



COEUR D'ALENE TRIBE
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Press Release: June 26, 2020: The Coeur d'Alene Tribe releases the first adult salmon into Hangman Creek since dam construction.

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Chinook salmon are swimming in Hangman Creek on the Coeur d'Alene Reservation for the first time in over a century



Community Salmon Celebration, Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation, Hangman Creek.

Whoops and cheers erupted from the crowd - the sound of singing and hand drums alive in the background - as community members of the Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation gathered at the edge of Hangman creek near Tensed, Idaho. All eyes were turned to the water and to the trucks full of Chinook salmon. The fish were netted out of holding tanks, and one at a time, gently released into the creek. Fish thrashed about and fought the current as they tried to slip between the hands of excited children. Moments earlier, the words of tribal leaders were received with anticipation, as they spoke about the significance that this day would hold for the Coeur d'Alene People. Their words reinforced the importance of building community awareness around the

positive events like this one that are happening throughout the Upper Columbia River Basin, where salmon have been blocked by dams constructed during the past century. For the first time in over a hundred years, the Coeur d'Alene People were once again fishing for salmon in Hangman Creek.

Several generations of Tribal members have been dreaming of such a day, and several years of painstaking planning had passed with little perceptible progress. Then, a cascade of action. In early June, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe received a call from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service saying that they would be able to secure 75 adult Chinook salmon from the Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery. Tribal fisheries staff scrambled to create a fleet of transport trucks, where none had existed days before. Calls were made to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to secure transport permits and arrange for pathogen testing at the State Fish Health Lab located in Olympia, Washington. Staff was then on site to sort fish in Leavenworth, WA and move them to temporary holding ponds at the Chief Joseph Hatchery operated by the Colville Tribes in Bridgeport, WA. Here they underwent pathogen testing and quarantine. Then, on June 26th, with a clean bill of health, the fish were transported to a stretch of Hangman Creek for the Tribe's first public ceremonial release of adult salmon. Tribal members were able to utilize traditional fishing tools such as gaff poles, dip nets and spears to catch the salmon. For many of the youngest kids, it was their first fishing experience. And what an awesome experience it was.

That afternoon, tribal speakers reflected on the magnitude of loss to their community and their way of life due to the construction of hydroelectric projects in their homeland. Just before the first salmon touched the water, tribal elder Francis White expressed that, "...after experiencing, in my life...days of our cultural darkness, now we are coming into our cultural light. Where our traditions, our ceremonies, are just shining down on everybody, and making everybody happy. And this is what we need. So let our light shine on, and let our children and our grandchildren feel that light." The significance of this moment could be keenly felt by everyone present.



Tribal Elder, Francis White, addresses the crowd.

As the speakers concluded, the Rose Creek Singers were asked to sing a song inviting the salmon back home to the creek. They sang to honor the fish, honor their ancestors, past leaders and current leaders and especially the Creator himself. “Our elders have always taught us that at times, words can only take us so far, and at those times our Creator has given us songs. Songs let our hearts connect directly with our Creator, directly with our ancestors”, said Caj Mathson, Natural Resources Director for the Tribe.



The Rose Creek Singers sing an honor song for the salmon

Tribal Council member Hemene James wrapped up the afternoon with these thoughts about the future for salmon on the Coeur d'Alene Reservation: “Let’s enjoy today for what it is, a return of something that was at the very center of our existence. A place where political deals were made, where marriages were made, where you got to see cousins and relatives that you only see certain times of the year when the fish were running. So let’s enjoy today as much as we can and keep the fight [to bring salmon back] going tomorrow, cause I promise you as long as I have breath going, the fight will continue”.

The day concluded with lots of smiles and a feeling of hope that this would be the first steps in many to come, that would make Hangman Creek a permanent home for salmon once again. The day was best summed up by words from the Tribe’s Natural Resources Director, Caj Matheson, “It’s a good day to be Coeur d’Alene and it’s a good day to be here on the Coeur d’Alene Reservation”.



Fisheries interns (pictured from left to right) Sergio Abuan, Emmitt White, and Talon Twoteeth use gaff poles to fish for salmon. Jeff Jordan is pictured in the background.