



JUVENILE COHO SALMON RELEASE BRINGS TOGETHER THE TRIBES OF THE REGION

Tribes of the region gathered on April 16th, 2024 to pray for the safe journey of about 100,000 juvenile Coho Salmon and nearly 400,000 Chinook fry into the Klamath River. They gathered near the head of the newly released Irongate dam. Near the loading dock, tribal leaders from Yurok Tribe, Quartz Valley Indian Reservation and Shasta Indian Nation joined the Karuk Tribe in thanksgiving for all of the hard work generations of leaders have done in removing the dam.

This is the first release since the removal of the dam in hopes of repopulating the newly restored habitat. The parents of these yearling Coho fish had swum up the river back in 2023 where they spawned and where the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) safely gathered these eggs and cared from them in a fish hatchery. The CDFW insures that these fish are fed and well maintained while they grow large enough to be released which is typically in one year or so.

These anadromous fish will journey into the Pacific Ocean where they will grow into maturity in 2 to 4 years before returning home to spawn and continue their life cycle. The CDFW fisheries work hard in housing and nurturing thousands of fish year-round. Many other entities are also hard at work in the dam removal process. Like RES, Resource Environmental Solutions, who's efforts are in the "restoring of the reservoir footprint behind the dam following draw down and dam removal." This is a large-scale effort in restoring the vegetation, fish and water quality in and around the river.

Leaf Hillman of the Karuk tribe, one of the leaders of the dam removal, spoke about the "new future" that the fish will encounter when they return home to spawn. Referring to the rehabilitation and restoration of the Klamath River. Troy Hockaday, Member at Large at the Karuk tribe, spoke about the pioneers of the dam removal which included Leah Hillman, Ron Reed, Troy Fletcher and Ronnie Pierce. Talks of what could improve the quality of fish and water of the river were concerns of the tribe for many decades since the installment of these dams. The one solution they could all agree on was that the dams must be removed in order for the river and fish population to be restored to its former glory.

Phillip Williams, North District from the Yurok tribe, addressed the hopelessness that their ancestors have felt in the past because of the dam. He is now “looking forward for families, years down the road, who aren’t going to feel hopeless any longer” because there will be economic opportunities for his people in the future. Kenneth Brink, Vice-Chairman for the Karuk Tribe, spoke about seeing “justice for his people down river” because “our kids no longer have to see our river die.”

Chairman Brink gave the prayer for the safe and healthy journey of the yearlings to the ocean. Leaf and Troy joined the chairman in a beautiful song honoring the yearlings before the CDFW’s team released the brood, using 5 large fish trucks with water release tubes. Each of these holding tanks are able to carry 100,00 yearlings. The little fish could be seen jumping and swimming in anguilliform, happily making their way down river. Before the release, CDFW performed several trial releases with a 100 percent success rate. Following the success of these trials and the large scale release of these yearlings, all tribes along the river are looking towards the future and it is healthy, clean and abundant.