



# H.R. 5811, the Columbia River In-Lieu and Treaty Fishing Access Sites Improvement Act

Congressman Earl Blumenauer • Third District of Oregon • [www.blumenauer.house.gov](http://www.blumenauer.house.gov)

## **IMPROVING SANITATION AND SAFETY CONDITIONS AT COLUMBIA RIVER FISHING SITES**

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### **The Problem**

The Columbia River Power System, which includes the Bonneville, John Day and The Dalles dams, has been a source of electricity, created millions of jobs, and stimulated economic growth, throughout the region. Another result of the dams, however, was the destruction of native fishing sites and villages. For thousands of years, numerous tribes based their entire livelihood and culture around the Columbia River, living on its shores and eating and trading the salmon from its waters. The dams, constructed beginning in the 1930s, deeply and severely impacted this heritage, flooding tribal homes and traditional fishing sites, and inhibiting tribal members' ability to exercise treaty rights to fish in their usual and accustomed places. The tribes and their citizens have never been fully compensated for these losses.

### **Current Status**

In a series of agreements and laws starting in 1939, the federal government acquired and developed small parcels of land to serve as "in-lieu" and Treaty Fishing Access Sites, providing members of the four Columbia River Treaty tribes – the Nez Perce, Umatilla, Warm Springs, and the Yakama Nation – access to exercise their rights to fish in the Columbia and reside at their traditional fishing places and stations.

Finally completed in 2011, a total of 31 sites have been developed along the banks of the mighty river, designed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to be used primarily for in-season fishing and some temporary camping. However, out of both a need for housing and a desire to be closer to the Columbia River and traditional fishing areas, many tribal members now use these areas as permanent residences. These sites were not designed for and cannot sustainably accommodate this intense use. In fact, many people at these sites are living in extremely distressed, unsafe, and unsanitary conditions, and the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs has not committed the resources necessary to ensure the basic necessities of clean and safe living conditions there. Thus, there is an urgent need for improved conditions, as well as, over the longer-term, construction of adequate housing and infrastructure for tribal residents.

### **The Bill**

To help improve conditions at these sites in the short term, Congressman Blumenauer has introduced legislation to enable the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs to make key safety and sanitation improvements. The bill calls for the Bureau to conduct a much-needed assessment of current safety and sanitation conditions at the sites, identifying areas of high use and opportunities for improvement. Next, the bill directs the Bureau to work on improving sanitation and safety conditions in several key areas such as structural improvements (restrooms, washrooms, and other infrastructure), safety improvements (wells and pump tank hookups to address fire concerns, and more), electrical infrastructure to ensure safe electrical hookups, and basic sewer and septic infrastructure. To facilitate this work and ensure that the Tribes themselves get to decide what is best for their people, the agency can contract out this work to Tribes and Tribal Organizations.

In the longer term, the Congressman is also working with the Tribes, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and colleagues in the Senate and House on legislation and funding to build permanent housing to replace what was flooded by the construction of the dams, honoring the Tribes' treaty rights and providing compensation that has been too long denied.

*For more information on Congressman Blumenauer's tribal housing agenda, contact Liv Brumfield at 503-231-2300, or visit his website at <http://blumenauer.house.gov/>.*