DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY　　Ayres -- 343-7445

For Release September 22, 1970

JUSTICE DEPARTMENT FILES INDIAN FISHING RIGHTS CASE

A suit in behalf of treaty fishing rights of Indian tribes in the State of Washington has been filed by the Department of Justice at the request of the Department of the Interior. The suit is similar to one filed two years ago in Oregon.

In announcing the filing, Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel said, "The decision in the Oregon case has done much to clarify Indian fishing rights on the Columbia River. We hope this suit will have the same effect on fishing rights in the Puget Sound and Olympic Peninsula areas of the State of Washington."

Representatives of the Interior Department and of Washington Indian tribes have been meeting with the Washington State Department of Fisheries and with Washington State Governor Dan Evans and his staff in an effort to work out terms for State recognition of Indian treaty rights. But it became evident that differences of opinion over the extent of the Indians' rights remained, Secretary Hickel said.

"We therefore asked the Department of Justice last spring to prepare a case to submit to the Federal Court," he added. "Our two Departments have worked closely in developing the case, which was filed September 18."

The action is brought on behalf of seven tribes that represent all treaty tribes in Western Washington that were parties to five treaties negotiated by Oregon Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens in 1854-56. Those tribes are: Puyallup, Nisqually, Skokomish, Makah, Quileute, Hoh and Muckleshoot. The court's ruling should affect the fishing rights of all tribes that are parties to those treaties.

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