

Part 1: The Boldt Decision

Adapted for Elementary Grades from –The State We’re In|| (League of Women Voters 2008)

Vocabulary:

accustomed
reservations
treaties
settlers

industry
protest
violation
treaty rights

suing
federal
phrase
concluded
ruled

When Washington Indian nations signed treaties with the federal government, they gave up a lot of land, but they kept the right to hunt, fish, and gather in all their “**usual and accustomed places**” –many of which were not on the **reservations**. At the time the **treaties** were signed, no one thought this would be a problem. But the population of **settlers** grew larger than anyone dreamed, and so did the number of white people who fished for a living. In fact, fishing became a major **industry**. Soon Indians were prevented from fishing in the places where they had fished for thousands of years. State agents arrested Indians caught fishing off their **reservations**, and took away their boats and fishing nets. In the 1960’s Indian fishers began to **protest** this **violation** of their **treaty rights**. Many people (including some famous movie stars) came to support them, and news of these **protests** brought the issues to the attention of the public. Finally, the US government acted to

protect Indian rights by **suing** the state of Washington to allow Indians to fish.

In 1974, George Boldt, a **federal** judge, **ruled** that the Indians were right: the treaties said they had the right to fish “in common with” everyone else. Judge Boldt looked at an 1828 dictionary to see what the **phrase** “in common with” meant to the people who signed the **treaties**, and **concluded** that it meant Indians should have half of the salmon. He also ruled that Indian tribes should be partners with the state in managing and protecting salmon.

The Boldt Decision was a big victory for Indians—and in the long run, a big victory for salmon, too.