

Tribes ask scientists not to fight return of bones

By Linda Ashton
Associated press writer

KENNEWICK, Wash. — The five tribes of the Columbia Plateau on Tuesday urged scientists seeking further study of the remains of Kennewick Man to accept the U.S. Interior Department's decision to return the bones for burial.

"It's time to put a close to what we consider a very blatant exploitation of our ancestor's remains," said Leo Aleck of the Yakama Nation.

"The real claim to those bones are Mother Earth. I believe Mother Earth claimed those bones 9,000-plus years ago."

The ultimate custody of the bones will most likely be decided in federal court in Portland, where a lawsuit is pending on behalf of eight prominent anthropologists who want more research on the bones.

Kennewick Man is one of the oldest and most complete skeletons found in North America, discovered in the shallows of the Columbia River in 1996. The bones are important as scientists try better to determine how and when the North American continent was populated.

For the last four years, the Umatilla, the Yakama, the Colvilles, the Wanapum and the Nez Perce have fought testing and research on the remains, contending it is a moral and cultural desecration of an ancestor, whom they call the Ancient One.

"Given the amount of study that the Ancient One has endured, we ask the federal government, courts and scientific community to support his swift return and reburial in accordance with the law," Matthew Dick of the Colville Confederated Tribes said.

"That's simply not a realistic hope," said Paula Barran, a Portland, Ore., lawyer representing the anthropologists.

The scientists recognize they have no common ground with the tribes on this issue and intend to go forward with the case, she said.

"Our clients don't have any less passion in what they believe than the tribes do," Barran said. "This isn't some lark they have engaged in. They have very strong concerns about government controlling areas of study and having the wherewithal to learn about the past. They're

concerned ... (about) future access to important artifacts."

On Monday, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt said the remains were "culturally affiliated" with the five tribes because the bones were found near the tribes' aboriginal lands.

He said he made the decision based on geographic data and the tribes' oral histories. Three laboratories were unable to successfully extract DNA from the remains because of the bones' age.

Radiocarbon-dating of the 380 bones and skeletal fragments place their age at between 9,320 and 9,510 years old.

At a news conference Tuesday, tribal representatives gathered along the Columbia River to talk about the importance of the Ancient One and the role of federal law in protecting tribal rights.

"This is our land. It's an Indian country," said Robert Tomanowash of the Wanapum Band.

"What's found along the river should not go nowhere to be tested ... to be abused. Our belief is to not disturb the dead. They should stay where they are committed forever until Judgment Day."

The tribes have not yet decided where they would bury the bones. Kennewick Man is being kept at the Burke Museum of Natural and Cultural History in Seattle until the dispute is resolved.

The bones were found on federal land managed by Benton County, and the Interior Department agreed to decide what should happen to them under the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

Protecting what is sacred to tribal people has been a fight ever since the arrival of white settlers, said Jeff Van Pelt of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

"NAGPRA is designed to right the wrongs done to Indian people," Van Pelt said.

Kennewick Man's origins have been debated since the first anthropologist to examine the remains said the skull bore little resemblance to modern-day Indians. Professors who studied the bones for the Interior Department said Kennewick Man appeared to be most closely linked to the people of Polynesia and southern Asia.

Commission bans bait fishing on parts of Rogue to help fish

MEDFORD, Ore. — The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission has banned bait fishing on parts of the Rogue River in the fall to protect salmon and steelhead.

Starting in 2001, the fly-fishing-only season of Sept. 1 through Oct. 31 on the upper Rogue will be followed by a flies- and lures-only season from Nov. 1 through Dec. 31 between Gold Ray Dam and the markers below the Cole Rivers Fish Hatchery.

The commission also banned bait fishing Sept. 1 through Oct. 31 along the 31-mile section of the lower Rogue between Grave Creek and Foster Bar, where boat access is restricted by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Commission member Don Denman of Medford said the changes would result in fewer losses of wild salmon and steelhead, both smolts and adults, that suffer fatal injuries from taking a baited hook deep into their gills or gullets.

There was considerable support for both sides of the issue, but the commissioners felt their action was

a compromise that would allow fishing with spinning and bait-casting gear rather than restricting angling to fly fishing gear, Denman said.

The restrictions on the upper Rogue will put an end to what is known as Slaughter Day, the day after the end of the fly fishing-only season when anglers enjoy unusual success fishing with salmon and steelhead roe.

The restrictions on the lower Rogue were suggested by fishing guides concerned that bait fishing was taking too high a toll on the popular young summer steelhead known as half-pounders, Denman said.

Mike Evenson, a state biologist, had said restrictions on bait fishing on the upper Rogue were unnecessary and would only limit the ability to harvest hatchery steelhead without providing any benefit for wild fish.

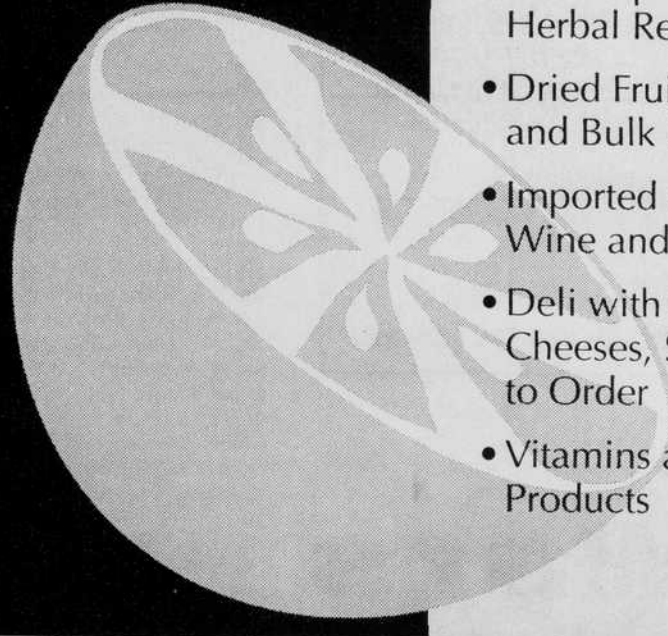
John Billows, who sells flies as well as bait from a store in Trail, said he feared the bait ban would take some anglers off the river.

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