



QUINAULT INDIAN NATION PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – November 15, 2023

Contact:

Cleve Jackson, Quinault Fisheries Policy Spokesperson Cleve.Jackson@quinault.org, (360) 591-9827

TO PROTECT WILD COHO SALMON THE QUINAULT NATION CALLS ON STATE TO JOIN TRIBE IN
CLOSING QUEETS RIVER AND GRAYS HARBOR FISHERIES

Despite hardship for tribal fishermen, the Quinault Dept. of Fisheries has closed fall tribal fishing for Coho early this year

Taholah, WA - In a letter sent today to Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) director Kelly Susewind, the Quinault Indian Nation (QIN) again called on the state to close fall Coho salmon fisheries in Grays Harbor and the Queets River in response to alarmingly low returns of wild adult coho salmon.

The letter states “We are disappointed at WDFW’s ‘wait and see’ attitude and reluctance to take precautionary actions to protect the resources entrusted to our stewardship in the face of uncertainty.”

“We understand this closure has brought hardship to our tribal fishermen and their families, but as stewards of our salmon for today and future generations, it’s the right thing to do,” said Quinault Indian Nation President Guy Capoeman. “While we won’t know with certainty how many wild coho will eventually spawn, after analyzing all the information we could muster, we believe precautionary management principles had to be followed. The best available science led us to conclude emergency closures were needed and we are disappointed the state decided against taking similar precautions.”

As co-manager, QIN has a treaty protected right to harvestable fish produced by the Queets River and the Chehalis Basin and the responsibility to regulate its fisheries. WDFW manages nontreaty commercial and sport fisheries within state waters.

In an earlier letter dated October 30, 2023, QIN urged WDFW to immediately close Coho fisheries under its jurisdiction in the Queets River and Grays Harbor. The agency has chosen to keep those fisheries open. In a November 3 letter to QIN in response, WDFW states “We agree that the limited information so far this year, suggests that the coho return is likely below pre-season expectation, but there is still a great deal of uncertainty.”

“We do face uncertainty in making these difficult management decisions, but the risk of leaving fisheries open too long and getting it wrong is too great with our salmon populations already in a precarious state of decline,” said Quinault Fisheries Policy Spokesperson Cleve Jackson. “Our shared responsibility to be good stewards of our sacred salmon requires us to be cautious and proactive before it’s too late.”

Based on preseason projections for spawning escapement – the number of salmon that escape fishermen to successfully reach spawning grounds – the Quinault Department of Fisheries opened tribal commercial and guide fisheries for Queets River Coho on September 1st and tribal commercial fisheries on the Humptulips and Chehalis River (which both empty into Grays Harbor) on October 1st.

After observing far below expected catch numbers anticipated by the Pacific Fishery Management Council’s preseason projections, QIN decided in October to close its fisheries early. A full season for Grays Harbor tribal commercial fisheries and the Queets River tribal guide fishery would have run until November 30.

The October 30 letter from QIN to WDFW states “Despite considerable social and economic consequences for its communities, the QIN has closed its Queets and Grays Harbor fisheries. We are distressed and frankly mystified over WDFW’s reluctance to take comparable actions.”

In further explaining QIN’s decision to close its fisheries, Jackson commented “Our ocean, where salmon spend most of their lives, is sick. Heat waves, acidification, harmful algal blooms, and disrupted food webs are becoming the rule rather than the exception. On land, we are facing challenges from growth and development, warming temperatures, droughts, floods, invasive species, plastic and chemical pollution, and other environmental degradation. The earth is out of balance. Our future is getting more uncertain and unpredictable. Our ancestors have taught us that we are part of the environment, not apart from it. We have the responsibility to make hard decisions to care for the whole, our communities, the land, forests, water, air, fish, plants, and animals for today and tomorrow.”

###