

• VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE •

# River of Renewal



*Fish-Weir Across Trinity River — Hupa, Edward S. Curtis, Prior to 1930*

*“I did not know that this project would lead me on a journey of self-discovery and that I would witness a crisis involving water, wildlife and energy throughout a ten-and-a-half-million-acre region; the kind of struggle over resources that increasingly is the cause of conflict around the world.”*

— Jack Kohler, Executive Producer



***River of Renewal*** tells the story of the crisis in the Klamath Basin where competing demands for water, food and energy have pitted farmers, American Indians and commercial fishermen against each other. Remarkably, this conflict over resources led to a consensus for conservation. The outcome may be the largest dam removal project in history and the restoration of a once vital river. The film uses interviews, archival sources and contemporary cinematography to document acts of protest and civil disobedience by Klamath Basin stakeholders whose ways of life are jeopardized by the decline of the region’s wild salmon.

This viewer discussion guide is designed to encourage deeper exploration and conversations about the film, the use and protection of natural resources, and how people of conflicting viewpoints come together to solve a problem.



*“The California department of Fish and Game already concluded that salmon died in the lower Klamath basin because of low flows and high water temperatures. Some people don’t understand the impact of that. I literally watched grown men cry—stand on the river bank and cry. Not over a dead salmon, but over such a catastrophic injury to our world.”*

— Lyle Marshall, Chair,  
Hoopa Valley Tribal Council



## PRODUCER’S NOTES

### Jack Kohler, Executive Producer

I was raised in San Francisco—a sidewalk Indian. My ancestors on my father’s side are from the Yurok and Karuk tribes of the Klamath River. My mother’s people are Welsh. The kids in school thought I was Mexican. One day I brought in a picture of my grandmother for show and tell. But I knew nothing of the history or traditions of my people.

I found my way in the urban world. In college I studied engineering. A few years before I went to Stanford, the school mascot had been the stereotypical Indian. Timm Williams, who played Prince Lightfoot, was Yurok like me, but he dressed up like a Plains Indian. In those years not many people knew that California Indians still existed. I became an actor, playing American Indian leaders on stage and screen. In my first professional role, I was a Yurok fisherman in a play about a fish war on the Klamath River. But I had no experience of his world and his way of life. Then came the opportunity to make a film about that struggle over salmon and sovereignty and to look for my roots.

As an urban Indian by the river of my ancestors, my legacy is pikiawish—responsibility for fixing the world. As a citizen and consumer, my use of water and electricity, my choices of who to vote for and what to invest in all impact natural places like the Klamath. Pursuing what we think is in our interest, we undermine the natural wealth we all depend on. Still, we can find our common roots, in spite of our differences, and do whatever we can to fix the world.

## BY THE NUMBERS

<b>10,000</b>	Estimated combined population of the Yurok, Karuk and Hupa tribes in 2009
<b>800,000</b>	Number of Chinook salmon at their peak, making their annual fall run up the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers
<b>66,286</b>	Number of spawning salmon returning in 2008
<b>2,200</b>	Number of fisherman and related industry workers who lost their jobs because of the commercial fishing ban on salmon in 2009

## DELVE DEEPER

- 1. People had lived in Hoopa Valley for thousands of years before the first American trappers and gold miners entered the area in the early 1800s. The traditional Hupa way of life was based on the semi-annual salmon run on the Trinity River which flows through the center of the modern day reservation boundaries. In 1933, California prohibited Indians from fishing on the Klamath River and its tributaries, including the Trinity. That ban lasted 40 years.**

How did the ban on fishing affect the Indian tribes and their traditional way of life? How did the salmon kill in 2002 affect them? How has the loss of salmon fishing impacted their cultural traditions from food to spiritual practices to their source of income?

- 2. For thousands of years, the Indians living along the Klamath and Trinity Rivers harvested salmon using traditional fish “weirs” (a wooden gated fish dam). This practice enabled locals to harvest enough fish to eat, while letting other salmon swim upstream so they could produce runs for future years.**

How have fishing practices changed over time? What impact does commercial fishing have on future generations of the species? What can we learn from the Indian traditions that will help us keep fish populations in balance?

- 3. The fish weirs constructed by the Indians on the Trinity and Klamath Rivers for centuries are considered to be the greatest technical achievement of the California Indians. The 20th Century Central Valley Project that dams and diverts water out of the Trinity starting at Lake Shasta and running all the way to Southern California, is considered a major engineering feat of non-Indian civilization.**

How do the two kinds of engineering compare? What are the benefits of each, their impacts on the environment, and the people whose lives depend on natural resources?

- 4. As a young engineering student at Stanford, film producer Jack Kohler says he dreamed of building dams. “At that time we didn’t consider the adverse environmental consequences a problem. Breeding salmon in hatcheries would make up for the loss of wildlife.”**

What have we learned in recent years about the practices of farming fish in controlled environments? How does artificial spawning change the evolution and genetics of hatchery-produced stock, and what are the impacts on the fish?

