



KLAMATH TRIBES OF OREGON PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – November 8, 2018

For more information contact:

Don Gentry, Klamath Tribal Chairman, (541) 892-1433, don.gentry@klamathtribes.com

Roberta Frost, Klamath Tribal Secretary, (541) 783-2219 ext. 170, roberta.frost@klamathtribes.com

KLAMATH TRIBES DROP ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT LAWSUIT

New biological opinion offers fastest way forward to improve fish survival in Upper Klamath Lake

Chiloquin, OR – The Klamath Tribes today announced the dismissal of its lawsuit against the Bureau of Reclamation. The Klamath Tribes maintain that the Bureau has failed—and continues to fail—to meet its obligations under the Endangered Species Act to prevent extinction of C’waam and Koptu (Lost River and Shortnose suckers, respectively).

In light of the Bureau’s recent announcement that a new biological opinion (BiOp) for the fish will be issued in April 2019, however, the Klamath Tribes must devote their efforts to ensure that future Project operations under the forthcoming BiOp will not jeopardize the continued existence of the C’waam and Koptu as operations have done under the 2013 BiOp.

“Time is running out for C’waam and Koptu. The Klamath Tribes believe the new BiOp offers the best and fastest path forward to improve conditions for fish in Upper Klamath Lake,” said Klamath Tribal Chairman Don Gentry. “The current BiOp is based on flawed and outdated science. We remain confident that Klamath Project operations will change for the better for fish if best available science is allowed to lead the way.”

The Tribes point to the forthcoming BiOp as an opportunity to avoid a repeat of the Bureau’s action in early October this year to divert more water from Upper Klamath after all the requirements of the 2018 Operation Plan were met. The lake now sits perilously low and close to the point scientists warn could lead to extinction.

“The new BiOp is an opportunity to address the problems of past operations. Rather than drawing the lake down dangerously low in the fall and betting on a wet winter, the Bureau should take every opportunity to build a buffer for the fish and Basin communities against future scarcity, which is a matter of when, not if,” said Gentry. “Instead the Bureau is setting up communities in the Basin for more conflict over water as the predicted warm, dry winter means the prospects for refilling the lake next Spring are not good.”

Recent monitoring by federal scientists indicate no improvement in survival rates for juvenile C’waam and Koptu. Out of the 170 radio-tagged juvenile hatchery fish released last Spring, just 3 are believed to have survived to date. Most of the fish are offspring of older fish that are nearing the end of their lifespans. C’waam and Koptu populations continue to face a biological bottleneck.

“The Tribes are looking forward to a thorough exchange of information as we begin the reinitiation of consultation on the 2019 BiOp. The Tribes are also encouraged by and deeply appreciate Senator Jeff Merkley’s efforts to bring the best, most recent science and scientists together for the Sucker Recovery Summit that the Senator is convening in Klamath Falls next week,” said Gentry. “We are grateful for all the work that Senator Merkley has done for the Klamath Tribes and all the stakeholders in the Klamath Basin. We are counting on making progress towards improving water quality in the lake and getting started on crafting a 2019 Operation Plan that gives the fish a fighting chance at recovery.”

Once the most important food-fish in the Upper Klamath Lake region, C’waam and Koptu were available by the thousands as a mainstay of the Klamath Tribes’ diet, and were also an important non-tribal recreation fishery. In 1986 the Tribes voluntarily suspended fishing, a treaty right, and harvest just two fish every year for ceremonial purposes.

The collapse of C’waam and Koptu fisheries has marched virtually in lock-step with the declining health of Upper Klamath Lake, the largest body of freshwater west of the Rocky Mountains. Once a major destination for boating, birding, wildlife watching, paddling, and fishing, people now avoid the lake from late Spring into Fall in most years due to severe algae blooms that not only kill fish, but prompt Oregon officials to regularly post [health advisories](#) warning against contact with toxins in lake water.

For more information visit www.klamathtribes.org

###