Tribal

The Tribal Vision for the Future of the Columbia River Basin & How to Achieve It

Vision

Introduction

The tribal vision is rebirth of the spiritual values of the Basin's land, water, air, plants and fish and wildlife, and the importance of these values expressed in terms of love, purity, respect and worship that sustained life for native peoples before the time of Christianity, Judiasm, or any other of the world's great religions. This strength should not be lost.

The tribal vision is how the tribes came to be part of the earth and part of creation and what the future holds. This vision is not easily expressed into non-tribal language, but it is sovereignty, respect of the air, water, plants and animals and the interconnection of the spirits of these and tribal peoples, past, present and future.

The Columbia River Basin is a single watershed, forming an entire ecosystem. It is linked and united by one river—the Columbia—and its many tributaries. In the past, this river—and this watershed and ecosystem—were biologically healthy and self-sustaining. They provided a multitude of resources and other benefits to the native populations.

For the tribes, there has always been a common understanding—that their very existence depends upon their respectful enjoyment of the Basin's rich and vast land and water resources. When Europeans came to the Columbia Basin, they found abundant resources under thousands of years of tribal stewardship. This stewardship was taught by unwritten laws and passed down through the generations. These laws begin with recognition of nature's bounty as a gift from the Creator, that everything in nature has a purpose, and that human society has a need to harmonize itself with the structures and rhythms of nature. When the first salmon comes up the river, the human world stops to honor the returning spirit of the salmon.

Tribal people believe that there is no distinction between natural resources and cultural resources—all are necessary for culture, economy, religion and a way of life to be expressed, practiced and maintained. Indeed, the native peoples' very souls and spirits were and are inextricably tied to the natural world and its myriad inhabitants.

Today, the Columbia River, and the Columbia River Basin ecosystem, is seriously damaged and extensively degraded. The extinction and threatened extinction of many salmon species is currently only the most prominent symptom of this widespread devastation. Many other fish and wildlife species of critical importance to the Basin tribes are also in danger.

As a result, tribal rights secured by treaty and established by executive order, as well as the federal government's trust responsibility to the tribes pursuant to those treaties, executive orders, official policies and judicial decisions, have been drastically compromised, to the detriment of all the citizens of the Northwest. Tribal cultures, economies, religions and ways of life throughout the Columbia River Basin are endangered no less than our air, water, fish,

wildlife, plants and other resources—they depend on them, and cannot exist in their absence. Tribes have already borne enormous, unjust losses and hardships because of the widespread lack of environmental justice.

It is time to remedy this situation. To do so, the Columbia River Basin tribes have developed the following vision for the future, and how to achieve it.

Vision

The tribal vision for the future of the Columbia River Basin is one in which people return to a more balanced and harmonious relationship with the environment. It is a vision for the future based both on past tribal teachings and practices and on current science. It is a vision where science serves our teachings and practices, but does not overshadow them.

The tribal vision for the future is one where all watersheds—from the smallest individual tributary to the Basin as whole—are once again regarded with respect and reverence for what they truly and inescapably are—home. It is a vision in which we once again return to the notion that we must nurture and sustain our home as it nurtures and sustains us.

The tribal vision for the future is one where people, fish, wildlife, plants and other natural and cultural resources are once again biologically healthy and self-sustaining. It is a vision of a healthy Columbia River Basin ecosystem also characterized by clean air and clean water. It not only supports viable and genetically diverse fish and wildlife resources that provide direct benefits to society, through harvest and improved physical health of tribal and non-tribal members, but also nourishes the spirit. It is a vision in which tribal sovereignty, treaty rights and the trust responsibility are honored, respected and fulfilled. In achieving this vision, both Indian and non-Indian people, and our shared home, will all ultimately benefit.

“The tribal vision for the future is one where people, fish, wildlife, plants and other natural and cultural resources are once again biologically healthy and self-sustaining.”

The tribal vision for the future of the Columbia River Basin has specific, measurable short-term and long-term goals and objectives. It is a vision achieved by clearly defined strategies and actions. Together, their collective aim is to maintain, protect and enhance currently healthy, natural ecosystems and habitat, and all their human and non-human resources. They will seek to restore, rebuild and reclaim those areas and resources suffering from past misuse and abuse, and halt any such ongoing occurrences.

