



## Sovereign Solidarity Speaks Volumes

It was unprecedented, historic, and an optimistic sign of how far the region has come in the “salmon wars” over the last decade.

On October 22, 2009, six Indian tribes, representing both upper and lower river interests, and three Northwest states filed a joint brief with Judge Redden. The brief was the first to bear signatures of all of these sovereign parties. It illustrates the breadth of agreement and the commitment to work together toward a common goal. As the brief put it so well,

“These sovereigns, who at times have opposed each other in this litigation, seek to end it as allies to implement the 2008 Biological Opinion, to collaboratively supply the necessary oversight and rigor to the AMIP (Adaptive Management Implementation Plan) that will be necessary to not only protect salmon and steelhead from jeopardy, but to take unprecedented steps toward habitat restoration throughout their range.”

The assertions and assurances in this eloquent brief are made with the endorsement of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the states of Washington, Montana, and Idaho. They are the fruit of the judge’s order for collaboration and the parties’ willingness to undertake it.



“We respectfully submit that NOAA and the Obama Administration have finally delivered on the actions this Court has been seeking for years,” the sovereigns state. They make clear their belief that success lies in a comprehensive, action-based habitat restoration effort and that the BiOp and Fish Accords “bring unprecedented financial resources forward” to accomplish this.

The sovereigns underscore that the plan uses the best available science; was developed and is overwhelmingly supported by federal, tribal, and state scientists; was critically reviewed by the region's independent science panels; and enjoys the support of NOAA Fisheries chief and top scientist, Dr. Jane Lubchenco.

But, alas, not everyone chose to come to the sovereigns' party. The Nez Perce tribe and the state of Oregon have continued to push for more. As the sovereigns' brief so rightly points out, at the same time these parties criticize the BiOp, they have "passionately pursued and spent millions of BPA and other state and federal dollars annually on the type of habitat projects required by this BiOp."

If Oregon and the Nez Perce don't believe in the value of these projects, why are they advocating for money from hardworking Northwest families and businesses to carry theirs out?

Unfortunately, the environmental and fishing litigants and their supporters in the dam-breaching community also press on, contending the exhaustively reviewed science in the BiOp is flawed and making the absurd claim there was not a regional collaboration to come up with these actions to protect and recover salmon. Even the governor of Oregon in an October op-ed said his state would rather "bring all parties – Oregon, the other plaintiffs and the federal government – to the table to create this solution." The president of American Rivers, Rebecca Wodder, also recently opined that "inclusive stakeholder negotiations have never been convened."

That's just what the sovereigns' process was all about! Statements like these are incomprehensible and exceedingly disrespectful to those who invested countless hours in the multiyear, multiparty collaboration.

It would be nice if this powerful sovereigns' brief had the ability to quiet those voices and stop the nonsense, and to convince outliers in the litigation to embrace the common ground and get to work to help the fish.

As for the fish, the coho, steelhead, and sockeye have come to the party. This year's record or near-record breaking runs bolster the science that says ocean conditions make a huge difference no matter what goes on in the fresh water, including the impacts of hydro operations. And the chinook RSVP'd for 2010, with an extraordinary number of immature males (jacks) that hopefully presages another banner year.

RiverPartners commends and congratulates the sovereigns on this brief and the effort that led to it. We are proud to have been part of it, and we hope the judge will give careful consideration to these fine words and this sincere commitment to bring the litigation to a close as allies in implementation.



*Northwest River Partners is an alliance of farmers, utilities, ports and businesses that promote the economic and environmental benefits of the Columbia and Snake Rivers and salmon recovery policies based on sound science. For more information, please visit [www.nwrivernpartners.org](http://www.nwrivernpartners.org).*