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August 31, 2006

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council Members

FROM: Peter Paquet
Manager, Wildlife and Resident Fish

SUBJECT: Presentation by the Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission on the role of the Commission and its member tribes in implementing the Northwest Power Act

Twenty-five years is a mere snapshot in the 10,000 years of tribal existence in the Columbia River Basin. Long before written history, salmon provided a unifying figure for the tribes and bands of Warm Springs, Umatilla, Yakama and Nez Perce. They gathered at sites such as Celilo Falls to share in harvest forging alliances that exist to this day. A Celilo Fish Committee governed the fishery ensuring that harvest was shared as well as worshipped and restrained in order to assure future runs. Subsequently, over-indulgence by hydropower, agriculture, logging and commercial harvest severely depleted salmon runs as well as the fish and wildlife habitat crucial to safeguarding the rights expressly reserved in treaties with the United States in 1855. The four tribes formed the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC) in 1977 modeling it after the Celilo Fish Committee. CRITFC's tribal leaders and leaders from other basin tribes were active in the deliberations that led to the passage of the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Electric Act in 1980. Even before the passage of the Act, CRITFC tribes were active in fish and wildlife protection and restoration. Today, they have developed the capacity to implement programs across their ancestral homelands that collectively stretch over roughly one-third of the entire Columbia River Basin in the United States.

There are accomplishments to highlight over the past 25 years, yet the many promises made in good faith and the goals that have been set are far from being fulfilled. Providing equitable treatment to achieve all benefits is a difficult feat. Good will and determination went into the passage of the Act. Therefore, conflict should not be allowed to set the pace for the hard work that lies ahead.