

Tribes, CRITFC update lamprey restoration plan

Columbia River tribes and CRITFC release comprehensive update to ground-breaking conservation effort as climate change, habitat loss threaten cultural cornerstone

Thirty years ago, most Pacific Northwesterners, the federal government and even scientists knew little about the Pacific lamprey. If they did know about them, more often than not, they considered them unimportant or even unwanted, going so far as to conduct intentional poisonings of lamprey.

It was tribal elders who started sounding the alarms about this culturally significant fish experiencing a drastic and rapid decline.

These alarms drove tribal natural resource programs into motion, laid the groundwork to build partnerships with state and federal resource managers, and started a focused and thorough collection of data surrounding Pacific lamprey and what would be required to help protect and restore these ancient fish.

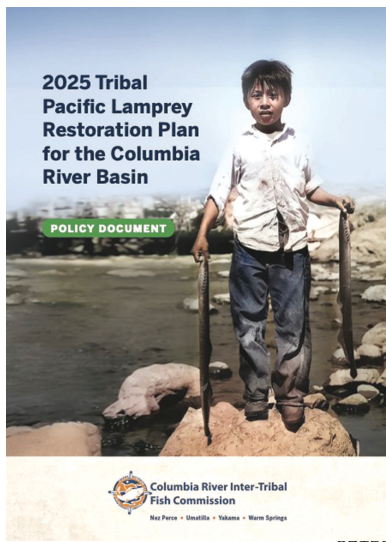
That cultural, habitat and genetic data collection brought about the first Tribal Pacific Lamprey Restoration Plan back in 2011. Guided by this plan, tribal, state and federal managers have worked to help reverse the decline of Pacific lamprey throughout the Columbia Ba-

sin. As they went about this work, they added more knowledge, research and policy improvements along the way. Now, 14 years after the first release, a new, more in-depth plan has been published.

The updated Tribal Pacific Lamprey Restoration Plan, finalized this spring after four years of development, is a scientific roadmap and meant to serve as a demonstration of Indigenous leadership in restoration and conservation and a blueprint for restoring cultural as well as ecological relationships.

The plan's structure has also evolved to meet different audiences' needs. "In this plan we consider moving us toward those goals' vision and how those goals may be a bit different in 2011 compared to 2025," said Laurie Porter, the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission lamprey lead. The updated version includes both a technical document for scientists and managers, and a policy brief for decision-makers.

"The technical document is directed to the scientists and students, anyone who is interested in learning more about the species. The policy brief, or document, is for our policy folks to take to D.C. and have at meetings advocating for lamprey," Ms. Porter explains. She emphasizes the new plan's



The cover of the 2025 Tribal Pacific Lamprey Restoration Plan features an historical photograph of a lamprey harvest at Celilo Falls.

accessibility and emotional impact: "Filled with quotes, photos, and tables, the publication is useful, but also accessible for everyone. Just start with the quotes and it will have an impact on you because it's a very powerful document."

CRITFC executive director Aja DeCoteau adds, "Lamprey have been an important part of the cultures, diets, and ceremonies of Columbia Basin tribes since time immemorial.

"The tribes have been successfully leading the effort to restore this threatened fish throughout the Co-

lumbia River Basin, not only to protect its role in the ecosystem, but also to preserve our access to this important First Food."

From cultural knowledge to scientific action

CRITFC worked closely with its member tribes in creating the first new lamprey restoration plan. Its development was jumpstarted with data, science and technical knowledge the CRITFC member the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation had been gathering for more than two decades at that point. It had also been gathering oral histories from elders to document where lamprey were harvested and to determine run size estimates.

"Our elders would say 'I had a 10-sack night,' which meant a harvesting night of collecting 10 gunnysacks that fit 100-150 lamprey each," said Aaron Jackson, Umatilla tribes' Pacific Lamprey project leader. "It's been decades since those kinds of numbers have been available."

Those days of abundance are a distant memory. But after nearly 15 years of restoration work guided by the region's first comprehensive Pacific lamprey plan, new science, climate change impacts, and increased urgency have all been documented and inserted into this new

plan. "When we first started this program, no one knew anything about lamprey when tribal members noticed their decline and called for action" Mr. Jackson said. "Those words fell on deaf ears of managers."

Despite the initial lack of interest from federal agencies, CTUIR pressed forward with the first lamprey restoration efforts in the Columbia Basin. Its approach was at the time experimental: collect adult lamprey from mainstem Columbia River dams and release them past the mainstem dams into tributaries like the Umatilla River where traditional knowledge indicated good spawning and rearing habitat existed. Starting in 2000, this translocation program began showing remarkable results.

"Since 1994, we're seeing the population increase," Jackson said. "In the Umatilla River, numbers are showing up much higher with years showing the counts up to 4,800 coming over Three Mile Dam, it's unbelievable... to see we finally made it."

For Columbia Plateau tribal communities, lamprey represent far more than just another fish species: They are one of the First Foods—sacred species that tribal members are culturally and spiritually obligated to protect as taught by the Washat religion.

LAMPREY continues on 10

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Oregon bill would help clarify priority of tribal water rights

Oregon Senate Bill 1153 would for the first time in state history, among other things, require the Oregon Water Resources Department to consult with Oregon federally recognized Indian tribes about water right transfer applications that may affect tribes' sovereign rights, privileges, and interests in the waters of the state.

As a sovereign nation and a governmental co-manager of many of the waters in Oregon, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs announced its support of Senate Bill 1153-10.

The tribes say, if passed, Senate Bill 1153-10 will provide an important legislative direction to the state Water Resources Department to:

- Engage in consultation with Oregon tribes to develop and enter into an inter-governmental agreement with tribes.
- Establish a consultation protocol for water right transfer applications in areas of Oregon that may affect the sovereign rights, privileges and interests of the tribe.
- To consider measures that would avoid or minimize harm to the sovereign rights, privileges and

interests of a tribe, including but not limited to treaty-protected rights, posed by water right transfers.

The Confederated Tribes also say the bill contains an important provision that minimizes the risk the bill will be misinterpreted as affecting its water right settlement agreement or other sovereign rights.

The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs has issued the following statement:

"Oregon State Bill 1153 can be an important first step towards addressing the risk that water right transfers pose to tribal rights, including treaty-protected fisheries in the State of Oregon.

"The State of Oregon's current water right transfer law does not expressly recognize the existence of tribes' treaty-protected rights, much less contain any mechanism for avoiding injury or harm to these rights.

"We remain hopeful that the Oregon Legislature passes this bill, as written, in order to ensure that the State of Oregon better protects our tribes' treaty-reserved water rights and fisheries."

