

# Governors talk about salmon in treaty issues with Canada

**■ CONSERVATION:** Tribes and Northwest states discuss a fair way to allocate the fish

SITKA, Alaska (AP) — Rebuilding diminished salmon stocks is the biggest resource goal shared by Washington, Oregon, Alaska and Pacific Northwest Indian tribes, the governors of the three states said today.

Govs. Mike Lowry of Washington, John Kitzhaber of Oregon and Tony Knowles of Alaska gathered in the coastal fishing town of Sitka to discuss salmon issues and try to agree on a common approach in conserving and allocating the fish.

"Salmon probably link these three states together more than any resource we have," Kitzhaber said. Habitat destruction, ocean conditions and overfishing are jeopardizing many Pacific Northwest salmon stocks, he said.

The daylong meeting is an attempt to formulate a common front among the three states that are the U.S. parties to the 1985 Pacific Salmon Treaty with Canada, a pact intended to fairly divide the fish that roam back and forth through U.S. and Canadian waters.

Lowry said it was critical for the three states to agree on salmon issues "so we can be coming in as U.S. partners."

Last year, Washington and Oregon sided with Canada to criticize salmon harvests in Alaska, saying overfishing there was jeopardizing stocks through the Pacific Northwest.

Alaska blamed dwindling salmon runs in British Columbia, Washington and Oregon on poor conservation methods and hydroelectric dams that have ground down fish stocks. Fishermen in Alaska took in a record 220 million salmon last year, which Alaska officials cite as evidence that their fishing prac-

tices are sound.

The biggest treaty disputes are about the number of fish that spawn in one country but are caught by the other. Canada says U.S. fishermen catch 5.3 million more salmon that originate in Canadian waters than they are entitled to.

"Most natural resources occur in places where they just happen to be in someone's political boundaries," Knowles said. "But salmon travel thousands of miles and over the course of their lives they conveniently ignore political boundaries."

Canada and Alaska also are at odds over chinook salmon, the prize catch for Southeast Alaska's commercial trolling fleet because those fish fetch higher prices than the other four salmon species.

Predation by mackerel that ate many young salmon in 1992-93 has greatly diminished the number of chinook spawning in British Columbia waterways.

British Columbia has recommended that Southeast Alaska's fishing fleet catch no more than 60,000 chinook this year, about one-fourth the quota of 230,000 fish Alaska targeted in 1995.

Canadian fishing regulators last year cut their own fleet's chinook limits in half and unsuccessfully urged Alaska to do the same.

The chinook dispute landed Alaska in U.S. District Court last year. A federal judge in Seattle shut down the Southeast Alaska chinook fishery after Indian tribes in Washington and Oregon, along with Canada, sued Alaska over the state's fishing practices.

"The tribes have learned that courts and judges are not the way to solve the problem," said Ron Allen, a Washington tribal official involved in salmon treaty negotiations. "When resolving our differences, we need to work through the management of the resources. That's

the intelligent way to go."

Allen said the tribes hope to avoid taking the chinook issue to court this year.

"When you go to court, it's a win-lose situation and all you do is create a schism among the partners," Allen said.

Mike McNeney, spokesman for the British Columbia fisheries ministry, said the province's chinook limits will be even smaller this year in an effort to conserve endangered salmon runs. The province's actual limits have not yet been set.

"What we're saying is, let's go easy on them this year," McNeney said. "It's not a question of asking Alaska to let those fish go through so we can catch them. It's a question of investing in the future so down the road those stocks will be available for everybody to catch."

Negotiations to settle the treaty disputes have proven futile. A neutral mediator also failed to resolve the quarrel.

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