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## **NEWS RELEASE**

from the

### **Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations**

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#### **IN MIDST OF SALMON KILL, FISHERMEN DEMAND A FAIR SHARE OF THE WATER AND CHALLENGE LONG-TERM PLAN FOR THE KLAMATH BASIN: Congressman Mike Thompson Joins Suit To Save Salmon**

As adult Klamath River salmon die by the thousands from low river flows and a river system too hot and too polluted to support them, coastal commercial salmon fishermen, joined by Congressman Mike Thompson, filed legal papers today in U.S. Federal District Court challenging the federal government's ten-year plan for managing irrigation in the Klamath Basin. The plan fails to assure that enough water will be released to the Lower Klamath River to keep from devastating its commercially valuable Klamath River salmon runs.

This weekend, adult chinook and coho salmon began dying by the thousands as they returned to the Klamath River and encountered dramatically low river flows and poor water quality, including high water temperatures well above the tolerance levels of these cold-water fish. Threatened adult coho salmon migrate up the Klamath River from mid-September through early November to spawn, with peak migration coming within the next two or three weeks. Meanwhile, observers describe the backwaters and eddies of the lower Klamath River as "littered" with the carcasses of chinook and coho salmon that could not make it to their spawning grounds because they died of diseases and stress triggered by a hot river.

"We are in the first year of the federal government's ten-year plan for the Klamath, a plan that killed thousands of juvenile fish this spring, and now thousands of adult fish as they return to spawn," said Zeke Grader, Executive Director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations (PCFFA), the west coast's largest organization of commercial fishing families.

“We will not just stand by and let the Bureau of Reclamation kill these fish and our way of life. If we need a regime change anywhere, its at the Bureau of Reclamation.”

Salmon provide an economic boost not only to commercial fishermen but also to outfitters, resorts, hotels, sport shops, fishing charter operations, and other businesses along the coast. Northern California and southern Oregon fishing ports were once the most productive salmon ports in the Lower 48. Klamath water-related fisheries loses to these ports already have been estimated at 4,000 family wage jobs and \$80 million each year since 1992.

“These dead fish represent thousands of jobs, millions of dollars, and priceless resources that are being destroyed due to the Bush Administration’s failures in the Klamath Basin. We are only four months into their 10-year water plan, and thousands of fish are already floating to the top of the Klamath River,” said Congressman Mike Thompson, United States Representative for California’s First Congressional District. “This massive fish kill will only get worse if the Department of Interior continues to ignore the downstream fishing, tribal, and working communities of the lower Klamath Basin.”

Because Klamath River coho are protected as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, the National Marine Fisheries Service must approve any long-term irrigation plan devised by the Bureau of Reclamation. This summer, the Fisheries Service held that the Bureau’s plan would jeopardize the continued survival of the Klamath River coho. However, when the Fisheries Service issued its modifications to the Bureau’s plan, it failed to require adequate measures to protect the salmon.

“The current plan relies on guess-work and voluntary measures,” said Glen Spain of Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations Northwest Office in Oregon. “In spite of more rainfall, salmon actually have less water in the river this year than during last year’s record drought. Why should farmers have all the water they need while coastal fishing-dependent communities and fishing families wind up with dead fish and dry rivers?”

Coho need adequate river flows during the spring, summer, and fall. Newly hatched salmon, called fry, need safe habitat in and around bank vegetation to hide and feed. Lower river flows force these young fish into the mainstream of the river where they are easy prey. Year-old salmon, called smolts, need adequate river flows to safely make the journey to the Pacific Ocean. Adult salmon, returning upriver to spawn, are hurt or killed by high water temperatures and poor water quality due to low river flows. Sustained river temperatures above about 60 degrees F. can be fatal to salmon, but temperatures in the river in the past few weeks have routinely been well up into the high 70’s and even the low 80’s F.

The Klamath was once the third mightiest salmon-producing river in the continental US, behind only the Columbia and Sacramento in productivity. The River has been reduced to a shadow of its former self largely as a result of the Bureau of Reclamations’ re-plumbing of its headwaters to maximize irrigation in the arid upper basin desert. The long-term answer will likely include buying back some of the agriculture land in the Klamath Basin to reduce water demand.

The fishermen’s lawsuit was filed by Earthjustice on behalf of PCFFA and Institute for Fisheries Resources, joined by The Wilderness Society, WaterWatch of Oregon, Northcoast Environmental Center, Oregon Natural Resources Council, Defenders of Wildlife, Klamath Forest Alliance, Headwaters, and Congressman Mike Thompson.

## KLAMATH RIVER FLOWS AT IRON GATE DAM

2002 Average Water Flows	Mean streamflows (in cubic feet per second)		2001 Average Water Flows	Mean streamflows (in cubic feet per second)
Date			Date	
09/01/2002	731		09/01/2001	1,019
09/02/2002	762		09/02/2001	1,030
09/03/2002	760		09/03/2001	1,030
09/04/2002	757		09/04/2001	1,030
09/05/2002	762		09/05/2001	1,030
09/06/2002	762		09/06/2001	1,019
09/07/2002	No data		09/07/2001	1,030
09/08/2002	762		09/08/2001	1,019
09/09/2002	762		09/09/2001	1,019
09/10/2002	762		09/10/2001	1,030
09/11/2002	762		09/11/2001	1,030
09/12/2002	762		09/12/2001	1,019
09/13/2002	761		09/13/2001	1,019
09/14/2002	762		09/14/2001	1,019
09/15/2002	760		09/15/2001	1,019

09/16/2002	757		09/16/2001	1,019
09/17/2002	758		09/17/2001	1,030
09/18/2002	761		09/18/2001	1,030
09/19/2002	758		09/19/2001	1,019
09/20/2002	761		09/20/2001	1,019
09/21/2002	758		09/21/2001	1,019
09/22/2002	762		09/22/2001	1,019
09/23/2002	No data		09/23/2001	1,019
09/24/2002	762		09/24/2001	1,019

*Source: US Geographic Survey streamflow data at Iron Gate Dam on the Klamath River*