

**TESTIMONY OF THE KARUK TRIBE BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE
ON WATER, OCEANS, AND WILDLIFE HEARING ON KLAMATH RIVER BASIN CONDITIONS AND
OPPORTUNITIES**

March 8, 2022

Ayukii Chairman Huffman and members of the Committee. I am Robert Super. I have the proud distinction of serving as Vice Chairman for the Karuk Tribe. The Karuk is the second largest Tribe in California with over 3,700 enrolled members and 5,300 enrolled descendants. Happy Camp, CA is the seat of Karuk Tribal government and we have Tribal housing developments in Orleans, Happy Camp, and Yreka. Our aboriginal territory encompasses over 1 million acres along the Middle Klamath Basin including large portions of Siskiyou and Humboldt Counties.

The Karuk Tribe's mission is to promote the general welfare of all Karuk people; establish equality and justice for the Tribe; restore and preserve Tribal traditions, customs, language, and ancestral rights; and secure for ourselves and our descendants the power to exercise the inherent rights of self-governance.

Among the many goals of the Tribe is the protection and restoration of our aboriginal homelands and the multitude of plant and animal species that we have depended upon for countless generations for cultural, religious, and subsistence uses.

Today the Klamath basin and the Karuk People are in crisis. For the last 150 years settlers in the Klamath basin have dammed, diked, diverted, logged, and mined our sacred River and our aboriginal homelands. These horrific crimes against humanity and nature were justified by state and federal laws that essentially criminalized being born Karuk. Being Karuk means hunting, fishing, gathering basket materials, and actively acting as stewards of the landscape by using ceremonial fire.

All these activities were at one time unjustly outlawed. Some still are.

The United States and the State of California actively attempted to wipe my People and our culture off the face of the earth. But in the end, they failed.

The consequences of this attempted genocide not only haunt the Karuk People, but they haunt the descendants of the early settlers as well. Today the Klamath basin ecosystem is in a state of collapse. Already chum salmon, pink salmon, and candlefish have been extirpated from the Klamath. Coho salmon, spring Chinook salmon, and suckers are close behind. Fall Chinook runs are now dwindling to unfishable numbers. This means that Karuk People are being denied our traditional foods. This makes us unhealthy. Last week the Pacific Fisheries Management

Council indicated that there would be salmon fishing restrictions along a large portion of the West Coast because of the need to protect weak Klamath stocks.

The severe declines of salmon also create problems for farmers and ranchers. When salmon populations decrease, regulatory burdens for farmers and ranchers increase.

Today, layered on top of the long history of poor natural resource management decisions by Oregon, California and the United States, is the worst drought in over 1,000 years. Layered on top of that is climate change driven by the world's addiction to fossil fuels.

It's a grim picture. However, it doesn't have to be this way. I will now share cause for optimism.

Today, we stand on the precipice of the greatest salmon and river restoration effort in history. For two decades the Karuk Tribe, the Yurok Tribe, the Klamath Tribes, salmon fishermen, conservation groups, and many others have worked tirelessly to remove the lower four Klamath River dams. Today I am proud to count Warren Buffett and his subsidiary PacifiCorp among our allies to achieve this auspicious goal.

We are on track to begin dam removal processes later this year. It should be noted that these dams provide no irrigation deliveries, no drinking water, and no flood control benefits.

I will note that dam removal is not funded by the United States. It is funded by California, Oregon, and PacifiCorp. I will also note that while dam removal is necessary for restoring Klamath Basin fisheries, it alone is not sufficient. That's why the bipartisan Infrastructure Law could not have come at a more opportune time.

While dam removal will allow salmon to access hundreds of miles of historical habitat, dramatically improve water quality, and remove conditions that allow fish disease causing parasites to thrive, we will need to restore river reaches above the dams and key tributaries below the dams to make the most of the opportunity. A look to the greater landscape to achieve forest and watershed health is also critical.

A few Klamath River tributaries are vital to fish to production in the Klamath. This includes the Shasta River which hosted over 80,000 spawning salmon in 1930s and the Scott River which serves as spawning and rearing habitat for most of the remaining population to ESA listed coho salmon in the Klamath Basin. Today, both of these rivers are pumped dry by water diversions and groundwater wells. While dam removal won't change that, funds from the bipartisan infrastructure bill could. We urge agencies to make restoring these sub-basins a priority.

Intimately connected to fish and water is fire. The Tribes of the Klamath once used fire as a primary management tool to protect our homes from uncontrolled wildfire, manage for plants used for food, fiber, and medicine, and stands of acorn bearing oak trees. We learned to do this from the animals, we still owe them a debt for this service to our wellbeing. They now suffer a lack of access to once abundant resources required to meet their basic needs just as we do.

The management of water resources is intertwined with the management of the forest. We urge federal agencies to prioritize projects that partner with us to use traditional ecological knowledge to restore historical fire regimes and revitalize our indigenous knowledge, practice and belief systems. This is key to preserving our culture but it's also key for the safety of all the basin's rural communities.

With funds designated for the Klamath numbering in the hundreds of millions of dollars, we are concerned about how funding decisions will be made. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to fix the Klamath Basin. That's why the Karuk Tribe recommends the formation of a new Klamath Basin Task Force. Federal agencies, California and Oregon agencies, and Klamath River tribes should work collaboratively to develop funding priorities to ensure we and the American people get the most fish for our buck. Included along with our written comments is a white paper describing our ideas for how such a task force would work.

Dam removal along with the significant financial investment in restoration activities is long over-due. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Klamath River fish kill when tens of thousands of adult salmon died before spawning. This event was first observed on California Native American day just as ceremonies were beginning up and down the river. We never want to see another fish kill. We simply want to be who we are in our place. We want to be Karuk and carry on our traditions as our ancestors have since time immemorial.

I appreciate the opportunity to share the Karuk perspective and look forward with working with the committee in the future.

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