

July 24, 2022

Native Teens Preparing to Kayak an Undammed Klamath Set Off from Hoopa in Trinity River Community Float, Will Arrive in Klamath on Tuesday.

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Hoopa, California- On Saturday, July 23rd, 14 Klamath Basin Native teens from the Paddle Tribal Waters Program of Ríos to Rivers kayaked a historic Trinity River send off and were joined by the Hoopa Valley Tribe, Save California Salmon, the Warrior Institute, and local Hoopa, Karuk and Yurok families on rafts. The teens just completed a two week training to prepare to be the first group to kayak the Klamath River after the dams come down.

“It’s an honor for me to be a part of such great efforts,” said Hoopa Valley Tribal Chairman Joe Davis. “I am especially inspired by the leadership of our youth and the work they have been doing. The future looks bright.”

Over 35 local people joined the float on the Trinity River through the remarkable gorge area of the Hoopa Reservation to where the Klamath and Trinity Rivers meet on the Yurok Reservation. The trip celebrated the upcoming Klamath dam removal and the local organizing by Native families and Tribes that are making it happen.

Although 20 years have passed since the Klamath River Fish Kill, the struggle is not over. Trinity River reservoirs that feed massive agricultural operations in the Central Valley are currently the lowest in the state and may not have enough cold water stored to stop Klamath River fish kills during the end of this summer.

“The Trinity River is the Klamath’s largest tributary and, in the absence of adequate clean water releases on the Klamath River, we have fought successfully for releases from the Trinity to stop Klamath and Trinity River fish kills,” explained Regina Chichizola from Save California Salmon. “However, due to Trump-era water plans and the unwillingness of California to protect carry over storage and Tribal rights, the Trinity is as threatened as ever. We cannot release water for fish that has already been transferred to Central Valley water brokers, and those water releases, like dam removal, are critical to the salmon.”

The group will arrive at a celebration in Klamath after four days of kayaking the Klamath and Trinity Rivers. At 1 p.m. on Tuesday, July 26 at the Requa Boat Ramp, the Yurok Tribe will greet the 14 local Indigenous youth. Danielle Frank, a Hoopa Valley Tribal member and Save California Salmon Youth Organizer, is one of the teens.

“As a teen of the Klamath River Basin, I’ve been hearing about the removal of the dams almost my entire life. I went to my first protest about the dams more than 10 years ago and I’m starting to build a career around protecting my homelands because of this fight,” explained Frank. “Being a part of The Paddle Tribal Waters Program has been one of the most inspiring experiences of my life. Watching the youth of the Klamath basin enjoy their home rivers and learn how to

protect them has reminded me why we fight so hard for these things. We fight so that our future generations can have these opportunities to connect with their homes and people, including our past and future generations.”

“Tribal people from the Klamath’s headwaters to the coast have fought so hard for dam removal because it is the single biggest action we can take to restore the river for our youth and the generations to come,” said Joseph L. James, the Chairman of the Yurok Tribe. “I can’t wait to see these kids paddle down the free-flowing river.”

In previous years, Ríos to Rivers has organized river trips with Indigenous youth from North and South America, including teens from local Tribes. This year, in anticipation of dam removal, the river advocacy organization decided to invite Tribal youth from the Klamath Basin.

Filmmakers Paul Wilson and Rush Sturges are making a documentary film about the process of the Tribal youth learning to kayak and preparing to be the first people to navigate the river after dam removal.

The Federal Regulatory Commission along with PacifiCorp, the State of California, and the State of Oregon are expected to soon sign off on the removal of the lower four dams on the Klamath River, which include: J.C. Boyle Dam in Oregon, as well as Copco 1, Copco 2, and Iron Gate Dams in California. Representing the largest river restoration project in US history, the removal of the dams will open up more than 300 miles of historic salmon spawning habitat. It will establish a more natural flow regime and other important natural processes. The decommissioning of the antiquated structures will also greatly reduce concentrations of toxic blue-green algae, making the river safe for recreational activities, such as whitewater kayaking.

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