

DRAFT

March XX, 2010

The Honorable Gary Locke
Secretary, U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Locke:

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Pacific Council) is writing to emphasize the importance of being successful in meeting one of the greatest challenges that face the Department of Commerce and this Council: the protection and restoration of Pacific salmon in the Columbia River Basin. As you know from your tenure as Washington's Governor, salmon play a crucial role in the health of our ecosystems and economies of our rural communities along the Pacific Coast and within the Columbia River Basin. The recovery of wild fish and the continuation of the Mitchell Act hatchery production that contributes over 50 percent of the hatchery releases in the Columbia Basin are of enormous importance to the coastal states, the inland empire of Idaho, and the fishing communities that depend on recreational, commercial, and tribal fisheries served by the Council.

We know that the decline in salmon abundance and the static funding level of Mitchell Act hatcheries for well over a decade has had severe impacts on coastal and rural economies throughout the Pacific states. With thousands of jobs and billions of dollars already lost and more at stake, reversing these declines and returning salmon to abundance must be a shared goal for Federal, state, and tribal entities. With the science-based management of our fisheries and hatcheries, coupled with improvements in habitat conditions, the Columbia-Snake River Basin continues to offer a unique opportunity to have healthy fisheries, strong local economies, and healthy wild populations of salmon.

As NOAA Fisheries engages in the latest, and potentially final, remand of the 2008 Biological Opinion for the Federal Columbia River Power System (Bi-Op), the Pacific Council urges the Department of Commerce to ensure that the parameters of the revised Bi-Op contain an aggressive approach to rebuild salmon stocks utilizing the best available science and incorporating the most recent information on climate change, consistent with District Court advice.

A strong, Court-approved Bi-OP will be one of the cornerstones for [recovery planning and implementation](#) in the Columbia River Basin. However, there must be a long-term commitment to restore the Columbia Basin's wild salmonid populations and that commitment can only be successful with a broad based regional approach. To that end, we ask that the Department of Commerce [consider the benefits of a collaborative effort, convene a "solutions table" similar to that used in the Klamath River Basin Settlement Process](#), where stakeholders from throughout

the Basin can work with state and Federal agencies and Northwest Tribes to [continue to](#) craft a long-term blueprint for [the implementation of](#) meaningful salmon recovery. Recreational, commercial, and tribal fishing communities [and their interests](#) must be an integral part of [the process for further development and implementation of a comprehensive recovery plan for the Columbia River Basin](#).

Finally, we urge the Department of Commerce to commit to the goal of salmon abundance, and to the return of harvestable, self-sustaining runs of wild salmon and steelhead - to rebuild struggling fishing communities, keep fishermen on the water, end the ~~recent now annual~~ cycle of salmon collapses and subsequent disaster relief, and ensure that wild salmon remain an integral part of the west coast's ecosystem and culture. This larger objective should guide our collective efforts to protect, restore, and manage our salmon resources.

Sincerely,

Pacific Council Chair