Tribes oppose closure of fish passage center

The tribes between counting pens and counting fish have joined forces in the battle over salmon this month as Indian tribes and other fish advocates told the North- west Power and Conservation Council they were 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 re- gional council to help balance energy development with fish and wildlife protection in Or- egon, Idaho, Montana and Washington state.

Salmon and other fish are counted at the test site as they emerge from the Columbia and Snake rivers, and the data are sent back to the Fish Pas- sage Center here for analysis.

Last month, Congress ap- proved an appropriations bill containing a provision by Rep. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, that cut funding for the center and di- rected the council and the Bonneville Power Administra- tion to find another agency or organization to take over the job within 120 days.

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

"We really disagree to see this legislation become law," said Idaho Sen. Craig. "But it's important that we work together to find a solution for the Columbia River Basin's hydroelectric system, which it failed to adequately pro- tect salmon.

"Because people didn't like the fish center bill, he's Craig's getting rid of it," Brigham said. "It's his winning.

After Brigham and several other people testified, council members Jim Kampwolf and Jack Dansholt of Idaho both voted to Craig's defense, resolving Nicole Combs, the policy and legal director for the Northwest Salmon.

"I think you've used the right's name in vain," Dansholt said. "Combs told Craig about his decision at least two weeks ago, and I think he's making a big mistake... it's clearly a bad law to make policy"