

Canadian Indians seek permission to hunt whales

■ **WHALING:** The planned hunt is supported by many, including groups that want to hunt whales for profit

The Associated Press

SEATTLE — Commercial whalers in Japan and Norway are getting behind a group of British Columbia Indians and other indigenous groups as part of a worldwide effort to revive whaling.

Leaders of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Indians told *The Seattle Times* they plan to hunt gray whales off the west coast of Vancouver Island for the first time in 70 years.

"It is our intention to go whaling again," said Tom Happynook, a chief of Huu-ay-aht Nation, one of 14 native nations that make up the Nuu-Chah-Nulth. "We want to bring back respect to the whaling people and whaling countries."

The proposed hunt — which could take place as early as next fall — is allied with efforts by commercial whalers in Japan and

Norway who hope to promote what they call "community-based whaling" among indigenous people for cultural, dietary or economic reasons.

In Washington state, the Makah Indians are waiting for permission for a similar hunt from an international commission that meets in October.

Gray whales usually swim past Vancouver Island in April or May, heading north toward the Arctic Ocean, then return in September or October on their way to Mexico.

In its initial hunt, Happynook said Indian whalers would likely kill one gray whale, dividing the meat and blubber among tribal members and selling the bones to artists or others.

The Nuu-Chah-Nulth people have not ruled out eventually engaging in commercial whaling, Happynook said.

Environmentalists and animal-rights activists, who promised a protest, fear the Japanese and Norwegian whalers are using the aboriginal approach as a starting

point for reviving commercial whaling worldwide.

"There is a surprising amount of pressure to increase whaling around the world that I never would have expected," said Jim Darling, a biologist who heads the West Coast Whale Research Association in Torfino, B.C.

"The precedent of starting these local coastal whaling operations is a good way to accomplish that."

Tribes like the Inupiat of Alaska, Greenland Eskimos and the Makah say their traditional dependence on the giant mammals warrants them an exemption from a worldwide ban on whale-killing. But whalers from Japan and Norway argue that they, too, have hunted whales for generations and are deserving of "aboriginal status."

Japanese and Norwegian whaling interests have joined with aboriginal groups to form the World Council of Whalers. Last month the group opened an office in Port Alberni on Vancouver Island with Happynook as the council chairman, the *Times* re-

ported in Sunday's editions.

The group has plans to promote aboriginal whaling in Russia, Indonesia and the tiny Caribbean island of St. Vincent, as well as among the Indians of Vancouver Island, Happynook said.

"This new organization will provide an informed, international voice in support of communities engaged or interested in sustainable whaling, as well as working to protect whalers' livelihoods, health and cultural integrity," said a written statement from the group.

Leaders of the Makah Tribe at Neah Bay say they have rejected offers of support from Japan.

"Japan wanted to give us money, to help us buy boats, to show us how to kill the whales, everything," said Ben Johnson, president of the Makah Whaling Commission. "We said no because we knew it would be very controversial, and we want to do everything by the book."

The Clinton administration has promised to support the Makah whale-hunt when the 39-nation

International Whaling Commission meets in Monaco in October.

But that support would evaporate if the Makah decided to sell the whale meat or affiliate with large-scale commercial whalers, according to past statements of James Baker, administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and head of the U.S. whaling delegation.

The arguments that Japanese and Norwegian whalers deserve aboriginal status have been ignored because both countries sanction a commercial whale industry, said Scott Smullen, Baker's spokesman.

Commercial whaling is largely blamed for driving many whale species to the brink of extinction at the turn of the century.

Canada is not a member of the international whaling body, but its government would not permit Canadian Indians to hunt whales except for "food or social or ceremonial purposes," said Diane Lake, a spokeswoman for the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans in Vancouver.

Some residents upset by plan to poison pike in California lake

■ **FISH:** Officials fear pike from Lake Davis could kill game, but locals are more worried about getting cancer

The Associated Press

PORTOLA, Calif. — A plan to kill off thousands of illegally stocked fish by poisoning Lake Davis is angering local residents who fear it will imperil their health and chase off tourists.

Residents of Portola, a Plumas County town of 2,000, have put up signs saying "Save the Lake, It's Our Water!"

They say they don't trust the reassurances of the California Department of Fish and Game, which came up with the plan.

Fish and Game is worried that the unwanted and ravenous northern pike in Lake Davis will work their way downstream, feast on native species and destroy California's treasured trout and salmon industries.

State wildlife official want to poison the reservoir with Nusyn-Noxfish — a compound containing an organic poison called rotenone and other chemical agents.

Fish and Game officials assert that the

\$2 million fish poisoning, planned for October, won't harm humans or contaminate the town's water. They say the chemical concentration easily meets acceptable limits for drinking water, won't harm birds or wildlife and will dissipate to non-detectable levels in the lake within a month.

Portolans are skeptical.

Pam Whitley, who runs an in-home day-care service, wrote a personal appeal to the department: "Please don't poison our water. Please don't use us for experimentation. Don't sentence our children to diseases 20 to 30 years from now."

Rejecting assurances to the contrary, some residents fear the pike eradication poses a threat of future cancers or birth defects.

On Lake Davis, where fisherman Bill McBurney was casting his line into a shimmering lagoon, he says: "We're not concerned about the poison."

Yet inside his Rancho Cordova office, Pat O'Brien, a Fish and Game senior fishery biologist, holds up a dried northern pike, gingerly runs his fingers over its razor-sharp teeth and speaks with an equal

sense of urgency.

"This fish is a game-eating machine," O'Brien says of the olive green and yellow-spotted fish, which can grow to 35 pounds and has such a voracious appetite it's been known to devour frogs, ducklings and all manner of trout, salmon and steelhead.

Pike, which are native to the Great Lakes, turned up in Lake Davis several years ago. Metal gridwork was installed to destroy any fish that attempt to swim out at the base of the dam.

But a single pike can lay up to 10,000 eggs, and O'Brien warns that the larvae can easily pass through the grid. If the pike multiply downstream, they could attack and devastate salmon and trout populations in the Sacramento River Delta 100 miles away.

O'Brien concedes that no pike have been spotted downstream, but says: "It's a pot ready to boil. And we can't take that chance."

But officials in Portola and Plumas County refuse to take Fish and Game's word on the urgency of the pike problem or the safety of the chemicals.

On March 21, the city, county and local

flood control districts sued to stop the poisoning, charging that the action will leave "70 tons of dead, poisoned fish" in Lake Davis and possibly destroy the ecosystem for years to come.

The lawsuit said Fish and Game has failed to prove that the chemical treatment won't produce "long-term effects ... on the public health."

Agency officials are preparing a response to the suit, but argued in an earlier memo no serious human illnesses have ever resulted from use of the fish-killing formula. A 132-pound person would have to consume over 40,000 gallons of rotenone-treated water in 24 hours to receive a fatal dose, the memo said.

City and county officials point to research showing that trichloroethylene, one of several chemicals in Nusyn-Noxfish that helps break down the rotenone in water, is a known carcinogen.

"As a policy they (Fish and Game) are more concerned with fish — and we're more concerned with public health and the long-term consequences," said Portola city administrator Melvin Zernow.

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