

9 April 2005

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor of California
Governor's Office
State Capitol – First Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Disaster Declaration for 2005 California Salmon Fisheries

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger:

The Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations (PCFFA), representing working men and women in the west coast commercial fishing fleet, respectfully request your declaration of a disaster for the 2005 California salmon fishery. Yesterday, 8 April, the Pacific Fishery Management Council recommended the most severe restrictions in recent history, if ever, on the ocean salmon fisheries offshore California and Oregon. This recommendation to the Department of Commerce was in response to depleted runs of Klamath salmon stocks culminating from the major fish kills that occurred in that river system in 2002. The California Fish & Game Commission has been forced to impose a drastically reduced in-river recreational fishing season on the Klamath and the three tribes that depend on salmon in that river system – the Yurok, Hupa and Karuk – are not even expected to meet their subsistence needs for this year.

Your declaration of a disaster is the first step needed in pursuing a federal disaster declaration that will allow the affected individuals and businesses to access federal disaster relief programs. We are making the same request to Governor Kulongoski of Oregon. We urge the States of California and Oregon to work together for this disaster relief and the development of short and long-term solutions for the Klamath outlined below.

The irony in requesting this disaster declaration is that most other salmon populations along the west coast have increased in recent years due to some improvements in in-river habitat and flow conditions and good oceanic conditions. For example, the Sacramento, part of the Central Valley river system, which accounts for over 90 percent of the salmon harvested offshore California and an estimated 70 percent or more of Oregon's ocean salmon catch, is predicted this year to have the best run since the federal dams were constructed in the Central Valley in the 1940's.

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Because ocean fishermen will be greatly restricted this year the potential loss to the State just from the commercial fishing fleet, given the expected magnitude of the Sacramento River production, could well exceed \$100 million. That, of course, will depend on where the fish are during the season and their availability. Given their historic migration patterns and expected warm water conditions, the situation does not look good. The situation for the salmon fishery, including processors and the supporting businesses, in ports such as Fort Bragg and north is a disaster, as it will be for businesses, fishing guides and others on the Klamath River and for the tribes.

At least twice before the salmon fisheries of the west coast have been declared a disaster, once following the seven year drought of the late 1980's and early 1990's and an earlier one following the severe El Niño of 1982-83.

In addition to a disaster declaration we ask that you order the appropriate state agencies to assist us by adopting a nine-point action plan to:

1. Take appropriate steps to ensure the survival of downstream migrating juvenile salmon this spring and, if necessary, next spring, including trapping and trucking the fish, if flows are insufficient on a one-time emergency basis to minimize mortality in the river due to disease brought on by low flow and high water temperature conditions.
2. Radio tag downstream migrating stocks for the purpose of monitoring the fish in-river and while at sea to track their migration to allow, among other things, for fishery management to better direct the fleet in order to avoid the take of Klamath-origin stocks, while still allowing to the maximum extent possible the catch of abundant salmon runs.
3. Develop test fisheries in the area from Point Reyes north (e.g., Fort Bragg) that will allow managers to better determine when Klamath stocks are present and under what types of fishing conditions those fish may be avoided.
4. Protect returning adult spawners to the Klamath River by assuring there will be adequate flows for the survival and spawning of these fish or, if insufficient flows are not available because of drought conditions, other extra ordinary steps be taken to assure the successful spawning of these fish. It should be noted the Pacific Fishery Management Council voted to not reduce the minimum number of adult natural spawners (the "floor") for this year even though it meant even greater restrictions on fishing than otherwise would have had to be imposed. We do not disagree with this decision so long as all efforts are made to protect those natural spawners when they return. The tragedy would be if the fisheries made this sacrifice only to have the fish die when they entered the river because flow conditions were insufficient or other actions were not taken to assure the survival of these fish, which had escaped the fishery, and their progeny.
5. Explore the feasibility of providing access to the fishing fleet of the record number of Sacramento chinook salmon expected to return to the river this fall. We believe some form of "terminal" fishery should be explored that would help prevent a massive over-escapement to the river and could help to provide some financial relief to the commercial fishing fleet, as well perhaps, for some of the affected recreational fisheries and tribal subsistence needs.

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6. Work with the Governor of Oregon and members of the two state's congressional delegations in the development of programs to reduce existing out-of-stream water demands in the Klamath Basin, including purchase of water rights from willing sellers, and increasing water efficiency in the basin, including assistance to farmers and ranchers as may be needed.
7. Request the State of Oregon place an immediate moratorium on any new water appropriations from the basin until the flow needs for fish are established.
8. Pursue efforts to change the operations of the old PacificCorps hydropower dams, that have exacerbated the poor water quality conditions in the Klamath River, including the examination of dam decommissioning, in order to improve fish flow and passage conditions on the mainstem Klamath River.
9. Begin implementing as soon as possible the recommendations made in the state's coho salmon recovery program. Many of the steps recommended for the state and federally Endangered Species Act-listed coho salmon will also benefit spring and fall run chinook salmon populations that the tribes, commercial and recreational fisheries depend on.

We appreciate the leadership you have demonstrated in the development of a state ocean action plan and ask now for your leadership in helping our state's beleaguered salmon fisheries and the decimated salmon stocks of the Klamath Basin. If you or your staff have any questions regarding this request for a disaster declaration or any further detail on the proposed nine-point action plan outlined above, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you.

Sincerely,

W.F. "Zeke" Grader, Jr.
Executive Director

Attachments: 14 July 2004 Letter to the President
9 September 2004 Letter to the Pacific Fishery Management Council
10 March 2005 Letter to the Pacific Fishery Management Council

cc: The Honorable Ted Kulongoski, Governor of Oregon
The Honorable Barbara Boxer
The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
The Honorable Gordon Smith
The Honorable Ron Wyden
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
The Honorable Mike Thompson
The Honorable Peter DeFazio
The Honorable Earl Blumenauer
The Honorable Lynn Woolsey
The Honorable George Miller

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The Honorable Anna Eshoo
The Honorable Sam Farr
The Honorable Lois Capps
Dr. William Hogarth, NOAA Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
Pacific Fishery Management Council
California Fish & Game Commission

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