

COMMERCE NEWS

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Commerce Department Declares Commercial Fishery Failure for Coastal Oregon and California

WASHINGTON, DC –Secretary of Commerce Carlos M. Gutierrez today declared a commercial fishery failure has occurred for West Coast salmon fishermen this season from Cape Falcon, Oregon, to Point Sur, California, due to low numbers of fish caused primarily by the drought. The Commerce Department’s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) oversees the nation’s oceans based fishing industry and fisheries resources.

The commercial fishery failure is being declared as a result of the information gathered by Commerce officials this season. The findings showed a significant economic impact resulting from limited opportunity to catch salmon due to the low number of fall Chinook salmon projected to return to the Klamath River in northern California to spawn.

“The evidence is clear -- our fishing communities have been significantly impacted,” said Gutierrez. “We have moved quickly to gather the necessary facts in order to make this declaration and we will continue to work closely with the communities and their elected leaders.”

Today’s decision answers requests from Oregon and California Governors, Members of Congress and affected communities. Secretary Gutierrez led the Department’s efforts in expediting the declaration process which was originally expected to take until February 2007. Gutierrez dispatched Commerce officials to the region who consulted closely with state and local officials to collect the data necessary for determining a fishery failure declaration.

Deputy Secretary David Sampson, who was in Portland and Coos Bay, Oregon, to personally deliver the announcement to affected communities added, “We stand by the commercial fishing industry and will do what we can to help them through this difficult time. We heard their calls and acted quickly.”

A determination of whether a fishery failure occurred is made on a case-by-case basis taking into account a number of economic factors including overall revenue from caught fish, number of fishermen, degree of dependence on alternative fishing opportunities, documented decline in the fishery resource and other environmental data.

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A commercial fishery failure triggers authorities to respond to the economic impact of the failure and to promote the recovery of the resource. The fishery failure determination follows a decision last month by Gutierrez to declare a fishery resource disaster, making Small Business Administration (SBA) loans available. Since the Secretary's resource disaster declaration on July 6, SBA has begun receiving applications and has already approved nearly \$200,000 in loans. Gutierrez also directed that the Commerce Department's Economic Development Administration (EDA) make fishery impacted communities a funding priority for FY'07 Economic Adjustment grants. Additionally, Gutierrez requested that the Governors of Oregon and California closely review their pending 2006 Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery Fund grant applications and determine how to best channel existing resources and speedily disburse monies to programs that can help effected fishermen.

Background/Historical Context:

A lengthy 5-year drought in the Klamath Basin has led to significantly reduced precipitation and streamflows in the basin. These conditions have degraded important spawning habitat, increased infestation of harmful parasites, and thus have not provided the conditions necessary for healthy salmon populations.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) defines the criteria for determining a commercial fishery failure. The Secretary may declare a commercial fishery failure due to a fishery resource disaster as a result of natural causes; man-made causes beyond the control of fishery managers to mitigate through conservation and management measures; or undetermined causes.

The Department of Commerce, through the NOAA Fisheries Service, is responsible for protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

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