- 5. In the spring of 2002, the federal government released water from the dam to supply farmers with water for irrigation. That same year, the Klamath Basin suffered a serious drought with very high temperatures. In the fall, some 80,000 adult spawning salmon died in the Klamath estuary, piled three and four deep along the banks. Thousands of juvenile salmon also died in the river, fish that would normally live out their life in the Pacific Ocean before returning to the Klamath to spawn. Since 2005, fish counts have been so low in the Pacific that commercial salmon fishing has been banned along much of the California and Oregon coasts, impacting not only fishermen, but related businesses from restaurants to bait shops, from ice houses to packing houses.**

What if any, are the relationships between these events? Some of the factors were seasonal and due to climate changes and some were due to human factors. How might some of these catastrophes been prevented? What can we learn from looking back at these events?

- 6. Jack Kohler, executive producer of *River of Renewal* observes that “in times of stress, it’s easy for people to blame: those who fish blame a corporation that threatens their way of life; non-Indians demonize Indians; farmers see government as the enemy, and on it goes. Every group does what it thinks is right while failing to see what it has in common with the others.”**

Opposing interests are present in every community, presenting an opportunity for all of us to help bring people together around common interests. What is the common ground Kohler refers to that united people in the Klamath Basin? What situations in your community have parallels, and how could opposing groups find common ground to become allies, rather than enemies?

## IDEAS FOR ACTION

1. If you think about how your food purchases at the grocery store or in restaurants affect the natural environment and those who grow or harvest your food, what choices do you have that might lead to a balance of natural resources, rather than a depletion? How can you implement those choices individually and with your family to contribute to a sustainable environment for ourselves and the natural resources we depend on.
2. The high school students of Hoopa Valley organized a 214-mile relay to raise awareness about the plight of the salmon. The event attracted a wide range of people, including sports fisherman and environmentalists. Is there an issue in your community that could benefit from such a unifying event? What role can you play to spark interest in a community-wide event that would create the common ground Jack Kohler talks about?
3. Earlier in the guide, it was mentioned that 2,200 fisherman and related industry workers lost their jobs because of the commercial fishing ban on salmon in 2009. How would a job loss of this size for this industry or one similar affect your community? What could your community do to help alleviate the results of job loss on this scale.



**Commercial fisherman at a rally in San Francisco protesting the decline of Klamath River salmon.**  
*Photo courtesy of Pikiawish Partners 2009*

## RESOURCES

### BOOK

#### Stephen Most, **River of Renewal, Myth and History in the Klamath Basin.**

Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006.

Stephen Most describes what can happen when competing interests and values collide. His story takes place in the Klamath Basin, a region that is rich with water and fish. He chronicles an effort that aims to balance economic recovery with restoration of the environment.

### RADIO PROGRAM

#### **Dying for Water: Indians, Politics and Dead Fish in the Klamath Trinity Basin**

<http://www.flickerfeather.org/dyingforwater/>

In the Fall of 2002, disease raged through the warm and shallow water of the once-mighty Klamath River. Within days, 68,000 adult Chinook Salmon perished as they returned home to spawn. This radio story chronicles the 2002 salmon disaster, from past to present, through the hearts, the voices and the songs of tribal people who consider the fish their relatives, to the highest levels of government and corporate power. The program is a co-production of Northern California Cultural Communications and KIDE-FM, Hoopa, California [www.kidefm.org](http://www.kidefm.org).

### INDIAN TRIBES ALONG THE KLAMATH RIVER

#### **Yurok Tribe**

<http://www.yuroktribe.org/index.htm>

#### **Hoopa Valley Tribe**

<http://www.hoopa-nsn.gov/>

#### **Karuk Tribe**

<http://karuk.us/index.php>

### ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

#### **Friends of the River**

<http://www.friendsoftheriver.org/site/PageServer>

As California's statewide river conservation organization, Friends of the River protects and restores California rivers by influencing public policy and inspiring citizen action. Friends of the River is dedicated to preserving and restoring California's rivers, streams and their watersheds, as well as advocating for sustainable water management.

#### **Hydropower Reform Coalition**

<http://www.hydroreform.org/>

Hydropower Reform Coalition represents more than 140 national, state, and local conservation and recreation groups that care about rivers and work hard to protect them from harmful hydropower dams. The group's efforts have protected or restored thousands of river miles, thousands of acres of watershed land, and countless opportunities for boating, fishing and other forms of recreation.

#### **Klamath Riverkeeper**

<http://www.klamathriver.org/>

The Klamath Riverkeeper organization aims to restore water quality and fisheries throughout the Klamath watershed, bringing vitality and abundance back to the river and its people. The members work closely with the Klamath River tribes, fishermen and recreational groups.

#### **Slow Food USA**

<http://www.slowfoodusa.org/>

Slow Food USA seeks to reconnect Americans with the people, traditions, plants, animals, fertile soils and waters that produce our food in order to transform food policy, production practices and market forces so that they ensure equity and sustainability.

#### **Renewing America's Food Traditions (RAFT)**

<http://www.slowfoodusa.org/index.php/programs/details/raft/>

Managed by Slow Food USA, RAFT is an alliance of food, farming, environmental and culinary advocates who have joined together to identify, restore and celebrate America's biologically and culturally diverse food traditions through conservation, education, promotion and regional networking.

#### **Seafood Watch Program**

<http://www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/seafoodwatch.aspx>

This is a program of Monterey Bay Aquarium designed to raise consumer awareness about the importance of buying seafood from sustainable sources.

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