

# RESTORED BY US

**“The Earth was created by the assistance of the sun, and it should be left as it was...The country was made without lines of demarcation, and it is no man’s business to divide it... The Earth and myself are of one mind. The measure of the land and the measure of our bodies are the same... Understand me fully with reference to my affection for the land. I never said the land was mine to do with as I choose. The one who has the right to dispose of it is the one who has created it.”**

**- Chief Joseph**

For over 500 generations salmon have been a sacred and cherished resource to the Nimiipuu; the Nez Perce people. Since time immemorial, stories have recounted the salmon’s sacrifice to care for man; providing its body for food, nourishment, and tools. In appreciation of the salmon’s sacrifice, the Nez Perce feel a profound obligation to care for and protect the salmon today and into the future.

Today this obligation is demonstrated by the Nez Perce Tribe’s commitment of significant resources to fish restoration activities within the Columbia River and Snake River Basins. The Nez Perce Tribe Department of Fisheries Resources Management (NPT Fisheries) is one of the largest and most successful tribal fisheries programs in the United States. The program has been instrumental in restoring salmon to the Columbia Basin and is an indispensable component for the restoration of fishing resources in the Pacific Northwest. Through a variety of restoration and revitalization projects, NPT Fisheries has a large impact on local and regional economies, and beyond.

**“The Nez Perce Tribe fisheries program is responsible for approximately 1/3rd of the anadromous salmon runs in the lower Snake River/ Clearwater River drainage. The Tribal fisheries program operations, and the estimated angler spending (and related tourism) creates approximately \$45 million in regional spending and supports nearly 450 jobs annually (including the multiplier effects).”** stated Steven Peterson, Assistant Clinical Professor of Economics at the University of Idaho.

NPT Fisheries currently has Idaho offices in Lapwai, Sweetwater, Orofino, Kooskia, Powell, Grangeville, and McCall with one office in Joseph, Oregon. NPT Fisheries consists of seven different divisions: administration, watershed, production, resident fish, harvest, conservation enforcement, and research. The program has a diverse workforce, however, all individuals that enter the field share a love for the resource and the outdoors. Due to a low turnover rate, internal promotions, and training opportunities; many staff have made a career of working for NPT Fisheries.

The history of NPT Fisheries stems from a need to restore fish habitats and revitalize fish populations. There have been many adverse effects by the operation of hydropower systems in the Northwest, climate change, and people. The program began in 1981 as a very small entity initially focusing solely on protecting the Tribe’s interests and providing for the membership. Today, the program’s focus is on increasing fish runs and restoring their natural habitats in order to provide for all.

**“The Nez Perce Tribe Department of Fisheries Resources Management will protect and restore aquatic resources and habitats. Our mission will be accomplished consistent with the Nimiipuu way of life and beliefs, which have the utmost respect for the Creator, for all species, and for the past, present and future generations to come. for all species, and for the past, present and future generations to come. Our mission will be consistent with the reserved rights stated within the Nez Perce Tribe’s 1855 Treaty.”** - NPT Fisheries Mission Statement

These goals are accomplished through a variety of programs and efforts, and occur in a number of ways. For example: over the last 37 years, NPT Fisheries has placed a high priority on increasing fish runs. At the time NPT Fisheries was created, Fall Chinook (nacó’x) returns in the region were at record lows with under 300 fish returning to the area. These devastatingly low numbers resulted in Fall Chinook being listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Today, Fall Chinook returns have reached over 80,000. This dramatic increase is due, in part, to NPT Fisheries moving fish, allowing them to spawn naturally, as well as scientifically managing the harvest.

Another prime example of successful work by NPT Fisheries is its Clearwater River Basin Coho Restoration Project. It was initiated in 1994 with the goal to restore Coho Salmon (q’óyxc) runs to the area. For a time, Coho were considered to be extirpated, or no longer existent in the Clearwater River basin. In addition, attempts by state entities to bring these fish back were discontinued. However, understanding the importance and need to revitalize this fish population, NPT Fisheries took on the task and pressed forward. Today, Coho have returned to the Clearwater River basin and recent returns have been recorded at just over 18,000. The restoration project would not have been possible without the efforts of NPT Fisheries raising Coho and releasing them into the areas where they had been eliminated in the past.

**“We’re all connected. If the salmon became extinct, the connection would be broken. That’s why we’re working so hard to restore them.”** - Elmer Crow

Watershed restoration and improvement of the surrounding ecosystem of fish is another important facet of the work of NPT Fisheries. This type of restoration is essential to the survival of fish and their ability to spawn. NPT Fisheries implements more watershed restoration projects than any other single entity on the Snake River basin. The efforts work from ridgetop-to-ridgetop, as everything moves down into the water eventually.

The NPT Fisheries watershed division maintains a unique partnership with the U.S. Forest Service to manage the various projects. This partnership promotes mutually beneficial relationships surrounding shared objectives. Each party brings varying resources and expertise to the projects. Thanks to this collaboration, a number of watershed restoration projects have been completed. Some of those projects include opening up over 350 miles of habitat by removing a large number of barriers, decommissioning over 650 miles of old logging roads, and treating 1,500 acres of noxious weeds. In addition, there has also been drastic amounts of habitat protection and native plant reimplementation.

**“We’re happy to have had the long-standing partnership with the Nez Perce Tribal Fisheries to support steelhead and salmon recovery. Together we’ve improved fish habitats with aquatic restoration activities like road improvements, aquatic passage improvements, road decommissioning, mining reclamation, and controlling invasive weeds.”** stated Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests’ Forest Supervisor, Cheryl Probert.

This partnership’s economic impact occurs through the generation of income and creation of employment opportunities. With the many projects occurring each year comes the need for a large number of contractors and supplies. A concerted effort is made to buy and contract locally for these projects.

Since the beginning, fish have provided more than just food. Fish have served as the foundation of the economy by being used for trade of other goods. Fish also serve as a resource for tools and additional necessities. The commercial aspect of fish continues today.

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