

Tribal fishermen catch 15 steelhead

**SALMON continued
from front page**

Cultural Outreach coordinator, and Michael Wilson, the Tribe's Natural Resources Department manager.

Natural Resources staff members Kelly Dirksen, Bryan Fendall and Nathan Breece also were there to lend support by transporting captured fish back to the boat so the Tribal trio could keep dip-netting, as well as handling permits, gear and boat operations in the tricky waters.

On a boat just downriver, Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno, Vice Chair Jack Giffen Jr. and Tribal Council members Ed Pearsall, Jon A. George and Tonya Gleason-Shepek, who captured the moment on her cell phone, watched the historic moment.

Leno, who often states when he is in the Portland metro area that he wonders if he is walking in the footsteps of Tribal ancestors, said he is proud that Tribal members can now fish in the footsteps of their ancestors.

"For me, it was just amazing to see our people up there on the rocks, dip netting. It was almost like you could see our ancestors doing it," he said. "And then to have the success that we had. We were allowed 15 fish, and they had 15 fish in about 3.5 hours. I was thinking we might not even get one fish. It was quite awesome."

Leno said witnessing Tribal members fishing at Willamette Falls ranks high on the Tribe's list of accomplishments during his 20-year tenure on Tribal Council.

"It's right up there with ceremonial hunting," Leno said. "For me, it's not the taking of the animal, whether it's a fish or an elk, but it's the piece that we get to recover part of our sovereignty. They forced us to give up our hunting and fishing rights at Restoration time, which is critical to Native American people. It's a piece of your survival. They took that piece away and didn't even blink an eye doing it."

The Oregon Fish & Wildlife Commission voted during its April 22 meeting held in Bandon to allow ceremonial fishing by members of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde at Willamette Falls, restoring the rights sacrificed by the Tribe in the 1980s when it was seeking support for its Restoration and subsequent Reservation Plan.

The new rule allows the harvest of hatchery spring Chinook salmon and/or hatchery summer steelhead for ceremonial purposes with a limit of 15 fish taken per year by Tribal members.

Only hatchery-origin fish are allowed to be taken. Wild fish must be released unharmed back into the Willamette River.

Dirksen, who is the Tribe's Fish and Wildlife Program manager, said the three Tribal fishermen caught 15 summer steelhead, all hatchery raised, during the trip to the Falls.

"The fish are cleaned, vacuum-sealed and in the freezer at Natural Resources," Dirksen said.

Dirksen said the Tribe received



Courtesy photo by Kelly Dirksen

Natural Resources Department Manager Michael Wilson was one of three Tribal fishermen who traveled to Willamette Falls in Oregon City on Wednesday, June 8, to dip net for salmon. Wilson, tethered to the rock outcropping at the Falls, said dip netting for salmon was a difficult physical experience. The trio of fishermen caught the Tribe's annual quota of 15 fish in less than four hours.

its permit to harvest salmon from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife on Friday, June 3, and the tags arrived on Tuesday, June 7. He then went to the Falls and saw that one particular spot was active.

The next day, the Tribal contingent traveled to Willamette Falls for four hours and ended the more than century break in Grand Ronde Tribal members fishing there.

"The ruling was so valuable that we wanted to try and utilize it the first opportunity we had," Dirksen said, adding that the Tribe was running out of time this year because of the imminent arrival of listed Coho and the lowering of water flowing over the Falls.

Wilson said fishing for salmon using dip nets was hard work and exhausting.

"We were working hard at it," Wilson said. "In this spot, rather than sticking the nets straight down into the water, we had to reach out with the nets quite a ways, kind of parallel to the Falls, then dip it down and push it down into the deep hole and drag it back toward you. So, one, you had to stand on the ledge with a crack on one side and a drop-off into the Falls on the other side. Balancing on that ledge, which is slippery and wet, and launching it out there to where the deep hole was ... that was a workout."

Wilson said he was aware of the historical significance of what he, Freeman and Mercier were doing.

"At least for myself, I was aware of the importance of what we were doing and how long it had been since any of our Tribal people had been at those Falls fishing," Wilson said.

