



## **KLAMATH TRIBES OF OREGON PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE- May 24, 2018**

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### **KLAMATH TRIBES FILE LAWSUIT TO KEEP ENDANGERED FISH FROM EXTINCTION**

#### **Saving endangered C'waam and Koptu will also help salmon and bring back a healthy Upper Klamath Lake**

**Chiloquin, OR** – The Klamath Tribes today filed a lawsuit under the federal Endangered Species Act to protect endangered C'waam and Koptu (Lost River and Shortnose suckers, respectively) through better management of water levels, water quality and habitat protection in Upper Klamath Lake.

“Our creation story tells us that if the C'waam go away, the people go away. Both the C'waam and Koptu, which are vital to our culture and subsistence, are now at imminent risk of extinction. The science makes it clear that this was the only option left to us to address the water and fish emergency in the lake,” said Klamath Tribal Chairman Don Gentry.

Once the most important food-fish in the Upper Klamath Lake region, C'waam and Koptu were available by the thousands as a mainstay of the Klamath Tribes' diet, and were also an important non-tribal recreation fishery. Today the Tribes' have voluntarily suspended fishing, a treaty right, and harvest just two fish every year for ceremonial purposes.

“These fish are reaching a tipping point. Too many fish are dying before they're old enough to reproduce,” said Mark Buettner, a fisheries biologist for the Tribes, who also studied C'waam and Koptu when he worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “Most of the younger fish are offspring of older fish that are nearing the end of their lifespans. We're basically looking at a biological bottleneck.”

The collapse of C'waam and Koptu fisheries has marched virtually in lock-step with the declining health of Upper Klamath Lake, the largest body of freshwater west of the Rocky Mountains. Once a major destination for boating, birding, wildlife watching,

paddling, and fishing, people now avoid the lake from late Spring into Fall in most years due to chronically low lake levels. Low water levels are a key cause of severe algae blooms that not only kill fish, but prompt Oregon officials to regularly post [health advisories](#) warning against contact with toxins in lake water. Drought conditions in 2018 put additional stress on the ecosystem and the health and survival of C’waam and Koptu.

Upper Klamath Lake is one of North America’s biggest [stopovers](#) for migratory birds and home to the largest gathering of wintering Bald Eagles in America outside of Alaska.

“The lake is the crown jewel of the Klamath Basin in terms of its biodiversity. It’s a fascinating and beautiful place,” said Ron Larson, a retired U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist. “Managing water levels to benefit fish would improve water quality and the health of the lake so it can be more a part of the benefits and quality of life of living around here.”

Improving water quality in Upper Klamath Lake would also mean cleaner water for the public and all the species that live in the Basin – including threatened Coho salmon downstream. Well-timed water releases from the lake can help maintain healthier river flows and water quality for Coho and to dilute the concentration of deadly parasites that infected as many as 4 in 5 salmon in 2014 and 2015.

Today’s filing is one of many tools the Klamath Tribes are using to protect and restore C’waam.

“The Klamath Tribes look forward to continuing the valuable work we’re doing in partnership with federal and state officials, ranchers and others towards water quality improvements, water conservation and habitat restoration,” said Chairman Gentry.

The Tribes’ lawsuit to protect listed C’waam and Koptu requests that the Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Marine Fisheries Service take “immediate, emergency measures” to provide sufficient water for the tribal fisheries to address deficiencies in the 2013 Biological Opinion. The Tribes and their scientists see 2018 as a potential tipping point, believing that the Biological Opinion is inadequate to preclude the possibility of an extinction level event for the C’waam, the Koptu, or both this water year.

The C’waam and Koptu fisheries sustained the Tribes’ people for millennia. In addition to providing for the Tribes’ subsistence, treaty resources are central to the Tribes’ ability to maintain and exercise their cultural and spiritual practices, which in turn are critical to the physical and social health of tribal families and community. Without these treaty

resources, the Tribes do not have the ability to live as Klamath People in the way their Creator intended. The Klamath Tribes have a responsibility to restore and steward the C'waam and Koptu, and other tribal treaty resources, for their current members and future generations.

The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court, Northern District of California.

For more information on why the Tribes' filed the lawsuit please visit:

<http://klamathtribes.org/restoring-fish-and-a-dying-lake/>

and [www.klamathtribes.org](http://www.klamathtribes.org)

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