

The Dipnetter

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



April 2012

FIRST SALMON



by Gerry Lewis
CRITFC Chairman

The first salmon is making its way up the Columbia River, following the call that the Creator placed in it and its brothers and sisters to return home to renew life. As Indian people, the first salmon is the sign that we made it through the winter and that these sacred fish have returned to nourish and sustain us another year. Soon, fishers will begin the ceremonial fishery, working to supply the longhouses and churches with enough fish to serve their needs to celebrate the First Salmon feast.

These salmon are at the center of our traditional culture, religion, and way of life. Because of this, the ceremonial fishers are selected and honored for this important role. Because of this, the fishers are allowed to go out on the river first. Finally, because of this, the rest of the fishery waits until the longhouses and churches have enough fish to provide for the feasts and ceremonies that define us as Indian people.

Each year, the Yakama, Umatilla, Warm Springs and Nez Perce tribes engage in ceremonial fisheries. The tribes seek to ensure that spring chinook are available for longhouses and churches for the spring ceremonies as well as for other ceremonial needs throughout the year. In years of higher abundance, there is a desire to finish

the ceremonial fishing as efficiently as possible while ensuring the ceremonial needs are fully met. This is done because at higher run sizes, the tribes would also like to be able to consider some commercial fishing opportunity after the ceremonial fishery. This is one of the most important things the tribal fish managers do. Our duty as managers is to make the best decisions from the most accurate information we have. Our duty to our culture is to make sure that salmon—



Columbia River people have gathered for thousands of years to celebrate the return of the salmon.

the center of our way of life—remains a part of the religious and traditional feasts and services that make us Indian. All too often, our beliefs and culture have faced threats from modern times. But the salmon have given us strength to carry on and

to connect us with our ancestors as well as our children and our children's children.

To all the ceremonial fishers preparing for the harvest, I wish you good luck. You are carrying on a tradition tens of thousands of years old and handed down to us by the Creator. Your efforts allow us all to take part in this sacred First Salmon ceremony that ties us to the salmon in the most important and spiritual way. Thank you. 🐟



Stuart Ellis
Harvest Biologist

Winter and Spring Fisheries

The winter gillnet fishery opened on February 1 in all three pools of Zone 6. Sturgeon are the primary species caught in this fishery along with some steelhead. Effort and catch was concentrated in the John Day pool first. It closed on March 1 after staff projected the commercial harvest guideline would be reached. After counting all the landings, the 1,000-sturgeon guideline was exceeded by about 350 sturgeon. The Bonneville Pool was originally scheduled to be closed on March 5, however high wind forecasts delayed some gear pulls by one day. Unfortunately the fishery in this pool also exceeded the 2,000-fish harvest guideline by nearly 150 fish. The Dalles Pool fishery closed on March 21. The landing numbers for this pool were unavailable at the time of publication. 🐟

LEGAL WORKSHOP



Tom Zielman conducted a training on the ramifications of State of Washington v. Jim for Yakama natural resources enforcement and CRITFE officers. Mr. Zielman is the Yakama Nation attorney who successfully handled the case that eventually went before the Washington State Supreme Court. The case determined that Washington does not have criminal jurisdiction over enrolled members of the four tribes at the Treaty Fishing Access Sites on the Washington side of the Columbia River. Mr. Zielman emphasized that this ruling does not create a gap in law enforcement coverage at the fishing sites. The Yakama Nation and the other CRITFC member tribes have extended their criminal jurisdiction to the sites on both sides of the river and authorized CRITFE officers to enforce their laws. At the direction of the tribes, CRITFE officers also carry federal law enforcement commissions from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Over the vigorous opposition of lawyers for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Washington State Supreme Court determined that the sites are "Indian reservations" for the purposes of Washington state law. Washington has asked the court to reconsider its decision.

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LOOKING AHEAD: 2012 RIVER FORECAST

BY CRITFC METEOROLOGIST/HYDROLOGIST KYLE DITTMER



Kyle Dittmer
Meteorologist/
Hydrologist

The spring melt and the high water levels (freshet) it brings to the Columbia River each year makes this time of year particularly dangerous for fishers. CRITFC monitors river conditions throughout the year and creates forecasts to inform fishers of the predicted timing and nature of the freshet. By being informed, CRITFC hopes to not only provide fishers with useful information but also improve river safety.

