Karuk Tribe of California

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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American Fisheries' Society Report confirms Tribal Oral Histories: Salmon once thrived in Upper Klamath Basin

Yreka, CA- A new report to be published next week in the prestigious American Fisheries Society's publication *Fisheries* confirms what Tribes have been saying for years: salmon and steelhead were once made their home in the Upper Klamath Basin before dams blocked their annual migration. Historic records summarized in the report make it clear that the Klamath's once abundant runs could be restored to hundreds of stream miles of historic habitat if Klamath dams that now block fish passage are removed. As Gerald Skelton, Culture and Heritage Director of the Klamath Tribes would put it, "unbuild it and they will come!"

PacifiCorp (a subsidiary of multinational energy giant Scottish Power which now owns the Klamath Dams) have claimed that salmon never historically existed in the Upper Basin. In April of 2004 company spokesman Toby Freeman told an AP reporter that "I want to see hard scientific evidence salmon once spawned in the upper basin rather than relying on tribal histories…"

Today, Karuk vice chairman Leaf Hillman responded, "Here's your scientific evidence. The science clearly supports the oral histories of Klamath Basin Tribes."

The report is titled "Distribution of Anadromous Fishes in the Upper Klamath River Watershed Prior to Hydropower Dams - A Synthesis of the Historical Evidence" and will be published in the April edition of *Fisheries*.

"Building the Klamath Dams, in hindsight, was a serious mistake," noted PCFFA Northwest Director Glen Spain, "and this report proves the point. The Klamath River was once the third largest salmon-producing river in America, but the dams were built with no fish passage and cut the river in half. Hundreds of stream miles of once occupied upstream habitat could once again be the home of abundant salmon and steelhead runs. With restored runs, the economic benefit of dam removal to lower river and coastal fishing dependent communities would be enormous."

This year, serious declines in the Klamath Basin caused by 2002 water flow problems, as well as lack of access for fish to blocked habitat above dams, has triggered coastal ocean salmon fisheries closures as compared to 2004's season of 50 percent or more from Santa Cruz, CA to the Columbia River, more than 800 miles of coastline, likely resulting in economic losses in Oregon and California up to $100 million.

Today the Klamath fall chinook are the weakest stock of fall chinook salmon on the west coast. The need to protect those weak Klamath salmon runs, whenever they intermingle in the ocean with other more abundant runs, now constrains all other harvests. This year, even though record runs approaching 1.7 million chinook are expected in the California central coast and northward from the California Central Valley hatcheries, most of those fish will be out of bounds for fishermen on a ratio of up to 60 California Central Valley fish for every single Klamath fish that must be protected from accidental capture. This means a huge loss for tribal and commercial fishermen at a time of record or near-record runs from everywhere else but the Klamath.

Klamath runs today are less than 10% of their historic numbers, with Klamath coho salmon (federally protected under the Endangered Species Act) down to a mere 2-3 percent of historic abundance. Loss of access to upriver spawning habitat blocked by several small hydropower dams has been a continuing factor in these declines. However, the power produced by all these dams combined is miniscule, less than one-tenth the power produced by just one modern gas-fired turbine power plant.

"This report just adds to the evidence that these small, obsolete dams must go. They produce little power, but are strangling a once booming coastal fishing economy and killing a river that thousands of people depend on for their communities, cultures and jobs," summarized Glen Spain. "These dams have to go. When they do, the salmon will come back home."

The issue has joined Tribal and commercial fishermen, once at odds over fish allocations. Said Hillman, "We look forward to the day when there will again be enough fish to fight over."

This report follows a health study by a University of California researcher describing the health impacts on Karuk Tribal members by a loss of salmon in their diet. Said Hillman, "The two studies together make a strong case for the need to remove dams."

The federal license for these small Klamath hydropower dams expires in March of 2006. Negotiations are ongoing about their ultimate fate.

A copy of the report can be downloaded at http://www.friendsoftheriver.org/PressRoom.html. The principle author of the report, Fisheries Biologist John Hamilton, is reachable at the Yreka US Fish and Wildlife Office at (503) 842-5763.

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