

YUROK TRIBE COMMENT ON REVIEW OF 2005 FISHERIES AND SUMMARY OF 2006 STOCK ABUNDANCE ESTIMATES

Once again Yurok People are facing a fishery in the coming year that will be far below what is necessary to meet our minimum subsistence need and we will have no economic opportunity. These restrictive fisheries not only have a dramatic effect upon our diet and commerce, but directly affect the Yurok way of life. The status of the fishery and its effect upon many of the people in this room highlights the urgency associated with fixing the habitat problems facing Klamath Basin fish populations.

The Yurok Tribe has implemented protections for Coho, Spring Chinook and Sturgeon. Responsible managers take responsible actions reflecting the need of the resource first and foremost. The Yurok Tribe believes that having a fishery for our future generations depends upon responsible management. Given that the abundance of fall Chinook is projected to be well below the minimum spawning escapement goal of 35,000 natural spawners, the Yurok Tribe cannot support further fisheries during the coming year, except for the Tribal fishery that will occur pursuant to 50/50 Tribal/non-tribal sharing mandates. To fish the stock further below the minimum conservation objective would jeopardize the health of the fishery resource, a risk that we cannot accept. This concern is amplified by the fact that returns to the Klamath have been substantially below the spawning escapement floor for the past two years; another year of this will trigger an “over-fishing review” in addition to the risk to the resource.

We have two technical concerns regarding the methods being used to manage ocean fisheries; one involves the underestimation of ocean harvest impacts and the other involves the impacts of fall fisheries, known as the “credit card” fisheries.

During each of the past three years the Klamath Ocean Harvest Model has substantially underestimated harvest impacts from ocean fisheries. While we were a strong advocate for revising the old KOHM, and believe that the new model is technically superior to the older version, there seems to be a bias with the current implementation of the model. Some have speculated that this may be contributable to a change in the profile of the salmon fleet, with a shift toward larger, more efficient boats. Whatever the reason for the under-projection of the impacts, we believe that this bias must be addressed. Therefore, we request that if any ocean fisheries are to be modeled for the coming year that a technical adjustment is made to the model so that the more recent years of data are weighted more heavily.

Our second technical concern regarding the modeling of ocean fisheries is that there is no preseason modeling for the post-September 1 impacts. These fisheries are executed without technical consideration of their ultimate impact to the escapement to Klamath fall Chinook. In years with more robust populations, these fall impacts may be of minimal significance, as they are simply deducted from the non-tribal allocation during the following year. However, in years of low abundance, such as what we are facing this year, these fisheries can have a substantial impact on our ability to meet the objectives of the FMP and subsequently protect our fishery resource. For example, during the current year we have been placed in a de-facto de minimus fishery, without having had the opportunity to assess the effects or the appropriate magnitude of

such a fishery. Therefore, we request that if fall fisheries are contemplated for the coming year, that the impact of these fisheries upon the 2007 spawning escapement be modeled.

It is worth noting in these dire times that there is a glimmer of hope for the future for those of us who depend upon Klamath Basin fisheries. People from throughout the Basin have begun to talk to each other about long-term solutions to the problems facing the fisheries resource; Tribes, farmers, fishermen, environmentalists, and communities from throughout the basin are discussing potential solutions to the problems facing the Klamath Basin ecosystem. It is also the Yurok Tribe's hope, as we enter into a critical juncture regarding the relicensing of the Klamath Hydro-electric Project, that we will be successful in getting four dams removed from the Klamath River as well as address other habitat issues affecting our fishery resource.

PFMC
03/07/06