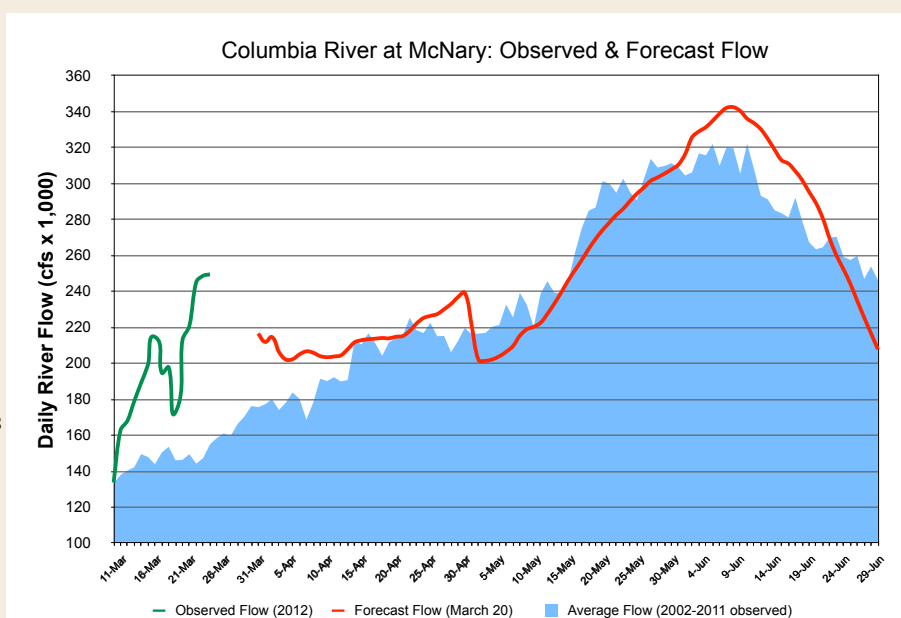
After a shaky early start of the snow season, we are underway to achieving river flow conditions at or slightly above normal (better yet), which are favorable for juvenile salmon migrating out to the ocean and for returning adults. The NOAA-National Weather Service March 13 river spring-summer forecasts are at 97% of normal. See graph.

CRITFC generates its own forecast, using what is called the multivariable ENSO index forecast method. (ENSO stands for El Niño Southern Oscillation. More on this below.) This forecast predicts this year's river flow will be 109% of normal.

Snowpack accumulation is good in the Washington and North Oregon Cascades and the Canadian Rockies (110-150% of normal), improving in the Clearwater and Umatilla (90-125% of normal), and

catching up elsewhere. Current snow levels are at about 1,500 ft.

In the Pacific Ocean, the La Niña event hit its peak in January. La Niña is the cold phase of ENSO, which causes extreme weather patterns across the Pacific for up to 12 months. La Niña events tend to bring higher than normal rain and snowfall plus colder temperatures to the Pacific Northwest during autumn and winter. The enhanced snowpacks that La Niña years bring benefit Columbia Basin fish during the following spring-summer.



The sharp drop in forecast flow beginning on April 30 is due to annual flood control measures at the dams. Visit <http://www.nwrfc.noaa.gov/rfc/> to see current data.

Fish Tech Job Openings

CRITFC is hiring temporary fishery technicians for fisheries research work. These temporary positions are with the Fish Science Department's Habitat Group. This group assists CRITFC and the four treaty tribes with collection and analysis of data pertaining to stream habitat conditions, habitat restoration, and stream ecology. These positions will focus primarily on monitoring status and trends in habitat conditions for ESA-listed spring chinook salmon in the Grande Ronde River Basin.

For more information about these positions, visit www.critfc.org and click "employment opportunities" at the bottom of the page. 🐟

CRITFC Text Messaging Service

Rather than waiting for a postcard to find out details about upcoming fisheries, get the information delivered directly to your cell phone. As soon as tribal harvest managers announce a fishery opening or update, CRITFC will broadcast the information via text message. If you would like to receive these updates, along with other news of interest to Columbia River Indian fishers, subscribe by sending a text message to the number **55958** with "critfc" in the body of the text. Calling the number will not work. This must be done as a text message from your cell phone. If you have any trouble subscribing to the service, call Jeremy FiveCrows at (503) 731-1275. 🐟

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Yakama • Warm Springs
Umatilla • Nez Perce



First Salmon Feasts

April and May begin the First Salmon Feasts throughout the Columbia River Basin. Longhouses and churches will be holding their ceremonies soon. Below are the current dates for the various longhouses's feasts.

Note: Due to the unpredictable nature of the salmon run, these times are tentative and subject to change.

| | |
|------------------------|--------------|
| Simnasho | April 1 |
| Warm Springs | April 1 |
| White Swan | April 1 |
| Lyle | April 8 |
| Celilo | April 15 |
| Rock Creek | April 22 |
| Mata'Lyma (Kamiah, ID) | May 20 |
| Umatilla | May 22 or 29 |



Plates of salmon ready to be blessed and served at the Umatilla First Salmon Feast.



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First Salmon Feasts

Honoring the salmon that gives us life.