Specifically, the tribal vision also includes stable, locally adapted Upper Columbia River and Upper Snake River ecosystems. These systems contain naturally producing, sustainable, harvestable resident fish, reintroduced anadromous fish populations, and wildlife populations that are comparable in health and abundance to historic, pre-development conditions.

Goals & Objectives

The future Columbia River Basin will be characterized by the following:

- Biologically healthy, self-sustaining and harvestable anadromous and resident fish, wildlife and other plant and animal populations and communities, with the following specific time frames:

  1. Within 3 years, halt the decline of salmon, sturgeon and lamprey originating above Bonneville Dam;
  2. Within 21 years, increase the total adult salmon returns of stocks originating above Bonneville Dam to 4 million annually, in a manner that sustains natural production and supports tribal ceremonial, subsistence and commercial harvests;
  3. Within 21 years, increase sturgeon and lamprey populations to naturally sustainable levels that also support tribal harvest; and
  4. Within 10 years, reintroduce anadromous salmon above Chief Joseph and Grand Coulee dams; within 50 years reestablish populations of salmon above these dams
  5. In perpetuity, protect and restore fish and wildlife and the aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems on which they directly and indirectly depend

- Improved environmental and habitat conditions are necessary for such populations and communities to survive and thrive, and are achieved in part by re-establishing normative functions including more natural river levels and hydrographs

- Resource populations and ecosystem conditions that provide for human sustenance, increased health and that support the traditional economic, cultural and spiritual needs and practices of the tribes, including harvest in throughout the international Basin

- Fulfillment and free exercise of tribal sovereignty and treaty rights

- Continuing habitat protection and enhancement through land acquisitions, land trusts, conservation easements and similar mechanisms

- Restoration of anadromous salmon productivity by achieving, at a minimum, survival rates at each life history stage as is expressed in *Wy-Kan-Ush-Mi Wa-Kish-Wit* (Spirit of the Salmon) for the seven year and 25 year tribal strategies

The following strategies and actions are examples of management actions that might be implemented to accomplish the tribal vision. They are not inclusive but are likely necessary to meet survival rates for anadromous fish at each different life stage as expressed in Wy-Kan-Ush-Mi Wa-Kish-Wit. The key to accomplishing the tribal vision for basin-wide anadromous fish restoration is achieving survival rates for each life history stage that are expressed by tribal strategies in Wy-Kan-Ush-Mi Wa-Kish-Wit. Adaptive management of different strategies and actions with increased scientific knowledge are also important elements to realize the tribal vision.

Strategies

- Emphasize healthy rivers and watersheds with abundant and diverse species assemblages and their management, maintenance and restoration, with particular attention to ecosystem diversity, productivity and stability

- Emphasize natural production provided by such rivers and watersheds

- Reintroduce and restore anadromous fish to the rivers and streams that historically supported them, in numbers sufficient to provide for the needs of the ecosystem and people, in perpetuity

Actions

Hydrosystem (Passage and Habitat)

- Stop barging and trucking juvenile salmonids

- Remove existing extended-length turbine intake screens; halt installation of new screens and consider removing existing standard length screens

- Operate the hydrosystem, as it is configured now or in the future, to:

  1. Maximize in-river juvenile anadromous fish survival and health consistent with reservoir operations established in the Northwest Power Planning Council's Fish and Wildlife Program;

2. Maximize adult anadromous fish health, survival and spawning capacity;
3. Maintain, protect and enhance currently healthy natural riverine conditions and habitat; and
4. Restore, rebuild and reclaim such conditions and habitat where they have been altered or destroyed

- To satisfy the above criteria, incorporate the following measures in hydrosystem operations and management:

1. Augment and manipulate flows and storage volumes when necessary to more closely approximate the natural, historic river hydrograph;
2. Relax and seek flexibility in rigid flood control rule curves to recreate normative hydrographs and reclaim floodplain habitat;
3. Spill and/or surface bypass to achieve 80% Fish Passage Efficiency (FPE) or better through non-powerhouse routes;
4. Turbine operation within 1% of peak efficiency;
5. Reduced water level fluctuations from power peaking operations;
6. New and/or improved turbine technology and efficiency;
7. Predator reduction and abatement;
8. Water temperature and total dissolved gas reduction and abatement to comply with the federal Clean Water Act;
9. Additional adult fish ladders, new designs and structural improvements to existing ladders and improved maintenance of existing ladders;
10. Restrict new dredging and improve existing dredging management practices and;
11. 24-hour video fish counting

