

PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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January 11, 2000

The Honorable Bruce Babbitt
U.S. Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW, MIB Room 6151
Washington, D.C. 20240

Re: Pacific Fishery Management Council's Trinity River Flow Recommendation

Dear Secretary Babbitt:

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) advises the U.S. Secretary of Commerce regarding the management of anadromous salmon stocks off the Pacific West Coast. Part of PFMC's authority under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and its recent Sustainable Fisheries Act amendments is to assure the protection and conservation of the essential habitats of fish stocks under its management. Water quantity and quality are critical components of the essential fish habitat (EFH) for salmon which will be affected by Trinity River stream flow decisions. Therefore, the PFMC is taking this opportunity to provide comments on your Department's draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Trinity River Mainstem Fishery Restoration.

PFMC supports the preferred alternative in the draft EIS provided there are assurances of the funding and policy direction necessary to guarantee full implementation of its mechanical and adaptive management components. Absent required funding and policy support, PFMC supports the maximum flow alternative.

Restoring flows on the Trinity River is critical to the Council's interests and responsibilities. The Trinity River was once a premier salmon producing river, with its fall chinook supporting robust commercial, sport, and tribal fisheries and healthy coastal communities. However, since creation of the Trinity River Diversion (TRD) in 1955 and subsequent operation of the TRD in 1963, Trinity River fish stocks have steadily declined. This decline is primarily attributable to reductions in mainstem Trinity River stream flows.

Since 1978, the weakening fall chinook runs in the Klamath/Trinity Basin have driven PFMC's salmon management process off the coasts of northern California and southern Oregon. Additionally, management of Klamath/Trinity Basin fish stocks has recently been influenced by the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Klamath/Trinity Basin coho stocks were listed as a threatened species under the ESA in May 1997. Klamath/Trinity Basin steelhead trout is a "candidate" species for ESA listing with a high likelihood of being listed given current trends. Moreover, chinook stocks within the Klamath/Trinity River recently underwent a status review by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for possible listing under the ESA. Though NMFS determined that an ESA listing is not warranted at this time, there is strong evidence to suggest that irreplaceable and genetically distinct sub-basin fish stocks (i.e., South Fork Trinity spring chinook) should be afforded special management consideration.

PFMC recognizes the efforts of the Department of Interior (DOI) and the Hoopa Valley Tribe in completing the Trinity River Flow Evaluation Final Report (TRFER). We are aware the TRFER is the preferred alternative in the draft EIS. This alternative increases flows at Lewiston, California from approximately 27% (340,000 Acre Feet [AF]) to nearly 48% (595,000 AF), while leaving over half of the flow available to export to the Central Valley Project. The preferred alternative also includes mechanical restoration of the mainstem Trinity River and ongoing mitigation efforts such as gravel placement immediately below Lewiston reservoir. The Council believes this alternative to be the minimum required for salmon run restoration and supports the preferred alternative only with the following stipulations:

- DOI commits base funding to implement the preferred alternative. We believe that at least \$12 M annually will be needed to implement this alternative.
- There is a strong commitment by DOI to implement the Adaptive Environmental Assessment Management (AEAM) program as contained in the TRFER. The AEAM program, as described in the preferred alternative, is both structurally and substantively different from the current Trinity Task Force process.*

Full implementation of the preferred alternative can only be accomplished if this funding and management system is implemented. If there were no commitment of funds necessary to fully implement the mechanical and AEAM components of the preferred alternative, then PFMC would support the maximum flow alternative. This maximum flow alternative would be the most beneficial and long-term action to take in order to restore the Trinity River fish populations, the fisheries, and the economic and cultural vitality of the North Coast region of California.

Sincerely,



Jim Lone
Chairman

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- * We would encourage you to seek advice from experts within Interior such as Mark Schaefer, Deputy Assistant Secretary – Water and Science, during the development of your record of decision (ROD).
- c: Assistant Secretary Patricia Beneke
Assistant Secretary Kevin Gover
Assistant Secretary Don Barry
Honorable John D. Leshy
David Hayes, Esq.
Honorable George Miller
Honorable Ben Nighthorse Campbell
Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
Honorable Barbara Boxer
Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Honorable Mike Thompson