

Klamath Fishery Management Council

Working to Restore Anadromous Fish in the Klamath River Basin

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March 12, 2003

California Commercial
Salmon Fishing Industry

California Department
of Fish and Game

California Offshore Sport Fishery

Hoopa Valley Indian Tribe

Klamath In-River Sport Fishery

National Marine Fisheries Service

Non-Hoopa Indian Representative

Oregon Commercial
Salmon Fishing Industry

Oregon Department
of Fish and Wildlife

Pacific Fishery Management
Council

U.S. Department of the Interior

Secretary Gale Norton
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20240

Subject: Klamath River flows

Dear Secretary Norton:

The Klamath Fishery Management Council wishes to express our concern regarding the flows that will be released this year from the Bureau of Reclamation's Klamath Irrigation Project. We view it as imperative that the Project be operated during the 2003 water year to provide adequate flows to sustain healthy populations of all anadromous salmonids.

The Klamath Fishery Management Council (KFMC) is an advisory committee created by the Klamath River Basin Fishery Resources Restoration Act (PL-99-552) to provide recommendations to state, federal, and tribal agencies regarding the management of Klamath River fisheries resources. The KFMC is composed of representatives of federal, state, and tribal resource agencies, as well as representatives of freshwater and ocean fishing groups. The decline of Klamath River Basin Fisheries resources is of great concern to the KFMC. At the recent symposium of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Klamath Basin was identified as one of three regions in North America where the exceptional diversity of fish species is threatened by habitat destruction. The operation of the Project is a key component in maintaining the spawning and migration habitats in the mainstem Klamath River necessary to support populations of salmon and other anadromous species. Ocean fisheries along the Pacific Coast from Cape Falcon to south of San Francisco are managed to control the harvest of Klamath River fall chinook. Therefore, the Project directly affects Tribal and non-Tribal fishing communities along several hundred miles of coast along the Pacific Ocean.

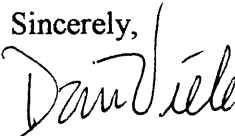
Several times during the past year, Bureau of Reclamation staff have noted that during 2002 the Project was operated consistent with the National Marine Fisheries Service's Biological Opinion on the effects of the ten year operations plan on listed species. At the February 19, 2003, meeting of the Klamath Basin

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Fisheries Task Force, Sue Ellen Wooldridge indicated that the Project would continue in 2003 to be operated in accordance with the Biological Opinion. As you know, the Opinion pertains only to coho salmon; other species, such as chinook salmon, which suffered the heaviest mortality in the fish die-off this past September, have habitat needs that differ from coho salmon.

Flows over Iron Gate Dam are currently about one third of levels identified in the draft Hardy Phase II Report for a dry year. We make the comparison not to insist on the Hardy flow levels, but to illustrate the inadequacy of current flows. We understand that the Bureau of Reclamation will purchase 50,000 acre feet of water from farmers willing to forego irrigation in 2003, at a cost \$4 million. We urge you to take all necessary steps to ensure that this additional water is allowed to flow past Iron Gate Dam for its intended purpose.

We appreciate that the decisions you face in allocating water in a basin such as the Klamath, where competing demands far exceed the supply, are difficult and controversial. However, we believe that the agricultural economies of the Upper Klamath Basin have been developed by the Klamath Project at the expense of the Klamath Basin fish resources, as well as the river and coastal economies which depend upon them. We urge you during your tenure as chair of the Klamath Basin Federal Working Group, to lead the development of long-term solutions that will ensure a balanced policy for utilizing the resources of Klamath Basin water; one that considers the ecological, economic, and cultural effects of Project operations beyond the local interests for which the Project was originally designed. We request that the Project be operated during 2003 to provide adequate flows for all life stages of anadromous fish that inhabit the Klamath River.

Sincerely,


Daniel Viele
Chairman

cc: Secretary of Commerce
Senator Feinstein
Senator Wyden
Senator Smith
Senator Boxer
Congressman Walden
Congressman Thompson
Congressman Herger
Congressman DeFazio
Pacific Fishery Management Council