

SALMON ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON CURRENT HABITAT ISSUES

California's drought has impacted all Californians, including our state's fish and wildlife. Endangered Sacramento River winter-run Chinook salmon were particularly hard hit. The 2014 brood year saw greater than 95 percent mortality of the natural spawned juvenile winter-run. The near-total mortality was caused by the water project's operators failure to meet their commitment to maintain temperature control. Reservoir discharges should have been limited to ensure the retention of an adequate cold water pool for the natural spawn.

Unfortunately, 2015 may see a repeat of the loss of temperature control – and extreme mortality of winter run – seen in 2014. California's State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) possesses the power to impose conditions on the operations of the Federal Central Valley Project and the State Water Project. This includes the power to require changes to operations at Shasta dam to protect endangered winter run, which will incidentally benefit the fall run.

The Salmon Advisory Subpanel (SAS) urges the Council to communicate its winter-run survival concerns to the SWRCB. In particular, we ask that the Council urge the SWRCB to limit discharges from Shasta Dam in order to maintain the retention of an adequate cold water pool for the 2015 winter-run brood. As shown by the 2014 loss of temperature control, the SWRCB cannot rely on the Bureau of Reclamation's (Bureau's) modeling and assurances to protect the winter-run. Instead, the SWRCB must evaluate the Bureau's operations - including a recent Petition seeking to imprudently increase discharges - in a precautionary manner, mindful of the grave risks to the winter-run and the Bureau's poor track record.

Unreasonable operations of the Central Valley Project have nearly led to the extinction of the winter-run Chinook. While senior water rights holders may suffer during this drought, none will suffer anything like a 95 percent loss. Sacramento River winter-run Chinook have been in California since long before these so-called "senior rights" holders. These Chinook have had their historic habitat blocked by Shasta Dam. They have precious little spawning habitat remaining and need the cold water that the dam can provide.

Fishermen are not the least bit responsible for the collapse of the winter-run, but we are paying the costs incurred for the benefit of inland water users. It is time for the water users to restrain their thirsts to minimize further harm to the winter-run. To this end, the Council should contact the SWRCB and insist that the Bureau be blocked from making excessive and imprudent discharges from Shasta Dam that may increase mortality risks to the 2015 brood of juvenile winter-run Chinook.

At the same time, the SAS recommends that the SWRCB regulate Trinity Reservoir to meet the needs of Trinity River fish populations, including the potential to provide additional fall flows to minimize the risk of a fish kill in the Lower Klamath River.

Finally, the SAS supports the Habitat Committee recommendations regarding Humboldt Bay aquaculture proposals.