

Press Release

Karuk Tribe of California

NEWS RELEASE

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Salmon Declines Threaten Tribe's Health and Culture *Washington Post story links dams and decline of salmon to poor health*

Washington, D.C.- Today, the *Washington Post* reported on a study by University of California sociologist Dr. Kari Norgaard documenting how the denied access to traditional food sources has affected the physical health of members of the Karuk Tribe. The Karuk live along the Klamath River in Northern California. Tribes and conservationists point to this report as the first clear link between the decline of Klamath River salmon due to dams and water mismanagement, and human health.

“As salmon in the Klamath River have dwindled, the Karuks have been forced to adopt a Western-style high starch diet,” said Dr. Norgaard. “As the Tribe has been denied access to salmon, the incidence of diabetes and heart disease among tribal members has skyrocketed.” For the Karuk, salmon once represented a staple of their diet. Salmon is high in protein and Omega-3 fatty acids which have recently received much positive acclaim by the medical community. According to Dr. Norgaard’s study, as the fishery has declined, rates of heart disease and diabetes for Karuk tribal members have reached levels two to three times higher than the national average.

“The lack of good food is killing our people,” said Ron Reed, a Traditional Fisherman for the Tribe. “Not so long ago you could fill a freezer with salmon and have good food to eat for an entire year. But now the salmon have been decimated by the dams and the low river flows. Instead of having healthy food to eat – fish – we are relegated to eating commodity foods. That’s our subsidy, unhealthy high starch foods. Because of our poverty, we’re forced to eat what the government gives us.”

Anthropological reports estimate that before European contact at the time of the gold rush (1850’s), the average Karuk consumed 450 pounds of salmon per person per year, or about 1.2 pounds per person per day. Today, salmon consumption is less than five pounds per person per year, nearly a 99% decrease. This year the Tribe caught fewer than 100 fish in their traditional dip net fishery, a record low. Yet dietary changes for the Tribe are not a matter of long-ago history. Until the 1960's the Karuk were catching hundreds of fish per day during fishing season.

“When I was a child I ate salmon twice a day” says Bill Tripp, age 31. “Now we can hardly get any.”

According to Dr. Norgaard, “early anthropologists studying the Klamath Basin Tribes, identified the Karuk, Hupa and Yurok tribes as the wealthiest people in what is now known as California prior to contact with Europeans. Today they are amongst the poorest. This dramatic reversal is directly linked to the destruction of the fisheries resource base.”

The loss of the most abundant food source, Spring Chinook salmon, came after the construction of dams, the last of which was constructed in 1964. Spring run salmon historically spawned high in the upper basin, but since the construction of the dams their access to 350 miles of spawning habitat has been denied. Currently, Iron

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Gate and the four other dams on the Klamath owned by PacifiCorp are undergoing a relicensing process through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

“It is ironic that today doctors around the nation are urging their patients to eat more salmon and adopt the kind of diet that the Karuk enjoyed for thousands of years,” concluded Dr. Norgaard. “But because of their poverty and the decline of Klamath salmon, the Karuk themselves are being forced into the kind of unhealthy diet that people in other areas are trying to get away from.”

Tribal leaders such as Vice-chair Leaf Hillman see only one solution to this seemingly intractable problem. “We want to bring the salmon home to feed our people. To do that we must remove the Klamath River dams and restore our river.”

In the past PacifiCorp spokesmen have suggested that the dams should remain because they improve water quality. To Hillman this is a laughable assertion, “That’s like saying that coal-fired power plants are good for air quality, its simply not true.”

The fate of the dams, and the Karuk Tribe, may be decided as the Klamath dams are relicensed. The Dams are owned by PacifiCorp, a subsidiary of the multinational energy giant Scottish Power (NYSE- SPI), based in Edinburgh, Scotland. The relicensing deadline is March, 2006.

To view the Washington Post article see:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A47525-2005Jan29.html>

To download Dr. Norgaard’s complete study:

<http://www.friendsoftheriver.org/PressRoom.html>

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