- Restore natural river levels, conditions and habitat in the Lower Snake River by removing the earthen embankments at Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose and Lower Granite dams, and mitigate for the economic and other short-term impacts that will occur; draw down Lower Granite reservoir to 710 feet (spillway crest) until embankment removal is accomplished

- Draw down the reservoir behind John Day Dam to Minimum Operating Pool (MOP) immediately, and to spillway crest or natural river level, on a year-round basis, in the near-term

- Manage water resources to more closely mimic the natural, historic river hydrograph (for example, through improved utilization of water from Canadian storage, Banks Lake and various irrigation projects) but maintain, to the maximum extent practicable, full, stable water levels in Lake Roosevelt and in Libby, Dworshak and Hungry Horse reservoirs according to their Integrated Rule Curves and consistent with the Northwest Power Planning Council's Fish and Wildlife Program

- Develop juvenile and adult anadromous fish passage capabilities, employing any and all possible biological, engineering/technological, legal, political and societal means, to circumvent the current artificial barriers to anadromous fish migration at Chief Joseph and Grand Coulee dams, Dworshak Dam and the Hells Canyon Complex (Hells Canyon, Oxbow and Brownlee dams)

- Protect critical estuary habitat and restore former estuary habitat

- Improve water quality in the mainstem Columbia and Snake Rivers by reducing or eliminating toxic pollution sources and other contaminant discharges in compliance with applicable water quality criteria (at a minimum)

- Designate the Hanford Reach of the Columbia River under the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and re-establish normative river conditions there

Habitat (Tributary and Mainstem)

- Stop ignoring superior tribal reserved instream water rights; fully recognize and honor them

- Adhere to and enforce all applicable tribal, state and federal laws and regulations (including water quality standards, discharge permits and fish and wildlife passage and screening requirements), strengthen them where needed, and develop incentives and cost-sharing programs to assist in their implementation

- Stop government programs and subsidies that allow or promote new development or replace existing development in sensitive floodplains and other areas

- Establish, in coordination with the International Joint Commission, a transboundary Watershed Board to examine, coordinate and improve management of Basin water quantity and water quality

- Protect, enhance, rehabilitate and restore instream flows and conditions and overall watershed health and productivity—specifically:

    1. Issue no new water rights and limit additional consumptive water withdrawals that would negatively impact instream flows;
    2. Acquire water rights and conservation easements on adjacent private lands;
    3. Monitor existing water withdrawals and halt all unauthorized, not permitted or otherwise illegal withdrawals or uses;
    4. Maximize irrigation efficiency and accountability, and decrease out-of-stream water withdrawals;
    5. Mandate appropriate water conservation measures to reduce out-of-stream demands for water;

6. Eliminate federal and state government subsidies that encourage, promote and sustain otherwise uneconomic agricultural and other economic activities;
7. Prevent damage to and destruction of riparian vegetation by fencing and other means, such as purchasing grazing permits and restore impacted riparian areas;
8. Prevent further degradation and destruction of wetlands and restore impacted wetland areas;
9. Improve or eliminate land use activities and practices that degrade water and watershed quality
10. Connect fragmented habitat
11. Eliminate introduction of new exotic species; control populations of existing exotic species

- Use the "Coarse Screening Process" (or other similar methods), where applicable, to establish baseline habitat standards and conditions that land and water users and managers must meet which limit watershed impacts to maintain and improve fish and wildlife habitat

- Establish pre-development baseline information and restore and/or mitigate to pre-development conditions and circumstances

- Protect, mitigate and enhance wildlife populations with continual operations and maintenance to ensure an ecological baseline having healthy habitat values with little or no risk of significant long-term degradation

- Improve water quality in the mainstem and tributaries by reducing or eliminating toxic pollution, point and non-point sources and other contaminant discharges in compliance with applicable water quality criteria (at a minimum)

