

Oregon bans gillnets on Columbia

CRITFC voices tribal opposition

(AP) - The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission voted last week to ban the use of gillnets to catch fish on the main stem of the Columbia River, relegating the primary commercial-fishing tool to side channels and tributaries.

Washington's fish commission was scheduled to decide soon on similar rules, eliminating the centuries-old practice from both sides of the river.

The gillnet ban was pushed by Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber, who hopes to mediate a longstanding conflict between commercial and recreational fishers while transitioning to new methods of commercial fishing. Recreational fishers say gillnets are harmful to the recovery of endangered salmon.

The Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, on behalf of treaty tribes of the Columbia, is opposed to the new regulation.

"The tribes are disappointed that the governor of Oregon responded to political pressures and forced the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission to hastily approve significant changes to the lower Columbia River fisheries," said CRITFC executive director Paul Lumley.

"They have been approved without consultation with tribal co-managers and without a complete and

thoughtful analysis of the effects on the entire mainstem and ocean fisheries management system," Lumley said.

"What was approved last week essentially reallocates a scarce resource with no demonstrated benefits for rebuilding naturally spawning runs. Cooperation and partnership will rebuild salmon populations, not fighting over allocation."

First used by Native American fishers long before the Lewis and Clark expedition charted the Pacific Northwest, gillnets are still the primary method of commercial fishing on the Columbia. They snag fish, by the gills, preventing them from breaking free.

The proposal also infuriated commercial fishers, who say it'll be impossible for them to earn a living by fishing only in the limited areas where they'll be allowed to use gillnets.

They say the proposed new fishing gear won't work and see the move as a ploy by recreational fishers to eliminate competition for strictly limited fish harvests. "Main-stem fishing should not be taken away because greedy people want more," Matthew Evans, a gillnetter from Astoria told the commission. "There's a lot of people out of work, and I don't want to be one of them."

Supporters of the new regulation say the nets are cruel to fish and kill thousands

of endangered salmon.


"Protecting and enhancing our wild steelhead and salmon benefits commercial fishers, recreational anglers, the public at large, and, most importantly, the fish," said Dave Schamp, chairman of the Coastal Conservation Association's operations in Oregon.

Kitzhaber's proposal was advanced after Schamp's organization gathered signatures to ban gillnets altogether on the Oregon side of the river. Kitzhaber said he was committed to improving economic benefits for commercial and recreational fishers alike. He viewed the ban as part of a larger strategy that includes increasing the availability of hatchery salmon returning to side channels and legalizing alternative gear for commercial fishing.

In a letter to the commission last Friday, Kitzhaber acknowledged that a lot must go right for his plan to work and asked the commission to consider backing off if shared economic benefits don't materialize.

Washington is studying alternative fishing gear to see whether it is safer for endangered fish.

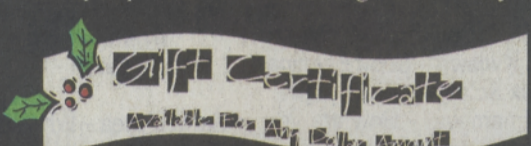
The most-touted method is a purse seine, which encircles fish in the river then is pulled shut at the bottom to trap them. With fish still in the water, fishers can sort out endangered fish and set them free.



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Feds pledge to improve protection of sacred sites

(AP) - Protection of sites held sacred by American Indian and Alaska Natives will be bolstered under a memorandum of understanding signed by four federal agencies and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

The memo signed Thursday by the departments of Agriculture, Defense, Energy and Interior also calls for improving tribal access to sites that are on federal land.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar says the agreement recognizes the shared responsibility the agencies have to respect and foster Native American cultural and religious heritage.

The agencies plan to work during the next five years to raise awareness about sacred sites. That includes developing a website, a training program for federal employees

and guidance for managing sacred sites.

The agreement comes just weeks after thieves made off with rock carvings that had graced a sacred site in California's Sierra Nevada.



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