

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation

The Toll

Wendell George: As a tribe, we were never even asked whether we wanted the dam or not. So in the 30s when the dam was started, it was approved by the Bureau of Indian Affairs because they had the trust responsibility for the tribe. And they could actually do this without tribal approval.

Alice Irey: When the dam went in and river rose, and they had to move the town of Keller and all the people along the Sanpoil River had to relocate. And there was no more fish. I had a cousin and her husband; they moved away from Keller and came over here because their land flooded. And my uncle had to move from Lincoln (that's on the Columbia River) when it flooded over there. It disrupted a lot of people's lives.

Lester Herman: So the tribe moved west to get work in the mills, whatever, factories, orchards. There was very little job security here after the completion of Grand Coulee Dam.

Janette Timantwa: It destroyed a lot of people. Our chief died and a lot of people died mostly from heartbreak, I think, because they lost Kettle Falls. To me it destroyed a lot of things, destroyed a lot of families. A lot of families broke up from...moving away from their homeland.

Deb Louis: A lot of our people back in that time left from here and went on down to fish at Celilo, and we still fished in the Methow, Wenatchee and down at the mouth of the Okanogan River. And then they built Wells Dam and that took away that fishery, down at the mouth of the Okanogan. So it's been a struggle for our people...all through these years, since they built this dam, to get salmon up here. Right now our fishermen travel clear down to Chief Joseph Dam to fish. So, we still have fish coming up the Okanogan River and we've done a lot of habitat work to assure that salmon can make it up the Okanogan, and up to the base of Chief Joe. We have fish hatcheries down at Chief Joe.

Janette Timantwa: I try to teach my kids here how to prepare salmon, but I'm the only one.

Lester Herman: Well, they had a celebration, it used to be called Salmon Day. And that was a celebration of the salmon return. And that was before the Grand Coulee Dam was originated. Well, the salmon is gone...and so, so is the Salmon Day.