



**Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian
Reservation**

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TREATY JUNE 9, 1855 • CAYUSE, UMATILLA AND WALLA WALLA
TRIBES

Testimony of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

**Public Hearing
Regarding SB 5521 – Department of Environmental Quality**

**Before the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Oregon State Legislature**

April 15, 2009

Co-Chairs Vicki Walker and Bob Jenson, and Members of the Committee:

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) understand the serious budget shortfall that Oregon is facing. As a tribal government, we understand budget limitations, cutbacks and the pressure of having to make hard decisions about how to spend scarce funds. With this understanding we respectfully ask that the Committee do what you can to maintain the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) toxics reduction programs in particular.

We ask this because we know that reducing the amount of toxic chemicals going into our water, air and people cannot wait. The longer we wait to make needed reductions to toxic discharges the greater the health and environmental damage and the greater the long term cost to restore what has been damaged. A recent study by the Oregon Environmental Council determined that environmentally attributable diseases, like cancer, birth defects, and neurobehavioral problems, cost Oregonians at least \$1.57 billion annually¹. We as a state cannot afford to continue on our current path of allowing these unnecessary risks to our health and costs to our communities. We cannot afford these preventable and excessive expenses in times of economic hardship but most importantly we cannot continue to tolerate the needless cost to the health of our people.

DEQ Director Pedersen has demonstrated strong leadership and vision in his recognition that we as Oregonians must do more to understand and reduce the toxic burden on our environment. He and his staff are implementing initiatives that are crucial to a sustainable and resilient Oregon.

Toxic Water Quality Standards Revisions

The first and greatest priority for the CTUIR with respect to the DEQ's 2009-11 biennium budget is implementation of revisions to Oregon's water quality standards for toxic chemicals.

¹ Oregon Environmental Council, *The Price of Pollution*, 2008. Pg. iii.

Oregon goals for water quality must protect all Oregonians who use, drink and eat fish from our waters. Right now Oregon's water quality standards for toxics do not². Both DEQ and the tribe have invested years of work to realize water quality standards that protect Oregonians. We must see this work through to completion in the summer of 2010. The CTUIR and all those who need the protection of these toxic standards appreciate DEQ's commitment to this work and ask for your commitment to support DEQ's work in water quality standards revision.

Senate Bill 737 Implementation

Also particularly important to more wise and responsible management of the persistent bioaccumulative toxins (PBTs) entering our waters is the development and implementation of the PBT Reduction Plans required in SB 737. The tribe is encouraged by the good work that DEQ and the Priority Persistent Pollutant Science Workgroup has done so far in identifying over 100 persistent toxic chemicals that we can better manage to protect our people and waters. We place high priority on the Senate Bill 737 work effort and hope the Committee values both the health and long term financial benefits of reducing these bioaccumulative toxins.

Reducing toxics in Oregon's water and fish will reduce the costs associated with the treatment and care of environmentally attributable diseases, and will result in a positive economic benefit to Oregonians. In addition a portion of the costs of salmon recovery efforts are related to toxic contamination in Oregon's waterways. A recent report released by the Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership found that by some estimates, exposure to toxic contaminants causes delayed, disease-induced mortality of up to almost ten percent of all the juvenile Chinook salmon that move through the estuary³. This figure does not include the mortality to other species and runs or other non-lethal damage resulting from toxic exposures.

The long term reduction of toxics in Oregon's waters will not only reduce the costs associated with salmon recovery, but it will increase the economic and dietary benefits derived from subsistence, recreational and commercial fishing. A report released in 2005 concluded that restored salmon and steelhead fisheries would result in \$544,000,000 of annual economic benefits to the state of Idaho alone⁴. Economic benefits to Oregon would likely be higher, based on a higher population of fish and people in the Oregon Columbia River Basin.

The CTUIR appreciates the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of DEQ toxics reduction programs that will improve Oregon environmental stewardship and the health of Oregonians. Under the direction of Dick Pedersen DEQ is focused on environmental results, partnerships and protecting our environment. We ask that they receive the funding needed to maintain the essential work they are doing on the front lines of ensuring our resources are safe for future generations. If Committee Members or staff require more information, please feel free to contact:

² Human Health Fish Consumption Focus Group Report Oregon Fish and Shellfish consumption Rate Project, DEQ Water Quality Division, June 2008. <http://www.deq.state.or.us/wq/standards/fishfocus.htm>

³ Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership, Lower Columbia River and Estuary Ecosystem Monitoring: Water Quality and Sampling Report. 2007.

⁴ Ben Johnson & Associates, The Potential Economic Impact of Restored Salmon and Steelhead Fishing in Idaho. 2005.

- Phil Donovan, Northwest Public Affairs (503-522-3023)
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Thank you.