

Fishing rights relinquished in the 1980s

FISHING continued
from front page

"I knew I needed to be here ... to receive strength and peace for my family. ... This moment in time is prophetic," Kennedy said.

Several years ago, Kennedy said she had a dream about the restoration of the Tribe's fishing rights and how wonderful it felt. The Tribe had to relinquish those rights in the 1980s to secure land for a Reservation.

Kennedy served on two post-Restoration Tribal Councils in 1985 and 1986 that were tasked with making that difficult choice. She vividly recalls meetings where members of sport fishing organizations would jeer and yell at Tribal members. She describes it as a "terrible time," having to choose between land for a Reservation or sacrificing hunting and fishing rights forever.

"There were four women and five men on our council and we said, 'We can't give up our rights,' but the men were more pragmatic and told us we wouldn't have anything at all if we didn't get a Reservation ... so we signed the consent decree to give up our rights forever. We cried, but we knew that the people of Oregon didn't want us to have it then."

After years of gradually shifting public opinion and countless hours of work by Tribal employees and Tribal Council members, fishing rights at Willamette Falls were restored by the Oregon Fish & Wildlife Commission on April 22, 2016. That ruling allowed for the harvest of hatchery spring Chinook salmon and/or hatchery summer steelhead for ceremonial purposes with a limit of no more than 15 per year.

Tribal Council member Jack Giffen Jr. thanked Natural Resources Department Manager Michael Wilson, Fish & Wildlife Program Manager Kelly Dirksen, Tribal Attorney Rob Greene and Staff Attorney Jennifer Biesack for their work during a Legislative Action Committee meeting on Tuesday, May 15.

"This process has taken (several) years," he said. "Even though it is limited, it is monumental and I want to thank all of the folks involved. ... It was trying at times, but we weathered the storm and we succeeded."

A special connection

The Tribe's connection to the falls dates back to historical times. Willamette Falls, or "ikanum" in Chinuk, is within the ancestral homelands of the Chinookan-speaking Clackamas and Clo-We-Walla peoples relocated to the Grand Ronde Reservation after signing of the Willamette Valley Treaty of 1855.

Tribal Council member Kathleen George recalled viewing log books from the early days of the Grand Ronde Reservation when Tribal members were required to account for their whereabouts. Willamette Falls was a frequent destination.

"Our fishermen are where they are supposed to be at the falls," she



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal Elder Greg Archuleta, left, and Chris Rempel prepare salmon to serve during the First Salmon Celebration held at the McLean House in West Linn on Friday, May 18.

said. "It is putting things right for our ancestors. We were the keepers of the falls. ... This is part of the healing and restoring of our Tribe and that relationship. Our hearts are pretty full now."

George and Kennedy, along with fellow Tribal Council members Brenda Tuomi and Lisa Leno and Secretary Jon A. George were transported by boat to the dam where they trekked down a steep drop-off and across slippery concrete to observe the fishing.

Jon A. George and Cultural Education Specialist Brian Krehbiel performed an impromptu ceremonial salmon song and prayed for the fishermen to be successful against the eager sea lions patrolling the river.

"To be involved in this is very emotional for me," George said. "The ODFW ruling was a confirmation restoring our rights."

Tuomi said the experience was powerful.

"I would like to have more Tribal

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members be able to go sometime," she said. "I wanted to thank everyone who has allowed me to be able to see this."

Leno said she has much appreciation for the work that has gone into making the fishing possible.

"Our past leaders and programs that have made a concerted effort to make this possible, to bring back our history, makes me very grateful. ... It is pretty monumental to the future of what is important."

Monday's Tribal fishermen included Cultural Advisor Bobby Mercier, Tribal member Jade Unger, Utility Maintenance Supervisor Joe Loomis, Cultural Education Coordinator Jordan Mercier, Maintenance Supervisor Andrew Freeman and Natural Resources Department

Manager Michael Wilson.

"This is the first time here dip netting and being able to connect with the falls, in the place where fishing used to happen, deepens my understanding," Jordan Mercier said. "It is an opportunity to experience something that hasn't happened in a long time. I am from the Clackamas Tribe, so it's an opportunity to deepen my connection, and it builds our strength and will."

Loomis said he decided to participate in the fishing mostly out of curiosity.

"I am not really a traditionalist," he said. "I am a fly fisherman, but am excited to be a part of this. I feel like we're in great hands today."

The team was led by Dirksen, who others jokingly referred to as "the safety guy." General Manager David Fullerton captained the boat to ferry people back and forth to the dam above the falls. Aquatic Biologist Torey Wakeland and Silviculture and Fire Protection Manager Colby Drake drove another boat to get below the falls, close to the rocks.

"My number one goal is that everyone goes out and everyone comes back," Dirksen said. "And hopefully we will catch some fish."

Although no fish were caught on Monday, Drake netted the first fish on Tuesday, which was ceremonially cooked and eaten by Grand Ronde Tribal members later that day.

Drake is not a ceremonial fisherman, but a Tribal member who grew up fishing with his father and brother, Alex Drake, who was also at Willamette Falls manning a drone to capture video of the fishing.

"I got invited to help be one of the lifeguards, so on Monday I ob-



From left, Tribal Cultural Education Specialist Brian Krehbiel, Tribal Council Secretary Jon A. George, Tribal General Manager David Fullerton, Tribal Council members Lisa Leno and Brenda Tuomi and Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy sing during ceremonial fishing at Willamette Falls in West Linn on Monday, May 14.

See **FISHING**
continued on page 9