postings or sign up for the CRITFC text messaging service to be alerted one week in advance of each closure.

LePage (Nov 28-Dec 2, 2011)*

Celilo (Dec 5-16, 2011)*

Stanley Rock (Dec 19-Jan 6, 2011)*

North Bonneville (Jan 9-30, 2012)*



A delegation of Yakama and CRITFC representatives attended the historic event to witness the freeing of the White Salmon River. Pictured left to right: Paul Lumley, CRITFC executive director; April Mesplie, Yakama Nation; Davis Washines, CRITFC Enforcement manager; Gerry Lewis, Yakama Tribal Council and CRITFC chairman; Virgil Lewis, Yakama Tribal Council; Sara Thompson, CRITFC; Bill Sharp, Yakama Nation Fisheries; Julie Carter, CRITFC; Joanna Meninick, Yakama Nation Tribal Council; Bob Heinith, CRITFC; McCoy Oatman, Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee.

CRITFC Text Messaging Service

CRITFC is testing a group text messaging service to quickly distribute important news to fishers and other interested individuals. Using this system, news such as fishery openings and closings, extreme river or weather conditions, and other timely items will be texted to subscribers to the service. The text service is free, however text messaging charges from your phone provider may be incurred if you are on a limited message plan. The typical number of text messages subscribers will receive is most likely five to ten per month. The system is completely automated. Individuals subscribe and unsubscribe themselves via text message. If you would like to begin receiving these messages, text **'CRITFC'** to **55958**. 🐟

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BOATING SAFETY TIPS

Effects of Cold Water Immersion

BY DIPNETTER EDITOR JEREMY FIVECROWS

It is important to practice safe boating habits but sometimes, despite your best efforts, you might find yourself in the river. That's where life jackets, signalling devices, and training come in to help you survive. Often people think that since they can swim that falling out of a boat is not a big deal. If we fished in waters of 70° or more, they'd be right. However, the Columbia River often runs quite cold, particularly during the spring fishery when the water can be 40° or colder. What happens when people fall into water this cold? Within the first two or three minutes, their bodies have a "cold shock" response. They experience a sudden fall in skin temperature, decreased breath holding ability, muscle spasms, and many hyperventilate. During this time it is unlikely that any person will be capable of any operation requiring a high degree of manual dexterity or even swimming.

Wearing a life jacket will improve your chances of survival, not only by keeping you afloat in conditions where you might not be able to swim, but also helping to make you more visible in the water to rescuers.



While not as cold as the Arctic Ocean, the Columbia River can certainly feel like it if you fall in during the winter or spring.