According to the commission, the new rules "preclude the potential for the harvest to have any biological impact or any measurable effect on recreational salmon and steelhead fisheries in the Willamette basin."

For example, an estimated 42,000 hatchery spring Chinook salmon passed Willamette Falls in 2015 and typically more than 20,000 summer steelhead also pass up-

stream of the Falls each year.

"The harvest of 15 of these fish would not have a measurable effect on fisheries upstream of this location," a commission summary stated. "The effect on naturally produced salmon and steelhead populations should also be negligible since the harvest is limited to hatchery origin fish only."

Tribal members issued a ceremonial harvest tag are allowed to fish in an area immediately downstream of Willamette Falls. They are not allowed to fish within 75 feet of any of the three fish ladder entrances.

Fishing is allowed during daylight hours from the shore or from a platform the Tribe will construct, and only traditional fishing methods, such as dip nets, are permitted. The resulting catch can be used for Tribal ceremonial and cultural purposes, but fish or fish parts cannot be bartered or sold.

The Tribe also is required to notify Oregon State Police and the Department of Fish & Wildlife two days in advance of fishing. In addition, the Tribe is required to report to the state within 30 days following the end of the fishing season the number of unmarked wild salmon and steelhead captured and released.

"These proposed rules will provide an opportunity for Oregonians to see traditional salmon fishing

methods in use at this historic site, and will provide the Tribe an important cultural link to its past," stated the summary.

In an authorization to proceed approved on May 19, Tribal Council decided that Tribal member employees identified by General Manager David Fullerton were to be the first ceremonial fishermen for the 2016 permits. The first harvested fish will be used for a Tribal celebration of the return of traditional fishing rights at Willamette Falls.

A \$5,000 budget for this year's ceremonial fishing season was established to pay for items, such as nets, harnesses, ropes, food, fuel, travel and other necessary safety gear and fishing equipment.

"Everything just came together," Wilson said about this year's salmon harvest. "I thought it would be a success if we just went up there and got the nets wet and went through the function of it. When Andrew got that first fish out of there, I was like, 'Wow.' We not only did this, but we got a fish out of here."

"It was a ton of work and several years getting to this point. I was really happy that I could be part of it all the way through to the actual making it happen on the rocks rather than just paperwork and commission meetings. Actually being there and feeling the fish."

In an e-mail to the Natural Resources staff, Wilson said that the day "ranks up there in my top 10 days of work here; maybe top five – and that is even knowing I am going to be sore."

Tribal staff are continuing to pursue platform locations and development of a long-term ceremonial fishing plan for 2017.

Leno said next year's fishing will likely follow the process established for Tribal ceremonial hunters.

"We will take volunteer fishermen and they will have to go through whitewater training because you are up in the Falls," Leno said. "They will draw for one or two fish and they will be able to go up with someone who has some experience for safety reasons. You're going to have to be in some kind of shape and crawl up those rocks. It's dangerous and slick. And then you have to handle a 32-foot pole, not counting if you do catch a fish, which you then have to deal with that fish, pole and net on slick rocks. It's a bit challenging." ■

TRIBAL EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS ORDINANCE OPEN FOR COMMENT

The Tribal Council, in consultation with the Tribal Attorney's Office, adopted, on an emergency basis, a proposed amendment to the Tribal Employment Rights Ordinance at the May 4, 2016, Tribal Council meeting. The proposed amendment provides that the TERO Commission shall consist of at least three (3) but not more than five (5) individuals. Currently, the Ordinance requires appointment of five (5) Commissioners. The amendment will provide the Council some flexibility in setting the number of Commissioners.

The Tribal Council invites comment on the proposed amendment to the Tribal Employment Rights Ordinance. For a copy of the proposed amendment, please contact the Tribal Attorney's Office at 503-879-4664. Please send your comments to the Tribal Attorney's Office, 9615 Grand Ronde Road, Grand Ronde, Oregon 97347 or by e-mail to legal@grandronde.org.

Comments must be received by June 15, 2016. ■