Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation 1998 Unified Watershed Assessment and Watershed Restoration Priorities

INTRODUCTION

The Environmental Protection Agency released its new Clean Water Action Plan proposal in February of 1998. The proposal would enable renewed efforts to identify and clean up nonpoint sources of pollution in the surface waters of the United States.

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation attended the EPA Clean Water Action Plan meeting in Seattle in July of 1998 and has participated with Oregon DEQ in the drafting of statewide proposals for prioritization. Further, the CTUIR has been applying a collaborative watershed approach to the protection and restoration of river systems on the Reservation and in the Tribe's ceded lands. Work has been focused on the Umatilla River, the Grande Ronde River, the Walla Walla River and the John Day River.

INFORMATION-DATA SOURCES

The following information sources were used to prioritize the watersheds requiring immediate and aggressive watershed protection and restoration:

1) CTUIR 1994 Nonpoint Sources of Water Pollution Assessment and Management Program.
2) Oregon draft 1998 303(d) list.
3) EPA's Index of Watershed Advisors.
4) Washington draft 1998 303(d) list.
5) Wy-Kan-Ush-Mi Wa-Kish-Wit. The 1996 CRITFC Columbia River Anadromous Fish Restoration Plan.
6) USFS and US BLM draft EIS Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project.
7) US COE, BPA, BOR 1995 System Operation Review Final EIS.
8) Oregon DEQ and CTUIR TMDL work-in-progress data and information for Umatilla River and Grande Ronde River.

PROCESS USED FOR CATEGORIZATION AND PRIORITIZATION

EPA guidance is to categorize watersheds into four categories:
1) Watersheds in Need of Restoration
2) Watershed Meeting Goals, including those needing action to sustain water quality.
3) Watersheds with Pristine or Sensitive Aquatic System Conditions
4) Watershed with Insufficient Data.

The CTUIR knows of no watersheds that fit into category 2 and 4. Portions of watersheds, such as the North Fork Umatilla River, fit into category 3 but the watersheds themselves are category 1. All watersheds listed below as Category 1 have been listed in the Oregon or Washington 303(d) list as water quality limited, in the CTUIR Nonpoint Source Assessment and Management Program and/or have been described in other studies (e.g. SOR, ICBEMP) as water quality and habitat limited.

For this assessment, CTUIR's recommended priorities are based upon a HIGH, MEDIUM and LOW priority. A HIGH priority watershed requires restoration and protection immediately in order to sustain endangered, weak or rebuilding anadromous and resident fish populations or if it is a migration corridor or other life history stage "bottleneck"[1]. A HIGH priority watershed requires sustained restoration over a period of a decade or more.

A MEDIUM priority watershed requires restoration and protection within the next five years. A MEDIUM priority watershed requires sustained restoration over a period of a decade or more.

A LOW priority watershed requires restoration and protection that is not critical to implement in the first five years and can wait until the higher priority watershed work is implemented.

CATEGORY 1 HIGH PRIORITY WATERSHEDS

Umatilla River (with Category 3 in North Fork Umatilla River)
Grande Ronde River
John Day River
Lower Snake River-Asotin
Lower Snake River-Tucannon
Lower Snake River
Middle Columbia-Lake Wallula
Lower Columbia River
Hell's Canyon
Walla Walla River (with Category 3 in South Fork Walla Walla)

CATEGORY 1 MEDIUM PRIORITY WATERSHEDS

Imnaha River
Upper Columbia-Priest Rapids

[1] Examples of a migration or other life history stage habitat "bottlenecks" are Lower Columbia, Middle Columbia-Lake Wallula, Lower Snake, Lower Snake-Tucannon, Lower Snake-Asotin. These mainstem segments severely limit the anadromous fish recovery potential of the Umatilla, Grande Ronde, John Day and Walla Walla Rivers and all other watersheds accessible to anadromous fish in the mid-Columbia and lower Snake rivers.

UNIFIED WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

This CTUIR Unified Watershed Assesment was developed in coordination with the Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission and with other Columbia River Treaty Tribes. The CTUIR has participated in the State of Oregon's process to develop its own Unified Watershed Assessment and appreciates the outreach of the State.

DEPARTMENT of
NATURAL RESOURCES

Administration

CONFEDERATED TRIBES
of the
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Ms. Teena Reichgott
US EPA Region 10
1200 Sixth Avenue, ECO-08
Seattle, Washington 98101

October 1, 1998

RE: CTUIR Unified Watershed Assessment
VIA TELEFACSIMILE AND US MAIL

Dear Ms. Reichgott:

Attached please find the Unified Watershed Assessment developed by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. This is being delivered as per your request at the July 9, 1998 Clean Water Action Plan meeting with Tribes.

We look forward to your review and appreciate your assistance in the development of this package. As you are aware, water quality in the surface waters throughout the ceded lands of the CTUIR is an environmental factor that severely limits r salmonid recovery.

We appreciate the partnerships that CTUIR and EPA have successfully developed to implement such outstanding projects as the McCoy Meadows Restoration project. It is my sincere hope that with additional support from the Clean Water Action Plan we collectively can begin a more aggressive effort to restore critical water quality to enable salmonid recovery in the rivers of our region.

Please advise as to the process and timeframes for putting Clean Water Action Plan funding to the ground. If you have any questions please feel free to call me or Rick George (541-276-3449).

Sincerely,

Michael J. Farrow
Director, Department of Natural Resources

Cc: Mr. Donald Sampson-CRITFC
Mr. Rick Eichstaedt-NPT
Mr. Dave Powers-OregonDEQ
Ms. Kate Vandemoer-US DOI/BIA
Tribal Water Committee
Fish and Wildlife Committee
Gary James, Rick George, Aaron Skirvin

Attachment: CTUIR Unified Watershed Assessment