

Statement of Beatrice Charles, Tribal Elder, Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe

Before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources June 4, 1992

I grew up on a farm alongside the riverbanks of the Elwha River. The farm that I grew up on, now the State fish hatchery and the diversion pipe for the ITT Rayonier water runs through.

When the dam was built some 20 years before, I was a young child then. My elder, Sam Almer, used to talk about the places that were the spiritual places for the Klallam people to go to. When the dam was built, the water went over this spiritual ground where my ancestors used to go for spiritual guidance and help.

I also heard about the dam when it broke in 1912, and the damage and devastation that it had done to my grandmother's farm. To top it off, the Indians weren't notified that there was danger. My late father was around about 18 years old, and he was out washing his face out on the porch where we used to have our water for washing our face and so forth and so on, and he heard the big roar. He knew right away what it was. So, he told his mother and the rest of the family to run for high grounds.

I was young at the time that we lived on the farm, but I remember how the fish runs were because our family used to gather on the bank in front of the house and we used to have probably a family conference there because I was a child. I used to run around, but I saw the fish runs. It was just ripples of salmon going up, and they were big salmon. I remember. I saw it, and I know that it was there. We all felt it was always going to be there, that it wasn't going to be depleted, but I was wrong.

The dam used to open up their gates, and a lot of water would come down. Then they would close it up. There were pools of water where the little fish were stranded, and when the pools went dry, the fish were dead. That's what happened to the fish.

I feel that we should remove the dam because I know the devastation that it had done to my people because I've seen it, and I know it.

As the years went by, the fish depleted and it's to the point where it's nothing. Our creator gave us this fish to live on, and it was rich and an abundance of fish. It was given to us, and we cherished it and we respected it. We never got more than what we could use. We used it and every bit of it. We didn't waste.

I feel again I would like to see the dam removed while I'm still alive. I may not see the abundance of fish come back in my lifetime, but I would like to see it come back for my grandchildren, my great grandchildren and for the rest of my people, the following generations to come. It was a gift from our creator. It was our culture and our heritage.