Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Thomas W. Sweeney (202) 219-4152
For Immediate Release: June 23, 1995
Print PDF

Four Northwest Indian Tribes will receive in-lieu fishing sites on the Columbia River, which they are entitled to through treaty rights, thanks to a memorandum of understanding signed today by the Department of the Interior and the Department of the Army.

Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Ada E. Deer and Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works John Zirschky both signed the agreement at the Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C. The agreement compensates the Nez Perce Tribe (Lapwai, Idaho), the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (Pendleton, OR), the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon (Warm Springs, OR), and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Indian Nation (Toppenish, WA). Approximately 29 fishing sites along the Columbia River and the Bonneville Dam Pool will be acquired and constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the tribes from 1996 through 2000 at a total cost of $57 million.

"We have worked very hard to achieve this agreement for the tribes," says Ada E. Deer, the assistant secretary for Indian Affairs (head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs). "This agreement has been in the works for more than half a century and we are now gratified that we can begin to establish these fishing sites for the tribes. We especially appreciate the cooperation of the Army Corps of Engineers and want to thank Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works John Zirschky and his staff for their cooperation and effort in bringing these fishing sites closer to reality."

Construction of the Bonneville Dam in the mid-1930s inundated approximately 37 fishing sites that the tribes had traditionally used. The Rivers and Harbors Act of 1945 authorized five fishing sites for Northwest Tribes to partially compensate for their loss. These sites are now managed for the tribes by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. As a part of the agreement approved today, a $6.2-million operation, maintenance and repair fund is being established by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

In 1988 Congress approved Public Law 100-581, Title IV, to more equitably compensate tribes for all of their fishing site losses that occurred because of the dam's construction. Pacific Northwest Tribes established their rights for access and fishing to accustomed Columbia River fishing sites through treaties signed during the 1850s.