



COLUMBIA RIVER INTER-TRIBAL FISH COMMISSION

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SYSTEM OPERATIONAL REQUEST: 2008 C-1

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FROM: Olney Patt, Jr., *Executive Director*

DATE: May 1, 2008

SUBJECT: **Operation of the Lower Columbia Pools for the Spring 2008 Treaty Fishery**

The Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, on behalf of its members, the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, and the Yakama Nation, requests the following reservoir operations in Zone 6 (Bonneville to McNary dams) during the 2008 spring Treaty fishery. Implement the following hydro-system operations during the spring ceremonial, subsistence, and commercial Treaty fishery times as established by the tribes and the Columbia River Compact.

SPECIFICATIONS: Implement the following operations as a hard system constraint, as follows:

May 5th, 2008, 6 am, Monday, through 6 pm, May 8th, 2008, Thursday.

Bonneville Pool: Operate the pool within a 1.0 foot band.

The Dalles (Celilo) Pool: Operate the pool within a 1.0 foot band.

John Day Pool: Operate the pool within a 1.0 foot band.

At this time we anticipate additional treaty fisheries in May. CRITFC will notify the Corps with specific times for the tribal fishery after each Compact hearing, via a new SOR.

JUSTIFICATION:

The 2008 spring Treaty fishing season is of critical importance to CRITFC's member tribes. The escapement of an estimated **170,000** adult spring Chinook, Columbia at Bonneville Dam (above recent normal rank), will create harvest opportunities for tribal fishers rarely realized in the last 30 years. The spring Chinook fishery is probably the most important of the treaty fisheries. Fishers will be exercising their treaty rights by participating in this harvest, using platform and in-river methods. This harvest provides for the cultural, religious, and economic needs of the treaty tribes.

CRITFC will sponsor net flights each week, starting May 6th, to count the nets in each Zone 6 pool. The survey data will be shared with COE-RCC staff by early afternoon of the flight day.

On April 30, 2008, CRITFC joined other salmon managers in support of SOR #2008-2, which requests increases in upstream reservoir storage releases at Libby and Grand Coulee to meet a flow objective of 180,000 cfs at McNary Dam. Based upon an examination of past river conditions and treaty fisheries, CRITFC believes that the additional flow requested in SOR #2008-2 will increase the probability of meeting the requirements of SOR 2008 C-1. Achieving good river conditions through managed river operations during the treaty fishery have been the basis of past litigation that have been supported by federal courts and are consistent with the trust and fiduciary responsibilities that the federal operators have with respect to CRITFC's member tribes. Good river conditions during the treaty fishery are also consistent with the spirit of the 10-year memorandum of agreements currently being signed by tribal and Corps, BPA, and BOR officials.

In past meetings with Corps officials, tribal fishers have explained that a pool fluctuation of 1.0 foot or more disrupts tribal fishery operations. Specific problems include: (1) increased local currents that sweep debris into fishing nets, (2) rapid 1-2 hour drops in water level will lead to entanglement of nets, (3) boat access problems, and (4) nets torn from their anchors. Nets and gear are costly to replace. Any delays or disruptions to tribal fishing operations caused by the excessive pool fluctuations in Zone 6 negatively impacts tribal incomes, food resources and cultural practices.

The fishers have also expressed to Corps officials that the loss of fishing opportunity during the extremely limited treaty fishery cannot be replaced. Much of the tribal fishers' annual income and food is generated during the brief treaty fishing season, thus, any delays or disruptions to their fishing operations caused by the excessive pool fluctuations in Zone 6 negatively impacts tribal incomes, food resources, and cultural practices.

If this SOR cannot be accommodated, CRITFC requests a verbal response with an explanation from the federal operators by COB Friday, May 2, 2008. Thank you for considering this request. Please contact Kyle Dittmer or Bob Heinith should you have any questions at (503) 238-0667.

Cc: TMT Members
Tribal staffs