Hatcheries/Supplementation

- Use artificial production, with an emphasis on protection and recovery of native fish, employing appropriate conservation management actions such as supplementation to provide eggs and juvenile fish for out-planting

- Use supplementation to:

1. Rebuild salmon populations, including those at high risk of extirpation, and minimize genetic risks such as inbreeding depression; and

2. Reintroduce salmon to watersheds from which they have been extirpated (including the Upper Columbia River), to reestablish naturally spawning salmon runs genetically and behaviorally similar to those present before construction of the Upper Columbia River dams (Chief Joseph and Grand Coulee) and the Mid-Snake River dams (Hells Canyon Complex)

- Modify the National Marine Fisheries Service's "Evolutionarily Significant Unit" ("ESU") policy and state "wild fish" policies to increase their flexibility so as to allow effective implementation of supplementation programs consistent with sound conservation biology principles

- Protect, mitigate and enhance resident fish populations negatively affected by construction and operation of dams, including impacts from water releases from storage projects, altered annual flow regimes, daily load following, temperature modifications and nutrient trapping, to the maximum extent practicable

- Mitigate hydrosystem and other impacts by native resident fish restoration, if possible, and native/non-native fish substitution, where appropriate (i.e., implement the Northwest Power Planning Council's Fish and Wildlife Program and the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority's Multi-Year Implementation Plan):

    1. Utilize substitution in areas once having anadromous fish, but which are currently blocked by dams and where in-place, in-kind mitigation cannot occur in the short term and;
    2. Utilize substitution in the vicinity of the areas once having anadromous fish, but allowing substitution and mitigation on- or off-site

- Continue research on Pacific lamprey, develop artificial production strategies and techniques, and implement them to supplement natural lamprey production

- Develop artificial propagation and management strategies and techniques for white sturgeon populations above Bonneville Dam

- Closely and continuously monitor tributary production and escapement to improve management

- Determine areas currently rendered non-useful for particular wildlife species (for example, blocked migration corridors, summer/winter areas, staging areas, etc.) and utilize substitution mitigation for displaced wildlife and wildlife habitat

Harvest

- Establish harvest regimes based on escapement goals that enable the recovery and restoration of all salmon and other fish and wildlife species

- Establish harvest regimes consistent with the Conservation Principles of U.S. v. Oregon, other applicable case law, Treaties and Executive Orders, that account for and properly apportion all direct and indirect sources of salmon mortality, including that inflicted by the hydrosystem, tributary land and water use and management practices, and other such sources

- Monitor effectiveness of newly adopted abundance-based management for North Pacific ocean fisheries in reducing direct and indirect (incidental) fishing mortality on Columbia Basin salmon

- Ensure that incidental salmon mortality (bycatch on non-targeted species) in other North Pacific and Bering Sea fisheries is accounted for and minimized through strict monitoring and adaptive management

- Re-establish traditional tribal fisheries at all usual and accustomed fishing stations and sites

- Continue monitoring and evaluation of wildlife populations to determine success of enhancement and maintenance of habitat values, and establish post-enhancement recovery goals and corresponding limits on harvest

Conclusion

The tribal vision for the future of the Columbia River Basin respects and reflects upon the tribal memories of the past. It simultaneously looks ahead, with a vision filled with images of Indian and non-Indian use and enjoyment of clean air and water, healthy lands, fish, wildlife, plants and other resources. The tribal vision calls for recognition and appreciation of the spiritual values of these, not merely to extract and exploit them for monetary or other economic value they may hold, but to restore and sustain them to bless the human spirit.

Tribal sustenance is achieved most simply and directly through activities that are termed "harvest," in non-tribal language. But this word, and its more commonly understood meaning, do not fully nor accurately represent the connection between Indian people and the "resources" the earth gives to us for our well-being. It suggests a relationship that is somehow unequal—too one-sided.

For the tribes, "taking fish," and wildlife and plants, cannot be separated from the obligation to "take care of fish" and wildlife and plants. In our past, promises were made and exchanged—and kept. We would provide for each other, we could provide for ourselves—the people and the fish. There have been other promises made, by and to Indian people, in words and on paper. We do not take any of these promises lightly.

The tribal vision for the future of the Columbia River Basin is one where, once again, promises made are promises kept.