



PRESS RELEASE

CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF THE COLVILLE RESERVATION

Lead US Negotiator on Columbia River Treaty Tours Colville Reservation

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For Immediate Release

NESPELEM, WA—Jill Smail, lead US negotiator for the next Columbia River Treaty between the US and Canada, toured the Colville Reservation with Colville Tribal elected officials and staff yesterday, hearing from Tribal leaders about the need to include them in the upcoming negotiations sessions.

“We’re very pleased that Ms. Smail came to our reservation to see for herself why the Colville Tribes, and other Northwest Indian Nations, must be part of the Columbia River Treaty negotiations,” Colville Business Council Chairman Rodney Cawston said today. “The 1964 Treaty focused on the development and operation of dams in the upper Columbia River but did not sufficiently address the natural resources issues and other problems the dams created.”

Cawston noted that the Colville Tribes lost thousands of acres of its land, including sacred sites and historic burial grounds, when the backwaters from Grand Coulee Dam formed Lake Roosevelt. The Tribes also suffered the loss of enormous Upper Columbia salmon runs, which tribal members had depended on for thousands of years.

“Our Tribal leaders had no say in the building of the dam that was devastating to our natural resources, our tribal economy and our traditional ways of life,” he said. “It is only fair that we should have a meaningful role in Columbia River Treaty re-negotiations this time around.”

The 1964 Treaty focused on power and flood control in the US and Canada and allowed for the sharing of one-half of the downstream U.S. power with Canada. Most of its major provisions will expire in 2024, and new negotiations are now underway.

“While there have been positive benefits for some under the Treaty, these benefits were not shared by Columbia River Tribes, who lost so much when dams were built,” Cawston said. “We are aware that Canada has recognized the importance of the Treaty to First Nations there and have offered them observer status in the negotiation sessions. We are very hopeful that the US will provide at least that level of involvement to Tribes in this country.”

On Monday night Smail was served a traditional dinner. “I want to thank all those who helped put together and served a traditional dinner for Ms. Smail. She and the other team members enjoyed the meal,” Cawston said. “I also want to thank those who spoke on the importance of salmon to sustaining our culture.”

On Tuesday Smail was given a tour of the Tribes’ fish hatchery in Bridgeport, and provided with information on how focusing Columbia River flood control measures in the Portland area can lead to increased flooding upriver in areas such as the Colville Reservation. “I want to thank the staff who did power point presentations that provided information regarding the importance of the river to the Tribes and describing the Tribes’ efforts to improve salmon habitat and to remove fish barriers,” Cawston said.

“We certainly appreciate Ms. Smail’s visit to our homeland and our River,” Cawston said. “We hope she will agree that the Colville Tribes and other Northwest Indian Nations ought to have a place in the negotiations as observers, as the Canadian government has done for First Nations.”

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About the Colville Tribes:

Today, more than 9,520 descendants of 12 aboriginal tribes of Indians are enrolled in the Confederated Tribes of the Colville. The tribes, commonly known by English and French names, are: the Colville, the Nespelem, the San Poil, the Arrow Lakes, the Palus, the Wenatchi (Wenatchee), the Chelan, the Entiat, the Methow, the southern Okanogan, the Moses Columbia and the Nez Perce of Chief Joseph’s Bands.