

Tribes oppose closure of fish passage center

(AP) - The choice between counting pennies and counting fish drew heated debate in the battle over salmon earlier this month as Indian tribes and other fish advocates told the Northwest Power and Conservation Council they are worried about the closure of the regional Fish Passage Center.

The fish center was created in 1984, four years after Congress approved the Northwest Power Act and created the regional council to help balance energy development with fish and wildlife protection in Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Washington state.

Salmon and other fish are counted as they travel past reporting sites on the Columbia and Snake rivers, and the data are sent back to the Fish Passage Center here for analysis.

Last month, Congress approved an appropriations bill containing a provision by Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, that cut funding for the center and directed the council and the Bonneville Power Administration to find another agency or organization to take over the job within 120 days.

The Craig provision drew an immediate outcry from the tribes, fisherman and conservation groups, who accused the Idaho Republican of political payback for fighting the Bush administration in court over salmon policy.

"It's really disturbing to see this legislation has come about," said Kathryn "Kat" Brigham, secretary of the board of trustees of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Brigham told the council that Craig had targeted the fish center because he was unhappy that its figures were used by U.S. District Judge James Redden last May to reject the \$6 billion Bush administration plan to improve the Columbia River Basin hydroelectric system, ruling

that it failed to adequately protect salmon.

"Because people didn't like what the fish center has done, he's (Craig) getting rid of it," Brigham said. "But he's wrong."

After Brigham and several other people testified, council members Jim Kempton and Judi Danielson of Idaho both went to Craig's defense, scolding Nicole Cordan, the policy and legal director for Save Our Wild Salmon.

"I think you've used the senator's name in vain," Danielson told Cordan after Cordan said Craig had avoided public debate on closing the center by attaching a rider to the appropriations bill.

Cordan responded that, "with due respect to the senior senator from Idaho, I think he made a big mistake ... it's clearly a bad way to make public policy."

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