2011 SALMON RUN SUMMARY

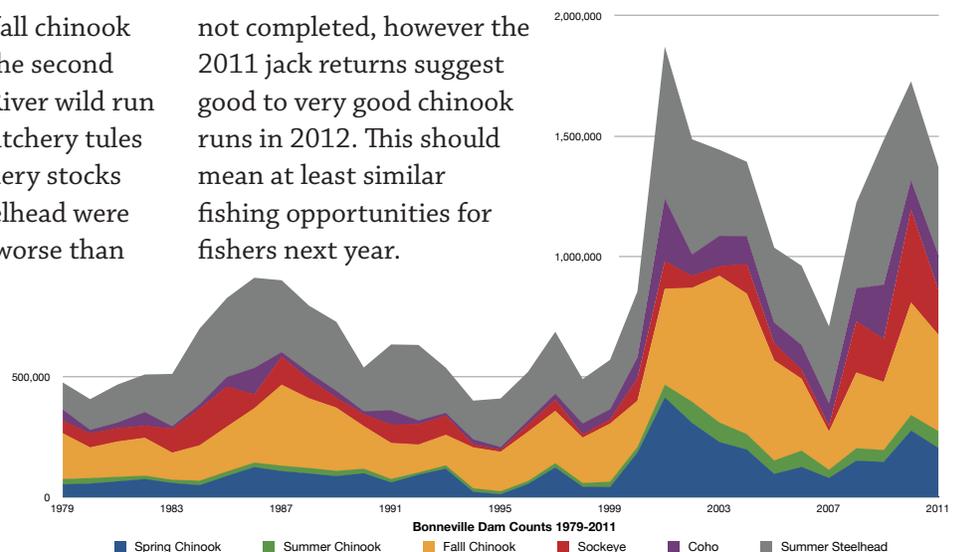
BY CRITFC HARVEST MANAGEMENT BIOLOGIST STUART ELLIS

The 2011 salmon and steelhead runs in 2011 were average to above average. The full run reconstructions have not yet been completed, but it appears that, measured from the 1970's, the spring chinook had their fifth largest run (205,430), the summer chinook had their third or fourth largest run (69,491), and the sockeye had their third largest run (185,796). The Snake River sockeye return (1,502) was the second largest since the Snake River dams were built. The upriver coho run (33,058) was the third or fourth largest since the 1970's and the Snake River Basin coho run (5,014) was a record since Lower Granite Dam was built. The coho run at Priest Rapids (22,038) was a record since the 1970's. The upriver bright fall chinook run (340,000) was the third largest since 1988. The overall Snake River fall chinook count at Lower Granite Dam (25,017) was the second largest since the dam was built. The Snake River wild run was well above average. The Spring Creek hatchery tules and mid-Columbia bright fall chinook hatchery stocks were at their recent year average levels. Steelhead were average overall, but B steelhead performed worse than average this year. The stocks of fish that the tribes have been able to concentrate recovery actions on all seem to be doing well. Some, like the far upriver coho, are doing great. However, in cases where the states or federal government are resisting implementation of tribal plans, such as steelhead programs for instance,

populations are not rebuilding at the pace they could be.

As far as fisheries, there was some tribal commercial fishing time in the spring, but not as much as fishers had hoped for. The fish were of great quality and commanded high prices. Summer season offered steady commercial opportunity throughout the season with opportunity to sell sockeye for most of the run. Fall chinook fisheries went well, with high prices for both tules and brights and an above average overall catch. There were 28½ nearly continuous days of commercial gillnet fishing time throughout the peak of the run. The coho catch in fall fisheries was nearly a record catch and was the highest percentage of the Bonneville run in at least 15 years.

The 2012 forecasts are not completed, however the 2011 jack returns suggest good to very good chinook runs in 2012. This should mean at least similar fishing opportunities for fishers next year.



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Yakama • Warm Springs
Umatilla • Nez Perce



A Beginning of Healing

On October 26, I had the privilege to attend the historic breaching of Condit Dam along with other tribal representatives. Together, we felt the earth move both literally and symbolically. The ground shook from the force of the blast that opened the dam and freed the White Salmon River. Officials had estimated that it would take six hours for the reservoir to drain. They obviously hadn't taken into account how eager the river was to be free—it took less than two hours for all the water to leave the reservoir and join the Columbia.

Some in the crowd were celebratory, but the overall feeling among the tribal representatives was of somber reflection, healing, and hope. Tears were shed by several elders, both of sorrow and of joy. Sorrow for the nearly 100 years that the river had been bound and the pristine salmon waters of the White Salmon were devoid of this sacred

CRITFC Executive Director's Message

First Food. Tempering the sorrow, however, was a feeling of joy and hope. After years of tribal efforts to remove the 99-year-old dam, we saw something many thought wouldn't happen in our lifetimes: the cold, pure waters of the White Salmon flowing freely from Mt. Adams all the way to the Columbia River—inviting new generations of salmon, lamprey, and steelhead to return to the spawning grounds that have laid waiting for them for a century.

The river will take years to heal from the damage inflicted by the dam. Rest assured, though, that the tribes will be there to pray for and assist every step of the way, for as the river heals, so does our hearts.



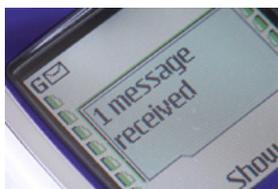
Paul Lumley
YAKAMA



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